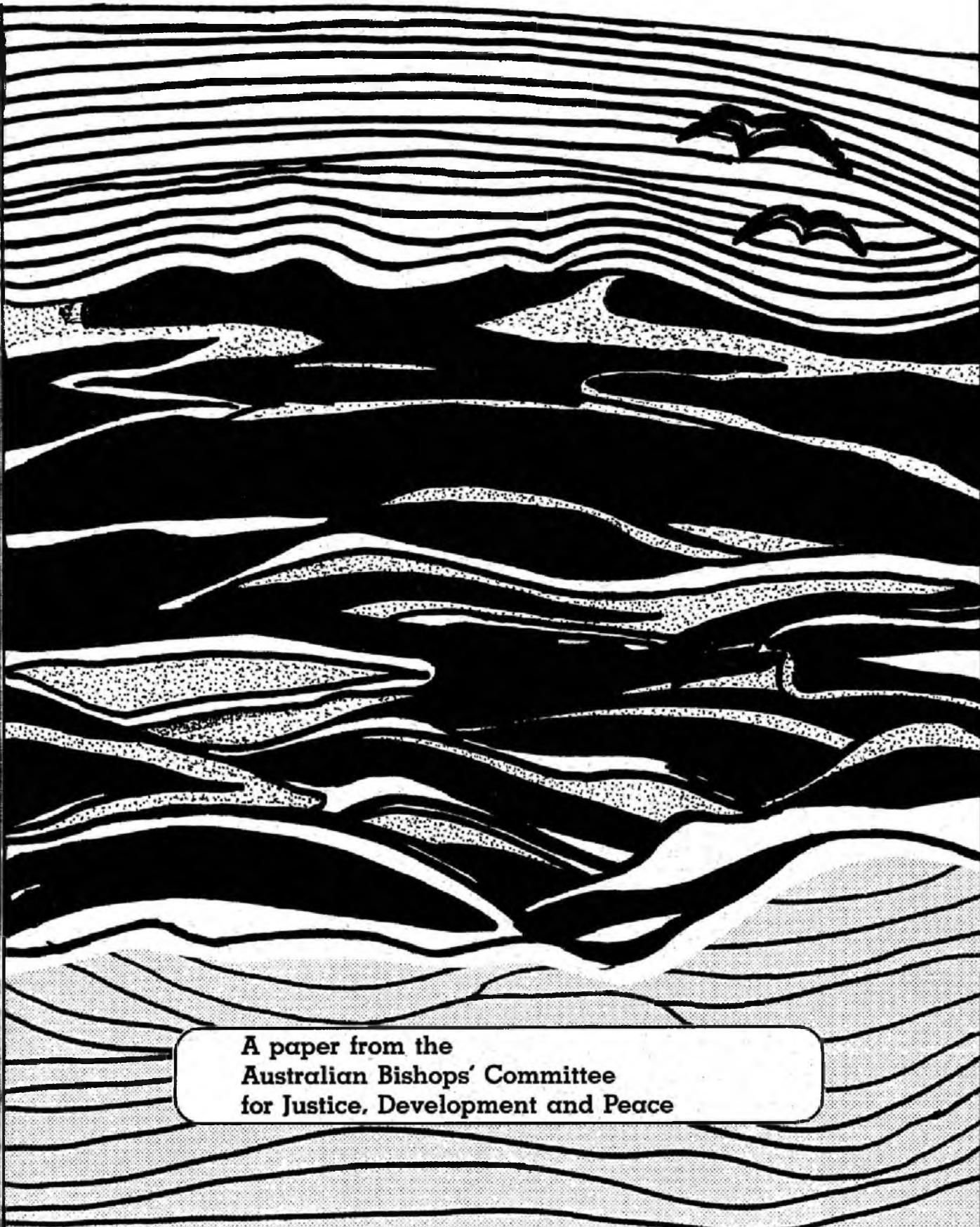


Christians and their duty towards Nature



A paper from the
Australian Bishops' Committee
for Justice, Development and Peace



PAPER No. 7

ACSJOC OCCASIONAL

In the recent Social Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II reminds us that in its use of and care for the environment, humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations toward future generations.

"People think that they can make arbitrary use of the earth subjecting it without restraint to their will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which people can indeed develop but must not betray." (Centesimus Annus No 37)

In issuing this paper the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace sees as its purpose:

"To invite all Christians, Catholics in particular, to reflect on the truth that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith."

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is pleased to present to you Christians and their duty toward Nature, No 7 in its series of Occasional Papers.

† William Brennan
ACSJC Chairman

The title of this paper, "Christians and their duty towards Nature" is taken from the text of John Paul II's New Year message for 1990, entitled "Peace with God the Creator: Peace with All of Creation."

