

## **Our Commitment and Missionary Responsibility**

### **In Light of Precious Blood Spirituality**

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#### **Introduction**

When asked to prepare a presentation for this Symposium I gave serious thought to the invitation before accepting with fear and trepidation! Over the years, I have often mentioned in conferences that it is important that we develop our reflections on the Care of Nature from the perspective of Precious Blood Spirituality. But I had never before developed a conference on the theme. I accepted the invitation as a challenge to grow in my own understanding and commitment as a Missionary of the Blood of Christ.

My reflection and study as I prepared this theme was done amidst the awesome beauty of Austria where I presently live. Natural beauty abounds. We live surrounded by majestic mountains, rolling hills, rich farmlands and flowers everywhere! In Bavaria in Southern Germany, in Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, flowers seem to be an integral part of their culture. Beautiful gardens, flower boxes on the windowsills and balconies of homes are tended to with loving care and add to the natural beauty. It is said that St. Francis of Assisi wanted a particularly beautiful flower bed planted in the garden of all his convents, so that at all times people would be moved by the sight of flowers to praise God.

But my extensive travels as Moderator General also took me to the arid areas of central Tanzania where people at times have to dig with their hands in order to find water. And I have been to La Oroya where the mountains are bare and colored a sick grayish-white as the result of so many years of serious contamination.

All of this is a clear reminder of the differences which exist between the haves and the have nots, between those who take for granted the abundance of natural resources and the beauty of God's creation, and those who from the day they were born were never even able to drink clear, uncontaminated water, as I witnessed in my time of ministry in Guatemala, where still today the first cause of death among children and adults is dysentery.

I do not pretend to be an expert on ecology or environmental issues and I do not intend to enter into the technical questions involved in this important topic. Politicians, specialists, and others with more knowledge and expertise can present the facts, the statistics, and share their first-hand experiences.

Rather, I will reflect on our commitment and missionary responsibility within the framework of our spirituality, especially focusing on the blood of the covenant and reconciliation and as Eucharistic communities.

#### **Part One: The Call of the Precious Blood**

## ***Living our Covenant Commitment***

One of the fundamental themes of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ is that of **covenant**. Covenant relationships defined the world in which the Israelite people lived. The covenant bond between God and a people became the symbol of proper relationships. Biblical justice demands fidelity to all our covenant relationships: to God, to humans, and to the earth.

The Jubilee Year prescribed in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 25:23-55) was a special time to celebrate God's presence and sovereignty over all things. Deeply rooted in the covenant commitment, it was a time for restoring the fabric of human relationships and for restoring community. It was a time of reconciliation. Social unbalances in the agricultural and urban society were corrected. Slaves were freed and monetary debts were canceled. The lands were to lay fallow and lands which were alienated were restored to their respective owners.

In Hebrew society material goods were often accumulated in the hands of the few and because of this unbalance, people were compelled to sell themselves in order to survive, at least physically. The law of the Jubilee Year denounced this social injustice and sought to correct the evil of accumulation of the sources of production and of wealth by the few privileged ones, a situation often denounced by the prophets.

In the same chapter of Leviticus we read of an important character in the social structure of Hebrew society: the Go'el. His significance and meaning are understood within the context of the covenant. In Hebrew society the clan was a factor of unity and defense of peoples and families. One of the most beautiful expressions of the family unity and obligations towards one another is found in the **law of Go'el**. In the case of illness, plagues, poor harvests or other disasters, families and individuals were helped by the go'el. He was the protector and defender of the clan, at a time in history when the family ceased to be a place of welcome and sharing, and became instead an object of exclusion and the marginalization of the weakest. The go'el would be brother, a paternal uncle, the brother-in-law, or some other blood relative. For the Israelites to defend the clan was the same as defending the Covenant.

The concept of the go'el was eventually applied to the Kings in the service of their people and to Yahweh. We read in Jeremiah 50,34: *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Oppressed are the men of Israel, and with them the men of Judah; all their captors hold them fast and refuse to let them go. Strong is their avenger, whose name is the Lord of hosts; He will defend their cause with success, and give rest to the earth, but unrest to those who live in Babylon."*

The religious foundation for these social laws is found in the concept that material goods, according to divine order, are given equally for all peoples. The land, in particular, is recognized as God's property. It is an inalienable good that no one can take away especially since it was entrusted to the Israelites as a result of the covenant.

## ***Jesus as Go'el***

As time passed this concept of go'el was projected into the Hebrew's notion of the Messiah as the one who would come to defend and to rescue the poor and downtrodden and to liberate the people. Eventually, **Jesus** is seen in this light. One of the oldest titles which the first Christians used to interpret the service which Jesus gave to His people, was that of **defender (Go'el)**, that is, savior, redeemer, liberator, advocate, close relative, elder brother. He was the close relative who came to help his brothers and sisters so that they might live once again in harmony. He came to restore community living in the way that God intended it when he called the slaves from Egypt and formed them into a Covenant People. Within this context we understand Jesus' option for the poor and the marginalized and his preaching of the Reign of God in which no one was to be excluded and all were invited to sit at the Banquet Table of Life. Clearly Jesus positions himself as the great go'el of the poor and needy. He calls all of his disciples to continue this mission, promoting the communion of the table where no one is excluded.

Our world has strayed far from the notion of biblical covenant. We live in a society of rampant individualism. As the free market economy makes a firm foothold in societies around the world, the traditional family values often give way to the individualistic and egoistic race towards acquiring more and more riches and material possessions. Consequently, family, sharing, hospitality, and community all suffer. There is a new kind of bonding going on. It is the bonding to the false god of consumerism and material goods. When people worship these false gods, then the bonds that connect us to one another in community also break down. In this type of society, some people and nations become richer and richer, while the majority grow poorer and poorer and are increasingly marginalized. And our earth is mercilessly stripped bare and raped and her natural resources depleted senselessly due to greed and the lust for more and more material goods. *Carpe diem* (seize the moment) seems to be the rule, without thinking of future generations and their basic needs. "Eat, drink and be merry; who cares about tomorrow?"

The situation of the Old Testament repeats itself. Who will be the voice of the voiceless? Who will defend the weakest members of society? Who will raise their voice to protest the injustices and inequalities of society today? Who will defend the rights of the excluded ones? Who will raise the consciousness of the people of the world towards the plight of the poor and the downtrodden? The question posed in the Gospel, "*Am I my brother's and sister's keeper?*" rings in our ears. We might add to that question: "*Am I my earth's keeper?*" Our answer is a definitive and resounding, "**YES WE ARE!**"

### ***Good Stewardship***

We know ourselves as intimately connected with all creation. We belong. We recognize our interconnectedness. God created the earth and entrusted its care to us. We have seriously neglected this important responsibility. We now need to assume our responsibility and to restore a more proper relationship with our environment, so that all human beings have the opportunity to live in dignity.

The Church's commitment to address the issue of the Care of Nature began to emerge during the Papacy of John Paul II. However, it is Pope Benedict XVI who is now being called by some, "The Green Pope" as he becomes increasingly vocal about ecological and environmental issues.

In *Caritas in Veritate* ("Love in Truth"), Pope Benedict writes, *"the environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole"* (# 48). And he calls us to solidarity when he says, *"Today the great gift of God's Creation is exposed to serious dangers and lifestyles which can degrade it. Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world...we must pledge ourselves to take care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity."*

And not only does he speak about the issue, but he acts upon it in concrete ways. To give but one example: He has replaced the cement roof tiles of the Paul VI auditorium with 2,400 solar panels that convert sunlight into some 300,000 kilowatt-hours of power each year, which is equivalent to the needs of about one hundred families. The cells generate energy to light, heat, and cool the six-thousand-seat hall. Another "green project" presently under consideration is the installation of small windmills as well as water treatment plants to break down water-waste products. In this case, the Holy Father not only talks the talk, but walks the walk as well.

As persons who live and minister under the banner of the Blood of Christ, we are called to witness to, to promote and to defend *fidelity* to all the relationships and responsibilities that stem from our covenant with God in Christ. As agents of reconciliation we struggle to build proper relationships with God, with one another, and with all of creation. We could describe our mission as that of being "guardians and keepers of the Covenant!" We see other creatures of Earth as our kin, as radically interconnected with us in one Earth community of life before God.

The Church has a responsibility towards Creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend earth, water and air as gifts of Creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect humankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood... The ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature. Once again, I quote Pope Benedict: *"Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth. A decisive yes is needed to protect Creation and also a strong commitment to reverse those trends which risk leading to irreversibly degrading situations"* (Homily given in Loreto, Italy, September 2, 2007).