INTRODUCTION

Since their first days on our earth human beings have looked at the world and seen that it is good. They have delighted in its beauty. They have been grateful for the good things that provide them with shelter, food and clothing. And they have been led to some crucial questions:

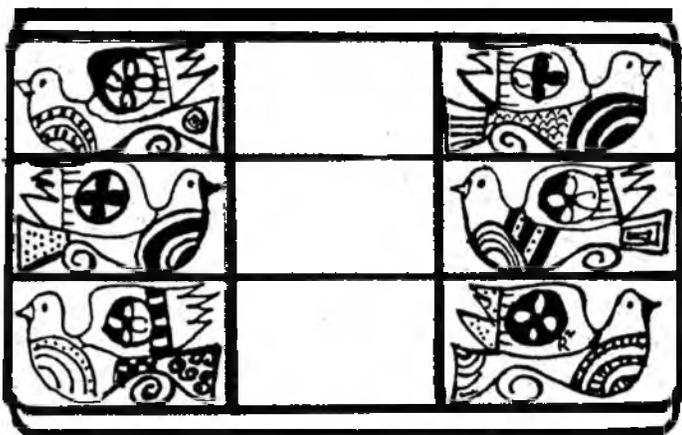
To what extent must the beauty we admire be left untouched, save to be nurtured and safeguarded?

How much is to be used so that we might live well upon this earth?

And how are our resources to be cared for and replenished so that our children, too, might be able to live upon the earth?

Many of us know too little about the functioning of the world and the inter-connected web of life on our own planet. Therefore we can do harm without knowing what we are destroying. Large areas of the earth's desert have developed through human abuse of nature, while we Australians have destroyed large tracts of our rain-forests and certain species of our fauna. With our rapidly growing technology, it has become possible for us to inflict far greater harm and to do more irreparable damage.

Fortunately, our growing technology has enabled us to understand better how to embellish our earth and how to avoid the harm that has been done to it in ignorance or greed. A widespread ecological awareness has made us more sensitive to the needs of other living things. "Ecology", from its Greek roots, signifies "*The meaning of the dwelling*". It refers to the study of the whole environment needed for the survival of living organisms. It studies nature in all the delicate and intricate interactions which characterise life on this planet.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Pope John XXIII called on us to look for the signs of the times. Vatican II asked us to try to discover what the Church should be in the world of our day.¹ Today, it is surely a sign of the times that many people are calling for a more enlightened care for the earth and for all living things. We give thanks for the human wisdom that has raised this cry of concern. Among the more significant actions has been that of the General Assembly of the United Nations which in 1982 adopted and proclaimed a "World Charter for Nature". It stated its "conviction that every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man". It stated a further conviction that, if we are to deal rightly with created things, we "must be guided by a moral code of action."

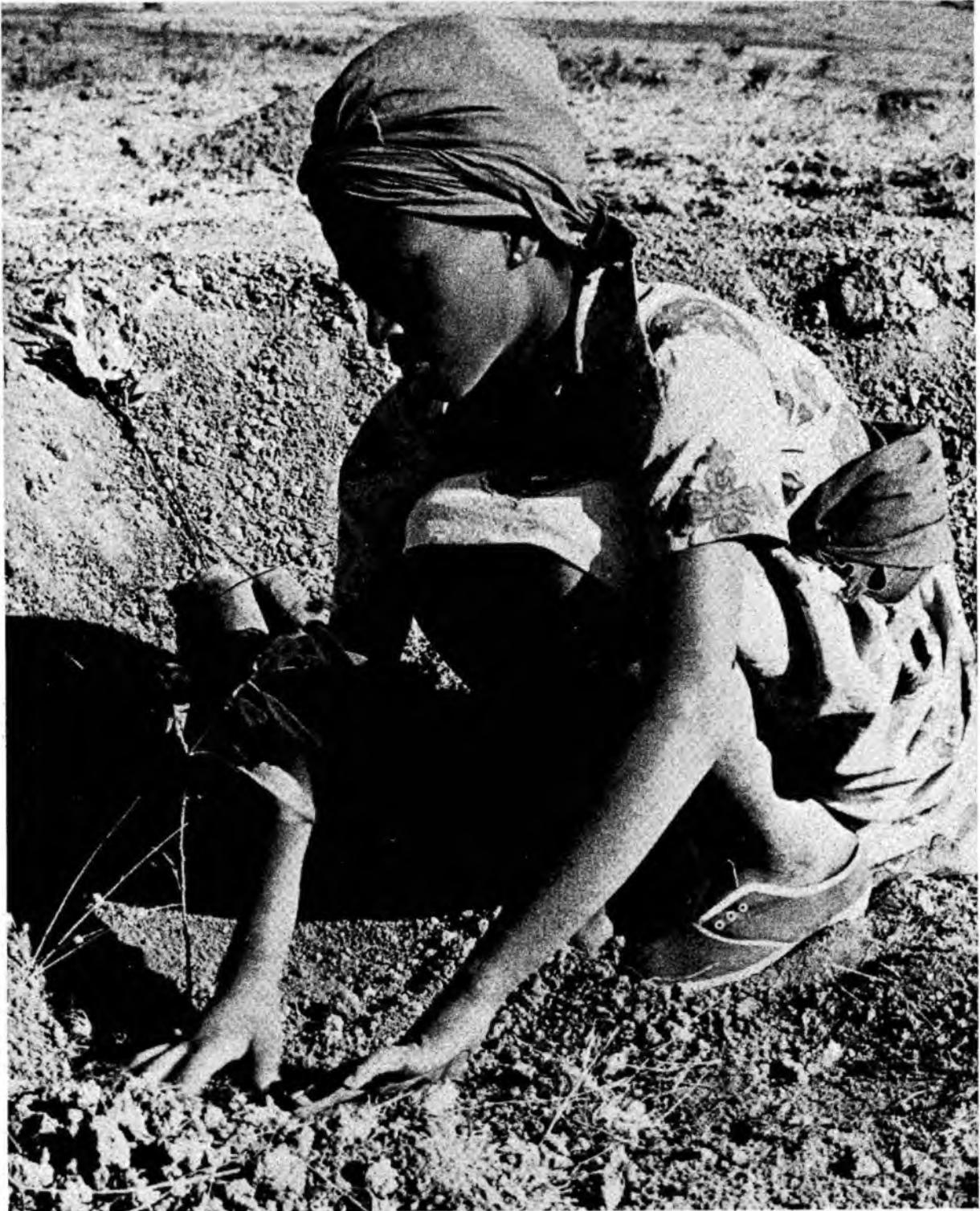
Here we touch on a second sign of the times, namely, the widespread conviction that there is a moral dimension to questions of ecology. Increasingly Christians are rediscovering a religious character in their attitudes towards other created things. St. Paul's words appear to be specially relevant in our times: "The whole of creation is eagerly waiting . . . creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God." (Rom. 8, 19-21).