### ***The Cry of the Blood***

We often speak of “the cry of the blood.” This has become an accepted way to connect our spirituality to everyday realities. Here I would just emphasize that this cry can be heard not only from the poor and needy whose cry was taken up by Jesus when he was elevated on the cross, but also in the cry of mother earth. It is a cry that John Paul II exhorted us to make our own in *Evangelium vitae*, #25. He makes a passionate plea for all Christians to make the blood of today’s victims heard and to respond in compassionate solidarity as we build a “culture of life” and a civilization of justice and love. The “cry of the blood” is a soul-piercing appeal that conveys what God expects of us: a justice that reflects God’s own fidelity and special care for the helpless and hopeless. We, as peoples marked by the blood of Christ, are particularly sensitive to this cry and to the appeal of the Holy Father.

As one author puts it, *“We Christians will be a voice for the voiceless, for the sake of all creatures of nature who have no voice in human affairs. We will listen to the plaintive cries of the great whales and hear the groaning of the rain forests, and we will be their advocates in the village squares and in the courts of power, by the grace of God. All the more will we hear the bitter wailing of the little children who live on the trash mountains of this world and who wear clothes that have been washed in streams overflowing with heinous poisons and who sometimes drink these very waters.”* (H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 119-120.)

Our commitment to the poor and to the well-being of life on this planet must go together as two interrelated dimensions of the one Christian vocation. Ecological conversion is not opposed to, but intimately involved with conversion to the side of the poor. Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* states that *“Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society. Nature, especially in our time, is so integrated into the dynamics of society and culture that by now it hardly constitutes an independent viable.”* (#51) The Pope emphasizes that environmental degradation makes the lives of the poor especially unbearable. The poor are disproportionately affected when natural resources are squandered and the environment plundered. And the poor are often the first victims and those most affected by natural disasters (such as that caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans) because they often lack the ability to get out of the path of the disaster as well as the resources to build up afterwards.

In his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI speaks in various numbers about the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and mission. He states: *“Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person.”* And in #90: *“We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide. We must denounce those who squander the earth’s riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven”* (#89). We recall that Christ’s mission was one of *“giving us abundant life”* and not just for some, but for all. The concept of “universal destination of goods” means that the world and all its bounty has been created for the good of all human

beings. As “go’els” we need to constantly promote the proper use of and destination of the world’s goods, so that all can find a place at the table of bounty!

### ***Reconciling all things***

The dominion granted to man and woman by the Creator (cf. Genesis 1:27-31) was not an absolute power to “use and misuse,” or to dispose of things as one pleases. As “stewards of the covenant” we have been entrusted with the mission to protect, defend, and promote the proper care of nature and our relationship with her (cf. Genesis 2:15). Because of our carelessness and lack of responsibility, the perfect harmony of humanity and the rest of Creation was ruptured.

When reflecting on the blood of reconciliation, we often speak of the need to heal the wounds which we have received during our life journey or the wounds which we have inflicted upon others. These wounds are purified and healed in the blood of Christ who took upon Himself our woundedness so as to heal and redeem. In this light and from the point of view of our mission to be persons of reconciliation in all its dimensions, we also recognize *“the scars which mark the surface of our earth: erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world’s mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption”* (Benedict XVI in Australia, “Welcoming Celebration,” July 17, 2008)

Such use and misuse of the land is not limited to small, isolated areas and it is not something which only happens now. Some theories put forth to explain the collapse of the highly developed civilization of the Mayans, which extended over parts of what is now Mexico and Central America, is over-exploitation of natural resources, in particular of the rainforest, a human-created disaster that certainly at least contributed to the decline and eventual fall of the culture.

We are all familiar with images of Easter Island 2000 miles west of Chile in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. According to scientists, originally the island was a subtropical paradise, covered with trees and home to innumerable species of animals, but deforestation destroyed practically the entire ecosystem, leaving it now a desolate area.

I have often spoken of our need to not only hear the cry of the blood and to respond to the call we discover therein, but also of the necessity to be *obedient* to that cry/call if we are to be faithful to our vocation. Pope Benedict speaks of “this obedience to the voice of the Earth (the inner laws of creation)...that speaks to us and we must listen if we want to survive and decipher the message of the earth.”

St. Paul wrote to the Romans: *“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.”* (8:19) And in Colossians we read: *“God reconciled all things whether in heaven or on earth by making peace through the blood of the cross.”* (1:19-20.23) In Paul’s vision, all the cosmos is good, God-given, and despite the rebellion of the powers within it, it

has been reconciled to its maker and a new creation has been born, and must now be implemented. We are called to be partners in that process of reconciliation and birthing.