It is a call to consider our relationship with other created beings and to reflect on the ways in which, as Christians, we should treat them, relate to them and use them responsibly.

We have long been familiar with the prayers of the Psalms in which all creatures are called upon to give glory to God and to bless the Lord. In our Space Age, our sense of wonder has been deepened as we increase our knowledge of the galaxies, the vast stretches of the universe, and the extraordinary way in which the earth was formed and all its varied forms of life brought into being.

We are pleased to see that christian scholars are bringing their knowledge to bear on issues relating to our environment. We pray that, to human wisdom we may bring the riches of our christian heritage so that all of us, enlightened by grace and nature, may work together for the good of all. To this end, in 1983 the World Council of Churches engaged its members in a process of study of the three themes of justice, peace and integrity of creation. For the World Day of Peace, 1990, Pope John Paul added his message "Peace with God the Creator, peace with all creation."

In February 1991 Canberra hosted World Council of Churches' Seventh Assembly. All of us gladly joined in the prayer which expresses the theme of the Assembly: "Come Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation." One of the sub-themes "looked at the interrelatedness of life and what the biblical teaching of creation implies for the vocation of human beings in relation to the rest of creation". Its title, too, took the form of an intercession: "Giver of Life — Sustain your Creation".²



THE AUSTRALIAN SCENE

Australians have become aware of the need to treat the land with respect, and to understand its rhythms and its riches. In response to the voice of the people, portfolios for the environment have been created in our parliaments. The Australian and New Zealand Environment Council has been formed. Many Australians have come to realise that they are the possessors of an extraordinary heritage. Much of it is unique. The aboriginal inhabitants of Australia looked on this land and found it very good. For them the land was linked with the "creating spirits" still vitally present to it, and present to them who used its gifts. They enjoyed a special relationship with the earth and they possessed their own "laws" for using its resources and keeping an ecological balance between earth, plants, water, animals and people. Birds and fish, kangaroos, wallabies and other animals served as food for them as did an assortment of seeds, roots and nuts. They felled no forests for they needed no houses, nor did they need to carve out pasture lands for animals which grazed where they pleased. However, in some areas the fire-stick was as destructive of rain-forest as later the axe would be."³

Researchers of One World Campaign calculated, in 1989, that Australia's 17 million people have twice the impact on world resources and energy as Africa's 640 million.

The first white settlers looked on this land and found it very different from everything they had known and understood. If it were to provide them with permanent food and shelter, they would have to act differently from the aborigines. They introduced into the land the animals which they knew and felt they needed: cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, donkeys and cats and foxes as well. To provide themselves with shelter and to make pasture for their animals they felled tracts of forest. They planted their crops, and eventually constructed their cities. In all this they gave little thought to the rights of the aboriginal inhabitants whose land they were occupying. It seems that most gave no thought at all to the fact that their actions were destroying the aborigines' traditional way of relating to the land.

It seems that most gave no thought at all to the fact that their actions were destroying the aborigines' traditional way of relating to the land.

Some of the species introduced were not environmentally friendly and have done harm. While rabbits provided food, they contributed to the degradation of the soil. Athol trees were introduced for shade and shelter. But they are salt accumulators contributing to soil degradation in some areas.⁴ Feral descendants of imported animals do harm to the environment and destroy some of our native fauna. In our efforts to get the land to serve us better, we can despoil the earth and even destroy forever some species of birds and animals. "At the national level, Australia has had the highest rate of mammal extinction of any nation on earth during the last 200 years. That means that the habitats of those animals and plants have been altered, degraded or destroyed."⁵ Increased technological ability has brought new ways of affecting the environment adversely.