### ***The Eucharist and Care of Creation***

The Eucharist is central to living a spirituality of the blood. It is the well-spring from which it is nurtured and flows. It is around the table of fellowship where we celebrate our condition as a covenant people. It is there that our relationships are restored with God and with one another. But often one crucial, important relationship is left out. We reorient our lives to God, self, and to others, but often we do not restore our relationship to nature. David Rhoads in a reflection on “Worshipping in Relationship with Nature” ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)) recalls that *“If we are out of sorts with the rest of nature, if we are displaced from harmony with the rest of creation of which we are such an integral part, if we are sinning against the natural world from which we ourselves have emerged, then we cannot fully find our bearings or our place. If God created the world as a place in relation to which human life is inextricably woven, then we need to make all of the natural world an integral part of our worshipping experience.”*

Every Mass creates an event of communion and connectedness. Every Eucharist has a cosmic character in which those celebrating encounter the Word in whom **all creation is lifted up**. Creation is a precious gift God has placed in our hands. Because of the sacredness of all which God has made, caring for creation is a form of worship. When we worship, we lay our broken beings and the wounded world before the merciful God who gives renewal in resurrection.

Jesus Christ recapitulates, not only the human race, but the whole of creation. The Son of God became incarnate *in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise... Truly this is the mysterium fidei which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns back to the Creator redeemed by Christ* (EdE 8).

In October, 2005 I participated in the Synod of Bishops which treated the theme of the Eucharist. I was one of the ten Superiors General elected to represent religious life. As such we were but a token presence among the 240 Bishops from around the world. Some of our work during those three weeks was done in smaller working groups. I was happily placed in one of the Spanish-speaking groups. And in that group I sat next to the Archbishop of Huancayo, **Mons. Pedro Barreto, S.J.** When he gave his 6-minute presentation on the Synod floor he related the Eucharist with the care of creation.

He said, *“La Eucaristía, siendo la cumbre a la cual tiende toda la creación, es también la respuesta a la preocupación del mundo contemporáneo por el equilibrio ecológico. Como ‘fruto de la tierra’, el pan y el vino representan la creación que nos es confiada por nuestro Creador. Por ello la Eucaristía tiene una relación directa con la vida y la esperanza de la humanidad y debe ser una preocupación constante de la Iglesia y señal de autenticidad Eucarística. No sólo las personas humanas, sino the creación entera...espera la recapitulación de todas las cosas, también las de la tierra, en Cristo.”*

Más adelante, continúa: *“La Eucaristía nos compromete a trabajar para que el pan y el vino sean fruto ‘de la tierra fértil, pura e incontaminada.’” “La fe en Cristo resucitado hace que la Eucaristía sea ‘un proyecto de solidaridad’ para compartir los bienes con los más pobres’ y vivir la espiritualidad eucarística en la Iglesia.”*

In the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict writes: *“To develop a profound Eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end... This Eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, ‘fruit of the earth,’ and ‘work of human hands.’ With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God’s creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God’s good plan in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation. The relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos helps us to see the unity of God’s plan and to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the ‘new creation’ inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the new Adam... Our Christian life, nourished by the Eucharist, gives us a glimpse of that new world—new heavens and a new earth—where the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, from God, ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (Rev. 21:2).” (#92)*

## **Part Two: Some Practical Suggestions**

After speaking of the theological foundations for our commitment to the stewardship of nature, especially emphasizing their roots in the spirituality of covenant and reconciliation, I will now suggest some practical ways that we can live our commitment to care for God’s house.

### ***The Eucharist***

I begin with the celebration of the Eucharist, which is so central to our Christian faith and to the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

There is a relationship between our care of creation and our worship. The challenge is to be intentional in making the connections between our caring and our worship, and to find liturgical ways to express that relationship. Worship can be a time to increase our awareness of the



world around us, to increase our appreciation of the sacredness of creation, and to deepen our desire to treat it with dignity and respect.

To celebrate the Eucharist is to identify oneself with Christ in the heart of the world and to commit oneself, to silence the cry of creation, wounded and claiming its dignity.