OUR CALL AS CHRISTIANS

Sometimes it is through the dark that we are brought to see the light. It is not our wish to echo cries of alarm or to repeat the well-known list of ecological disasters whether real or possible. True, the cries of alarm have drawn our attention to an urgent need. Let us profit from the dark side to look caringly for the light. Let us take this time of ecological awareness to discover in depth our christian call to contemplate and to care for the wonders of God's created world. It is a call to discover and delight in the beauty, to care for it in an awareness that beauty is a fragile thing. It is a call to consider our relationship with other created beings and to reflect on the ways in which, as Christians, we should treat them, relate to them and use them responsibly. Recently the Pope has stated: "Christians, in particular, realise that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith."⁶

Our purpose in this statement is simply this:

To invite all Christians, Catholics in particular, to reflect on the truth that "their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the creator are an essential part of their faith."

We believe that reflection on our christian faith will make us more alert and responsive to the call to care for created things "in justice and in holiness", "with wisdom and love".

As Catholics we should not need to ask ourselves whether we join with our brothers and sisters in trying to understand and care for our environment. We will ask, rather, how a care for the earth and its creatures can best be integrated into our christian living. We will ask, too, whether our christian vision can help us make enlightened choices when a love of nature seems to clash with a human need to use and consume.

Other issues need to be addressed, such as the effects of large populations upon the earth's resources, and an enlightened christian approach to this question.

In our Catholic tradition we have learned to give thanks to God for his gifts; we have called down his blessing on fields and crops and the fruits of the harvest. At the instructions of our Master we have sought the sacred through bread and wine, water and oil. The Second Vatican Council set forth the general principles of a christian view of our place in the world — although, naturally, the Council, 25 years ago, did not share some of the more specific concerns of our day. The Council speaks of human beings as related both to God the Creator and to all of his creation:

"For Sacred Scripture teaches that men and women were created 'to the image of God' as able to know and love their Creator who had set them over all earthly creatures that they might rule them and make use of them, while glorifying God."⁷

When God is not glorified, then human beings "also upset the relationship which should link them to their last end; and at the same time they break the right order that should reign within themselves as well as between themselves and other people AND ALL CREATURES." The source of this teaching, is, of course, the Bible.



LESSONS IN SCRIPTURE

When we look to the word of God in the Scriptures, we do not find precise answers to every question asked in the twentieth century. But we do find some norms according to which we are called to form the right human attitudes towards other created things.

Increased technological ability has brought new ways of affecting the environment adversely.

Vatican II reminded us that, looking at the world through Christian eyes, we see all things touched by the redeeming action of Jesus Christ and made new in him. "Redeemed by Christ and made new creatures by the Holy Spirit, men and women can, indeed they must, love the things of God's creation: it is from God that they have received them, and it is as flowing from God's hand that they look upon them and revere them. We thank our divine benefactor for all these things, we use them and enjoy them in a spirit of poverty and freedom."⁸To this Pope John Paul II added: "in Jesus Christ the visible world which God created for the human race . . . recovers again its original link with the divine source of wisdom and love."⁹

Catholics believe that the Bible sets out to give religious truth, not exact scientific data.

Since the Vatican Council, a number of Catholic theologians and Scripture scholars have studied and written about our relationships with other created beings. They have invited us to look with reverence on all created things touched as they are by the redemptive love of Christ, "who is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth . . . All things were created through him and for him and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1,15-18). We are grateful to our own Australian scholars and writers who have written and spoken about these matters, and we commend them for their efforts. Also, Pope John Paul II has put forward some applications of the general principles enunciated by the Council. He has done this pre-eminently, in his encyclical letter "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" (1987).

The latest and most complete papal statement regarding ecological issues is the letter which Pope John Paul II issued for the World Day of Peace, 1990, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation." Starting from this statement we would like to stress a number of points for our Australian Catholics.

Firstly, we are invited to reflect anew on our christian "responsibility within creation and our duty toward nature and the Creator" as "an essential part of our faith". All of us were taught that religion contained the duty of loving God and our neighbour. We were to look upon all men and women as our brothers and sisters. Now we find the Pope writing of "a sense of 'fraternity' with all those good and beautiful things which almighty God has created, and . . . of our serious obligation to respect and watch over them with care."¹⁰



Secondly, an education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others and for the earth. The Pope says that this education must not be based on a rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some 'paradise lost'. "Churches and religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organisations, indeed all members of society have a precise role to play in such education." We need to acquire a sound knowledge of the environmental problems which affect the whole world, and peoples other than our own. We must know what are the special questions which Australians need to answer. Without such knowledge, fears and prejudice will harden our minds and close them to rational discussion and willing collaboration.



Thirdly, we must learn even more to appreciate the beauty of creation. A great writer has said: "Beauty will save the world".¹¹ Pope John Paul says: "Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity." And, practically, "the relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment can not be overlooked."

Richer nations can criticise the poorer ones for destroying their forests and ravaging their land, even though the more affluent nations contribute to that destruction.