### ***Celebrating the Ecological Dimensions in the Eucharist:***

David Rhoads in an article on *“Worshipping in Relationship with Nature”* gives many practical suggestions as to how to incorporate the care for creation in our worship services: through the hymns we use; in the penitential rite in which we can incorporate how we have sinned against creation; through the use of scripture and in preaching; through prayers of petition in which our concerns and longings for creation to thrive are voiced; through prayers and psalms of thanksgiving, to mention some of the possible places where our concerns and hopes can be expressed. Once again, it is about helping the people to relate what they are celebrating in Church with life and creation and to bring them to a commitment to be good stewards.

### ***Liturgical Seasons***

He likewise speaks of how the different seasons of the liturgical year can be seen in the light of the care of creation:

**Advent:** as all creation groans together as we await redemption and restoration of all of life. It is a time to repent in preparation for a new age. The Advent readings from Isaiah recall the idyllic myth as symbolic of the reign of God in the new creation for which we long, where justice and mercy will prevail, and where the earth and our relation to it will be restored to some kind of balance.

**Christmas** celebrates God becoming one with the human family to save all creation from the brokenness of sin and death. It is a time to consider our oneness, not just with God and with others, but with creation itself.

**Epiphany** during which we celebrate the manifestation and glory of God in the natural order of life.

**Lent** when we grieve the losses to our environment and reflect on the sacrifices we can make to stop our sins against creation.

**Easter** when we celebrate the resurrection of human life and envision the restoration/regeneration of all of life.

And, **Pentecost** – a time to reflect on the wisdom we need and the actions we can take to live a life in which all human and non-human creation can thrive together. And these themes can be

visibly present as well through the decoration in our places of worship, banners, and sayings to remind us throughout the year of our commitment to be good stewards.

These elements can be expressed as well in special prayer services for particular occasions. He concludes his reflection thus: *“By immersion and by osmosis, the weekly connection with nature through words and symbols and ritual actions and the presence of nature itself will work a salutary effect on the worshipping community. By weekly, indeed daily, immersion, a transformation can occur that leads people to see our integral connection with all God’s creation and that enables people to come to a place of new and renewed gratitude for nature and a sense of responsibility to care for creation as part of our vocation as humans and as God’s people.”*

### ***Petitions of Pardon***

As we begin the Eucharist we can include in our petitions of pardon, our sins of complicity and of omission with regards our stewardship of creation. Here I would quote from the address I gave at the first symposium on Reconciliation here in this same aula, ten years ago. I find it necessary to do so, because our hands are not clean and we have much conversion yet to accomplish. As we celebrate this week our “Mass on the World”, we need to begin by asking pardon...

**For our complicity:** for our silence and for turning a deaf ear before the cry of Mother Earth, exploited and abused, raped of its beauty and natural resources;

**For our blindness:** because we are too busy in the construction of monuments to ourselves and in the protection of our institutions than caring for the Earth, the house for all;

**Pardon because fear has often paralyzed us and kept us from responding:** fear of losing our privileges, our positions of honor, our benefactors and especially our securities which could be endangered when taking a more prophetic stance with those who are paying the price of our rape of the Earth, through loss of their land and the destruction of their ecosystems;

**Pardon for our indifference as we watch nature being destroyed and abused, and as the indigenous are robbed of their lands,** thus becoming accomplices to their loss of identity, and silent witnesses to their extinction.

**And, finally, we ask pardon for not being faithful to our reason for being: to apply the merits of the Precious Blood!** Pardon because we have not known how to be effective instruments of salvation which touch the very real lives of persons, because we have remained principally spiritualizers, disembodied, in the realm of the sacred, as if a human person were not holy, a living temple of God, as if the blood which runs through his or her veins were not precious, and as if there were no connection between ourselves and nature.

Yes, we have to make a "mea culpa," as individuals and as institutions, as Families of the Precious Blood and as Church. Not only once, but every day.

## ***The Offertory***

Nowhere in our Eucharistic celebration are we more challenged than in the Offertory and in the Presentation of the Gifts of Bread and Wine.