Fourthly, we must consider very carefully the ways in which we can help other nations not to harm the environment. Richer nations can criticise the poorer ones for destroying their forests and ravaging their land, even though the more affluent nations contribute to that destruction. Existing international economic structures are such that nations in the third world are forced into using up their natural resources. "The proper ecological balance will not be found without directly addressing the structural forms of poverty that exist throughout the world."¹²

Fifthly, we are all called to examine our own lifestyles. Such a serious examination is possible only through some kind of conversion. This may be conversion from ignorance to true knowledge, from selfishness to caring, from merely "using" to respecting, and, for us, to a religious awareness. For some it will be a conversion to accepting the truth that "the earth is ultimately a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all".¹³

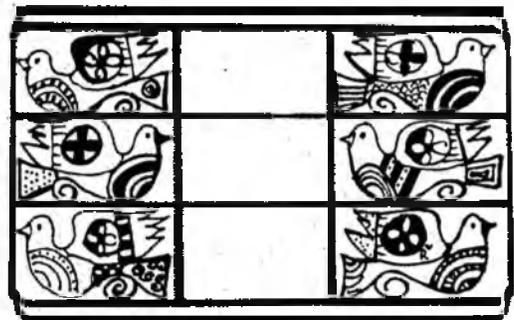


As the Pope says: "Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which they cause . . . Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life lest all suffer the negative consequences of the habits of a few".¹⁴

How many Australians would know that researchers of One World Campaign calculated, in 1989, that Australia's 17 million people have twice the impact on world resources and energy as Africa's 640 million?



Sixthly, we should all be 'conscious of the vast field of ecumenical and inter-religious co-operation opening up before us.' We can all profit from two excellent recent publications. The Uniting Church in Australia has produced an Australian Christian reflection on the Renewal of Creation "Healing the Earth". The 1990 Anglican Social Justice Statement, "Justice for the Earth", is an eminently practical study guide.



The Pope has paid tribute to all men and women who "with an acute sense of their responsibilities for the common good, recognise their obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment." Uniting with them in a concern for the earth, we will not expect all of them to share our religious convictions. Some of them do not share — nor do they approve — the language of the christian view which regards human beings as superior to other created things. They say this superiority has been understood and exercised only as exploitation of the rest of creation. Those of us who do not agree with this judgement must nonetheless recognise that, throughout history, many people have not always been attuned to what the biblical text meant by our living in the image of a life-giving God who delights in creation.

It needs to be said that population size in itself is not a direct cause of poverty or environmental damage, nor is its reduction a necessary solution.

In co-operating with others in a care for the earth, we will be helped by realising that among them there will be different "models", different ways of viewing the relationships which make all creatures interdependent. We all need to listen receptively to other people's views. Members of "Greenpeace" or "Earthwatch", ecofeminists and 'deep ecologists' will have useful things to say to all those interested in environmental issues. We will find that we share common goals and can work together for a healthy environment where all living beings can thrive and all of creation is respected.

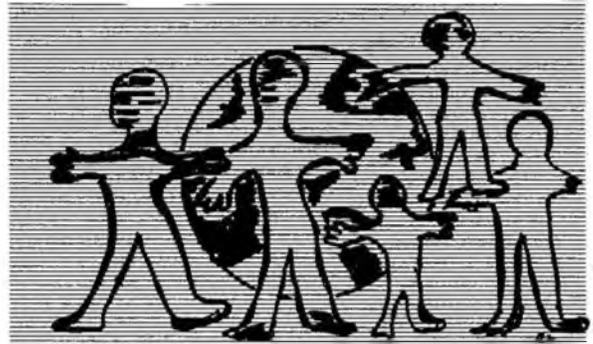
Seventhly, let us think and act creatively as we enter a new phase of discovery both of created realities and of our own way of seeing them in God's plan for them and for us.

Eighthly, as Catholics seeking a better understanding of how a care for the earth and its creatures is a "part of our faith", we need to give careful study to the Bible and to the official teaching of the Church on these matters.



CREATION ACCOUNTS

The Bible begins with two creation accounts. These are contained in Genesis 1,1 — 2,4, and 2, 5–25. The first account makes two clear statements. Firstly, it is to the one God that all created things owe their being. Secondly God has declared that the whole of Creation is "good". It is worth noting that the Hebrew word used here for "good" (tov) does not mean simply 'good' in a vague general kind of way. It has also a more dynamic sense of 'useful', 'purposeful'. The whole of God's creation is good in the sense that it is fitted together and moving towards a desired goal.



"God said: Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth . . .' And so it was. God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1, 26-28;31).



Two points emerge clearly from this text. One is the emphasis on the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. The other is that they are entrusted with a certain "dominion" over other created things. It should be noted that this word "dominion" gives rise to a difference of opinion. Some say that it has contributed to a selfish exploitation of the earth. They prefer "a new theology of creation (which) will reflect the broader biblical perspective in which the presence of God is immanent in nature as well as in humanity and His Spirit is constantly renewing the earth. This larger cosmic community requires a different human attitude. Instead of the instrumentality of conquering and subduing the earth, it should be one of participation and harmony."¹⁵



The more traditional interpretation, however, believes that "dominion", properly understood, demands a total respect for all created reality. The Bible itself rules out selfish exploitation in a passage from the Book of Wisdom: "God of our ancestors . . . in your wisdom you have fitted human beings to rule the creatures that you have made, to govern the world in holiness and saving justice" (Wis. 9.2). Vatican II took up this text and said: "Men and women were created in God's image and commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and TO RULE THE WORLD IN JUSTICE AND IN HOLINESS; they were to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate themselves and the totality of creation to God, so that through the dominion of all things by the human race the name of God would be majestic upon the earth."¹⁶

Pope John Paul says: "Made in the image and likeness of God, Adam and Eve were to have exercised their dominion over the earth with wisdom and love."¹⁷

The Bible is concerned with religious truths. In this first creation account two religious truths are made quite clear. Firstly, created in God's image, human beings are able to relate to God, to enter a relationship of interpersonal communion and intimacy. This is not just an incidental feature of human nature:

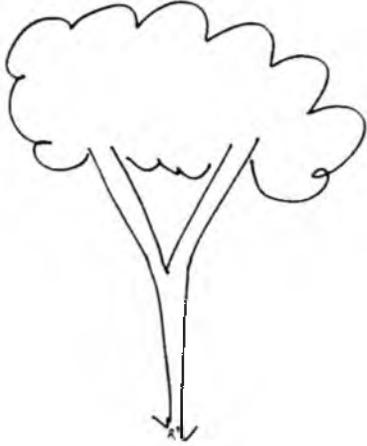
relationship to God enters essentially into the structure of human existence; it is a condition of life and death. In vital relationship to God human beings flourish; when the relationship breaks down they wither and die.

Secondly, being in God's image also means relationship to the rest of creation . . . The way human beings relate to the world and accept responsibility for it enters essentially into their relationship with God. The dominion is not one of selfish exploitation. The aim is to further the goodness, order and development of the world, to bring it to full achievement of its goal through respect for the sovereignty of God.

This relationship is also expressed in a later text from Genesis where God says to Noah: "I set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I shall recall the covenant between myself and you and every living creature, in a word, all living things . . ." (Gen. 9, 13-15.)

The second creation account (Gen. 2, 5-25) speaks of God putting Adam and Eve "in the Garden of Eden, to till it and keep it." (v.15). In this text, some people find the image they prefer, the task of stewardship of created realities is entrusted to human beings.

In their task of stewardship, Adam and Eve were given one commandment. We are told that they were tempted to disobey God, to use selfishly the gifts that they had received. They did so and all their relationships deteriorated. Their intimate friendship with God gave way to fear (3, 8). Their own loving relationship gave way to recrimination and blame (3, 12–16). Finally, their relationship to the earth was affected; the "garden" became barren, hard to cultivate, yielding a harvest only through sweat and hard labour (3, 17–19).



Centuries later, St. Paul would reflect on and write about sin and the effect that it had upon the world. Looking back to the Genesis accounts, Paul would say that sin — then and now — was "covetousness", it was perverting the goodness of things by using creation selfishly or for purposes not in the Creator's intention. (Rom. Ch. 3). Even concern for the environment can sometimes be selfish rather than an act of worship. For Paul, too, sin is not merely an individual matter between God and the sinner. Sin disrupts a whole pattern of right relationships that cannot flourish outside a right relationship with God.

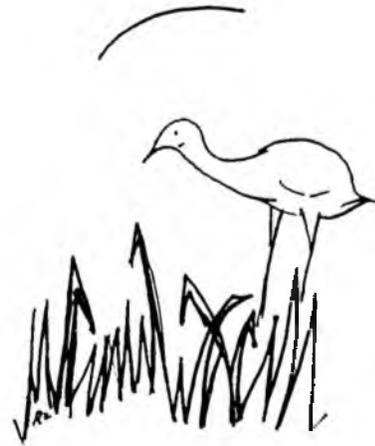
Catholics believe that the Bible sets out to give religious truth, not exact scientific data. It does not intend to give an approved cosmology or a correct scientific account of the world's origins. We have to look to science for these. "If the cosmologies of the ancient Near Eastern World could be purified and assimilated into the first chapters of Genesis, might contemporary cosmology have something to offer to our reflections upon creation?"¹⁸ We believe that, however the universe came into being, however the human race began, God is the Creator of the universe and of the human race. In this belief we find the origins of our conviction that, as Christians, we have an ethical duty to respect the gifts of creation, to give thanks for them, and to use them in accord with the will of God, as best we can interpret it.



That interpretation depends upon the extent of our human knowledge. It is far from being perfect. Following the teaching of Pope John Paul II, we have already given some suggestions about a christian response to our challenge to use well the goods of the earth and to treat them according to God's will. In his Encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, (1987), the Pope wrote some things which merit our consideration. He spoke of "respect for the beings which constitute the natural world, which the ancient Greeks — alluding to the order which distinguishes it — called the "cosmos". Such realities also demand respect by virtue of a threefold consideration . . ."

The three considerations were these: **First** it is right that we should be ever more aware of the fact that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animals, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one's economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the "cosmos".

The **second consideration** is "based on the realisation . . . that natural resources are limited; some are not . . . renewable. Using them as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute dominion, seriously endangers their availability not only to the present generation but above all for generations to come."



The **third consideration** proposed by the Pope refers to the quality of life in the industrialised zones. Here special reference is made to the pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of the population. The Pope speaks of the way in which moral demands impose limits on the use of the natural world. He refers again to the proper understanding of that term "dominion". "The dominion granted . . . by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use or misuse', or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen. 2, 16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to natural laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity."¹⁹

THE TASK AHEAD

In this brief message, we do not propose solutions to the problems which face us, particularly the problem of balancing a respect for all created things with the necessary development needed if human beings are to live fittingly on the face of the earth. We have proposed certain steps which we need to consider seriously if we are to work together towards a successful solution of these problems. It has been suggested that the Catholic Bishops of Australia might invite all those interested to take part in a nation-wide exploration of ecological issues in a search for positive, united action. This would be by a process similar to our present enquiry into the distribution of wealth: "Common Wealth and the Common Good." That same title could well apply also to the environment. We may well respond to this request.