Robert Barron in his book, *Eucharist*, touches upon the cosmic dimension of the Mass. He recalls that sin is not simply a personal and interpersonal problem, but rather compromises the integrity of the entire created order. *“Thus, the salvation wrought through Israel and Jesus and made present in the Mass has to do with the healing of the world. We see this dimension especially **in the gifts of bread and wine** presented at the offertory. To speak of bread is to speak, implicitly, of soil, seed, grain, and sunshine that crossed 90 million miles of space; to speak of wine is to speak, indirectly, of vine, earth, nutrients, storm clouds, and rainwater. To mention earth and sun is to allude to the solar system of which they are a part, and to invoke the solar system is to assume the galaxy of which it is a portion, and to refer to the galaxy is to hint at the unfathomable realities that condition the structure of the measurable universe. Therefore, when these gifts are brought forward, it is as though the whole of creation is placed on the altar before the Lord.”* (p.57)

We challenge the dominant economic and political model based on market forces and endless consumption. It will mean accepting that the resources of the Earth are finite, that current Western consumption patterns cannot be sustained by the wider human community, or into future generations, and that they bring death and destruction to other species in our planetary community of life.

It will mean personal and political options in support of renewable sources of energy, alternate forms of transport, the conservation and re-use of water, the designing of energy-efficient buildings, the protection of habitats, the limitation of urban sprawl, and the attempt to bring life and beauty to our cities.

David Edwards in his article, *“Eucharist and Ecology,”* states: *“The Eucharist is the symbol and the sacrament of the risen Christ who is the beginning of the transfiguration of all creatures in God. In eating and drinking at this table we participate in the risen Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17)... And what is made present is Christ in the power of resurrection, as not only the promise but also the beginning of the transformation of all things.”*

He also believes that this is the context in which we can interpret for today the prayer of **Teilhard de Chardin** in his *Mass on the World*.

All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die: all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire.

Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.

Margaret Scott, in an insightful book called *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, has a very insightful chapter on the Offertory entitled “Fruit of the Earth and Work of Human Hands” (chapter 4). She writes that *“the Eucharistic gifts imply much more than merely bread and wine. They speak of the whole of material creation and all of human existence. They thrust the Eucharist into the heart of human reality and the whole of the cosmos. At the same time, they initiate a conversation around the issue of land: those who possess it and the dispossessed, those forced off the land that fed them and crops grown on land owned by others. They open a dialogue about human toil and the slavery that today affects millions of men, women, and, particularly, children.”*

The key words of the Offertory – creation, bread, wine, earth, the work of human hands – all speak to us of food and drink, hunger and thirst, labor and remuneration; of those who have and those who have not, the rich and the poor.

She states that because the Eucharist is incarnated in our lives and rooted in our soil, *“they bring the poor and their struggles and the rape of the earth to the center of the Eucharistic celebration...It is about life in all of its dimensions.”* She continues: *“Woven into the story of bread and the tale of wine is much of our own human story here on this earth. Bread and wine tell us the tale of human labor, a narrative made up of effort and struggle, and of toil, tears, and sweat. This toil and sweat are integrated into the Eucharist and transformed by the action of the Spirit of God to become the bread of life”* (p. 52-53). The story of bread and wine is a tale of injustice but also one of hope and solidarity. It recalls all those who worked in the process of producing the bread and the wine we offer at the altar.

In the Eucharist we offer all human activity and efforts to God, uniting them to the redemptive work of Christ. *“Encoded in the Offertory is a commentary on the world of work and all the burning issues that surround it (exploitation, oppression, abusive working conditions, the employed and unemployed).* The Offertory echoes the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

And the Eucharist reminds us that the material world has been entrusted to us by God as gift, a gift that belongs to the whole of humanity and that the resources of the earth belong to everyone. The Offertory invites us to widen our perspectives and understanding of the Eucharist, to embrace its cosmic dimension.

I refer to Teilhard de Chardin’s offertory in the *Hymn to the Universe* as he places the whole universe on the paten and in the chalice: *“Since once again Lord...I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar...I your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the*

*labors and sufferings of the world...Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed from the earth's fruits." (p. 19)*

In the Presentation of the Gifts we are all priests in the great temple of creation, giving thanks to God and praise for all God's gifts. It makes us responsible for the survival of the earth itself and nurtures in us a deep ecological sensibility and a spirituality of interconnectedness that embraces the wholeness of the cosmos. So lived, the Offertory is a prophetic statement and a summons for justice.

### ***The Eucharistic Prayer and the great "Amen"!***

Our everyday Eucharistic Prayers bring out the radical inner relationship between God's action in creation and redemption.

Second Eucharistic Prayer: *"He is the Word through whom you made la universe, the Savior you sent to redeem us."* Third Eucharistic Prayer: *"All creation rightly gives you praise."* Fourth Eucharistic Prayer: *"In the name of every creature under heaven, we too praise your glory."*

And in the great doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we lift up the whole creation through, with and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit to the eternal praise and glory of God.