Serious efforts to increase world food production, the provision of clean water and better medical services, will increase the well-being of people and lead to a stabilization of population.

However, for such an enquiry to be fruitful, some preliminary steps must be taken. The first of these, we believe, is to respond seriously and with care to the eight invitations mentioned above (pages 7-9) addressed to us by the signs of the times and suggested by the message of Pope John Paul. Clearly, we must all work together for the good of the environment. However, in order that we might be able to do that effectively, there must be a meeting of minds and a common resolve.

A second task is to study and formulate the principles of a valid christian ethic of a care for the earth. It is only recently that many christians have considered that any ethical duty is involved here. They have not yet agreed what are common ethical grounds. The American Catholic Bishops wrote, in 1986: "The resources of the earth have been created for the benefit of all, and we who are alive today hold

them in trust. This is a challenge to develop a new ecological ethic that will help shape a future that is both just and sustainable."

Be it a new ethic or a new application of old principles, we do need to formulate a clear ecological ethic.

Pope John Paul proposes some principles of such an ethic in the documents we have quoted. Central to his thesis is the statement: "Respect for life, and above all the dignity of the human person, is the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress."²⁰ He does speak of "a sense of 'fraternity' with all these good and beautiful things which God has created" and also of "that greater and higher fraternity which exists within the human family."

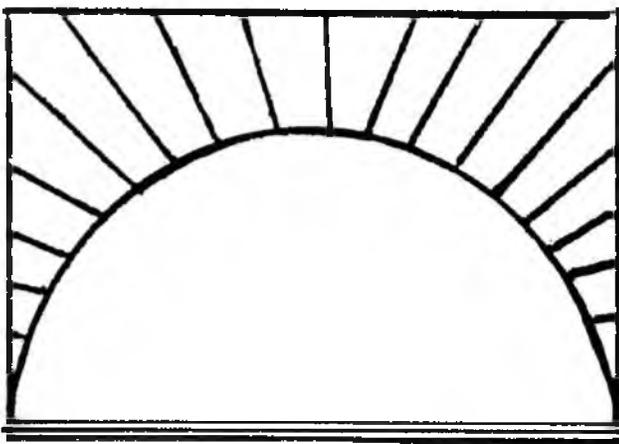


The interaction between human population and the environment is an issue that warrants careful examination. Some advocate a reduction in population, even in Australia, to prevent what they see as an exponential growth in human numbers that would culminate in widespread famine and ecological disaster.

It needs to be said that population size in itself is not a direct cause of poverty or environmental damage, nor is its reduction a necessary solution. More direct causes are natural disasters, localized and civil wars, world trade practices that restrict food distribution, financial arrangements that lock nations into unpayable debt and the tyrannical actions of despotic rulers.



Serious efforts to increase world food production, the provision of clean water and better medical services, will increase the well-being of people and lead to a stabilization of population. The direct attacks on population through international birth-control programmes are misdirected not only because they often employ immoral means and produce an anti-baby and anti-family mentality, but also because they fail to see that when food production and general well-being rise, populations look after themselves. It is surely not beyond the wit or will of the human race to solve the problems caused to the environment by modern society and to prevent future damage.