Renewing our Commitment to be Good Stewards, Go'els: *Living our "Amen" as Eucharistic communities*

### ***Through Other Liturgical Celebrations***

We pray and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable. Integrate themes of care for creation into parish liturgies and celebrations. Consider a special Mass to raise up the wonder of creation and the call to care for all God's creatures. Remember to include the needs of the poor on whom climate change and environmental degradation will have the most impact.

At the conclusion of my presentation, I will show a short video created by a group of theology students at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Our CPPS seminarian, Joe Grilliot, was one of the creators of this "Ecological Way of the Cross". I think it is an excellent example of how we can raise consciousness concerning our ecological responsibilities through traditional prayer forms and devotions.

### ***Through Education and Conscience Raising***

When we speak of our commitment to the defense of nature, one road is to teach and promote what has been called “the best kept secret of the Catholic faith: namely, the **Catholic Social Teaching**.” In general, we have done little to make it known to our own fellow Catholics. I experienced this first-hand while rector of St. Gaspar school in Santiago, Chile. After realizing the ignorance of many of our parents and even teachers, not to mention the students themselves, I decided to incorporate a course on the “Social Doctrine of the Church” as an obligatory subject in the high school curriculum for all of our students. This implied an extra subject and hiring of teachers expert in this field. Some of our parents reacted very strongly to this decision. Nevertheless, when confronted by them, I was steadfast in my decision and informed them that if they would not permit their son or daughter to participate in this subject, they were free to leave the school and go somewhere else.

I believe that we need to insure that the Social Doctrine of the Church is taught in our parish programs, especially for those young people preparing for Confirmation. The teaching Church is taking this seriously as is evidenced in the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), which by the way has a whole chapter dedicated to environmental issues.

Post quotes from Pope Benedict XVI, from social doctrine of the Church, and other news articles to help people learn about climate change and its effects and to learn about our responsibilities as Catholics with regard to this issue.

### ***Through our lifestyle choices***

Already Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* criticized “a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards ‘having’ rather than ‘being,’ while encouraging the creation of “lifestyles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments” (# 36).

Pope Benedict XVI in his recent Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, on the social dimension of our faith, calls for “a reform of life styles and the re-education of consumer choices, part of a ‘covenant between human beings and the environment which should mirror the creative love of God.” (cf # 50-51) We need to rein in our unbridled consumption and consumerism and adopt lifestyles based on self-restraint and moderation.

To be converted to a sense of kinship with and responsibility for the creatures of Earth, and for the land, atmosphere, seas and rivers that support them, can be a joyful and liberating experience. To get involved with the struggle for a more just and ecologically sustainable world can be fulfilling and meaningful, an experience of communion with other human beings and with the natural world.

In doing so, we will live as go'els, good stewards of the Earth God has given for all of us to enjoy. But in living our commitment, we will also be immersed in the Paschal Mystery, as we experience some successes here and there, but also discouragement and setbacks as we face the sheer power of the economic and political forces that are committed to maximum short-term profits with no regard for ecological or social consequences.

One of the choices we can all make is in what and how we eat! Jesuit author, Joseph A. Tetlow, says in his book, *Making Choices in Christ*, that *"No one who is mindful of others' hunger eats mindlessly whatever comes to hand. As with all God's gifts, we must keep sensible order in our eating and drinking, serving God and not our taste buds... We need to take personal responsibility for our own nourishment, deciding what we are going to eat and how much."*

We need to act to change our choices and behaviors contributing to climate change.

### ***Advocating for the proper Stewardship of Nature***

The words of John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* continue to echo in our hearts: *"Make the voice of Abel's blood heard!"*

We do this through supporting local, national and international initiatives to care for creation and the poor. Collaborate with other groups, denominations, etc. in these endeavors.

Advocate Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they have impacts on the poor and vulnerable. Network with others. Use the internet and web sites.

We can make a difference! Together we can demonstrate true stewardship and genuine solidarity with a commitment to the common good and to easing the burdens of poor and vulnerable people. We honor our Creator by caring for creation.