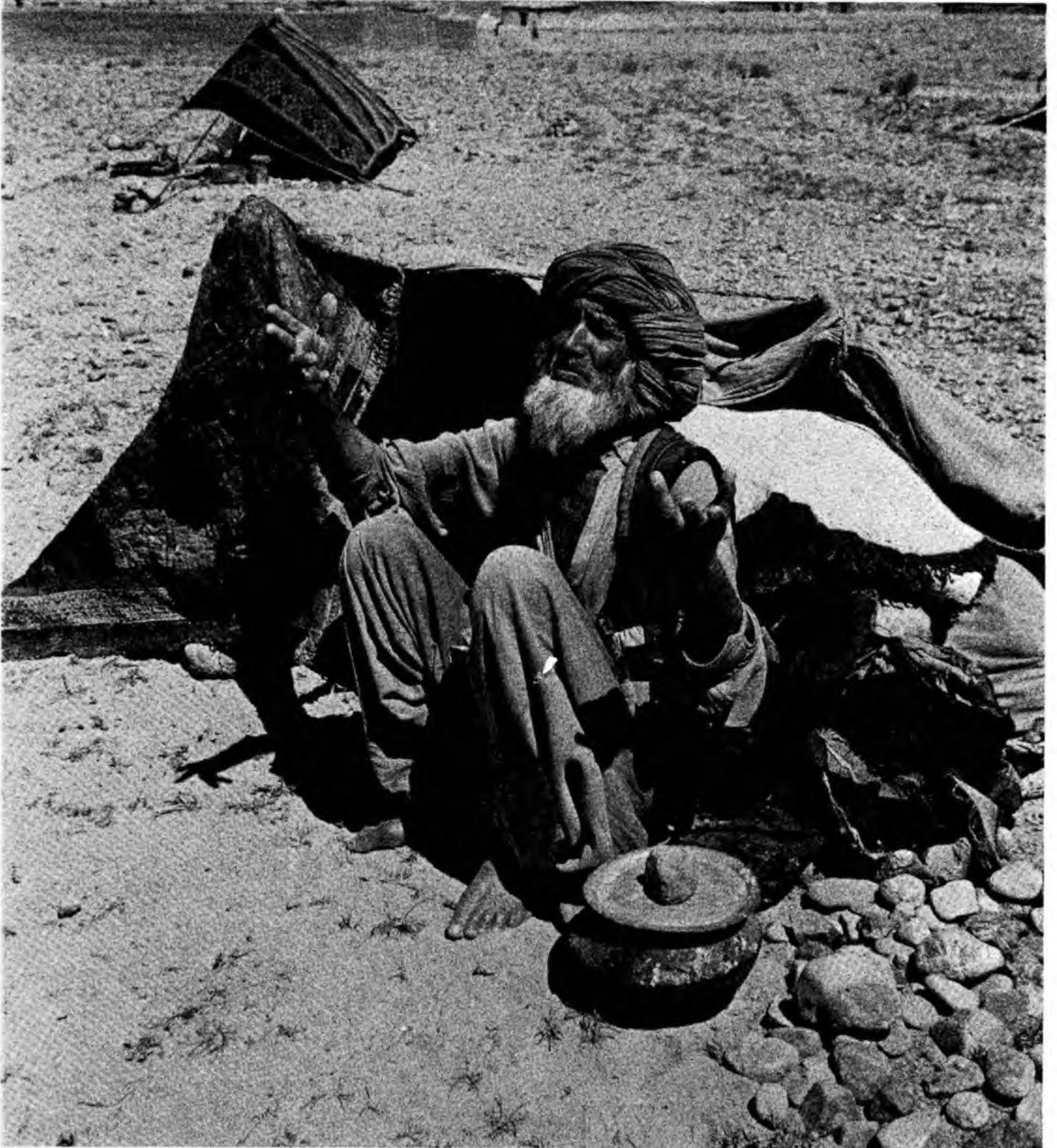
In the application of the principles outlined by Pope John Paul, many Christians believe that "the Church's social teachings . . . need to be expanded in a new ecological age."²¹ This is not surprising. We have no fund of accumulated wisdom to use in answering questions which past generations have not asked. Nor do we claim that, in searching for an expression of our Christian duty to care for created things, the Pope has found complete answers to all questions. Other issues need to be addressed, such as the effects of large populations upon the earth's resources, and an enlightened Christian approach to this question. We need to listen to new questions such as whether we should "extend our moral responsibilities vis-a-vis biocide (the killing of the life-system of the planet) and geocide (the destruction of the earth) . . ."²²

We support our scholars in their attempts to develop and explain this "ecological ethic." May the Lord bless their efforts and guide us all.

CONCLUSION

In a Commonwealth discussion paper on "Ecologically sustainable development," June 1990, it is recognised that "most people have aesthetic and ethical reasons" for the efforts they make on behalf of our world and our environment. We believe that these are the only reasons which, in effect, will serve to "save the world".

We express our appreciation of the efforts of all who have contributed to a better understanding of environmental needs. We urge our own Catholic people to take part in the common human endeavour to care for the earth in all its beauty. We believe that reflection on our christian faith will make us more alert and responsive to the call to care for created things "in justice and in holiness", "with wisdom and love".



Footnotes

- 1 Gaudium et Spes (GS)
 - 2 One World, Aug-Sep, 1990, p.4
 - 3 cf. Vincent Serventi, *Australian Native Plants*, Reid Books, Sydney 1984, pp. 32 ff; also Les Murray, *The Australian Year*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1985
 - 4 E.g. the Finke River. Salinity is better known as a problem connected with the Murray.
 - 5 The Hon Ms Ros Kelly, Statement for World Environment Day, 5 June, 1990
 - 6 Pope John Paul II, 1st Jan, 1990, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation*, n.15. This document will be referred to as *Peace with God*
 - 7 GS n. 12
 - 8 GS n. 37
 - 9 *Redemptor Hominis* n. 8
 - 10 *Peace with God* n. 16
 - 11 This is often quoted as a dictum of Dostoevsky, cf. Von Balthasar, *Glory to the Lord*, Clarke, Edinburgh, 1989, vol 3, p.342. Cf. also *The Idiot*, Penguin, p.420
 - 12 .Iq Peace with God n. 11
 - 13 .Iq Ib. n. 8
 - 14 Ibn 13
 - 15 Pro Mundi Vita, Feb 1990, p.3
 - 16 GS n. 34
 - 17 Peace with God 1
 - 18 Pope John Paul II, cit. in *Origins* 1988, p.377
 - 19 All these considerations are contained in n. 34 of the Encyclical
 - 20 Peace with God n. 7
 - 21 Pro Mundi Vita, Feb 1990, p.35
 - 22 Id. p.3
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Library Catalogue No. ISSN 1032-2205
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