(Dan Misleh, *"A Commitment to the Catholic Climate Covenant"*. In Church Magazine, Summer 2009, New York. 16-19)

## ***Concluding Remarks***

### **Calls for a new kind of Asceticism**

Archbishop Pedro Barreto on the Synod Floor also stated that we are being called to a *"conversión ecológica"*. Y, *"La convicción de la Iglesia es que 'la tecnología que contamina, también puede descontaminar; la producción que acumula, también puede distribuir equitativamente, a condición de que prevalezca la ética del respeto a la vida, a la dignidad del hombre y a los derechos de las generaciones humanas presentes y futuras"*.

Pope Benedict invites us to a serious review of our lifestyle, in a society prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new lifestyles *“in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments”* (JP II, *Centesimus Annus*)

In a meeting with priests and religious in the diocese of Bressanone, Italia, August 6, 2000, the Holy Father answered a question concerning environmental issues. Part of his response stated:

Care for the earth is not just about policies, but lifestyles: The pope insisted that it's not only laws and business practices that have to change, but **styles of life**. "It's not just a question of finding techniques that can prevent environmental harms, even if it's important to find alternative sources of energy and so on," Benedict said. "All this won't be enough if we ourselves don't find a new style of life, **a discipline which is made up in part of renunciations**." In that regard, the pope argued, Christians should lead by example. Christians should offer proof through the **simplicity of their own lives** that they believe what they say, and that it's possible to be happy and fulfilled while living in ways that respect the inner dynamics of creation.

Author Brennan Hill also states that **self-denial** that is needed if we are to take up an ecological commitment. He writes: *“Environmental concerns bring new light to the discussion of authentic self-denial. No doubt we will all have to live more simply if we wish to share our resources, replenish them, and share them with those in need. The new asceticism returns to natural foods that are nourishing and healthy, and it sets aside the processed and “fast foods” that are harmful to health and wasteful in their excessive packaging. This spirituality returns to making things, and repairing, patching, and refinishing rather than simply discarding. Such self-denial calls for a detachment from gadgets, faddish items, and luxuries. It is conscientious about adequate exercise and proper health care.”* (in *Christian Faith and the Environment*, 249)

## **Contemplation**

We are called to a **contemplative presence** with which we open our eyes and our hearts to the wonder of all that is. “Give me eyes to see and ears to hear!” It sometimes makes us weep at the rape of the earth and our complicity in global devastation and poverty. Contemplation also urges us to action. In the words of Benedict XVI, “Listen and attend with the ear of your heart.” Yes, listen and attend...before it is too late.

Nevertheless, we do believe in transformation and conversion. We believe in the redeeming power of God’s spirit. We are called by the Blood of Christ to be prophets “of that new order of things which Christ came to establish with his Precious Blood”, to use the words of St. Maria De Mattias. In order to give credible witness to that new order, we need to undertake a journey of conversion, as the redeeming Blood purifies and reconciles us of all that obstructs living



faithfully in the bond that we profess. The God of the covenant provides nourishment for our journey. When we gather around the Eucharistic Table to break bread and to drink from a common cup, we strengthen our covenant bond with God, with one another, and with all of creation. We renew our commitment to one another and we accept with joy the mission of being “go’els”, guardians and defenders of the covenant, furthering authentic community and covenant bonding in a fragmented society in a world so often raped and ravaged of its resources.

The God of the Scriptures is a covenant God who clearly heard the cry of the poor and the oppressed and the cry of the exploited earth. Moved to compassion and called to solidarity by the cry of their blood, God gave the ultimate, loving response in the person of Jesus, the Redeemer and Go’el.

Quiero citar las palabras del Premio Nobel, Pablo Neruda en su “Oda al Pan”:

“Por eso, pan,  
si huyes /de la casa del hombre,  
si te ocultan, / te niegan,  
si el avaro / te prostituye,  
si el rico / te acapara,  
si el trigo / no busca surco y tierra,  
pan, / no rezaremos,  
pan, / no mendigaremos,  
lucharemos por ti con otros hombres, / con todos los hambrientos,  
por todos los ríos y el aire / iremos a buscarte,  
toda la tierra la repartiremos / para que tú germines,  
y con nosotros avanzará la tierra:  
el agua, el fuego, el hombre / lucharán con nosotros.  
Iremos coronados / con espigas,  
conquistando / tierra y pan para todos,  
y entonces / también la vida / tendrá forma de pan,  
será simple y profunda, / innumerable y pura.  
Todos los seres / tendrán derecho / a la tierra y la vida,  
y así será el pan de la mañana, / el pan de cada boca,  
sagrado, / consagrado,  
porque será el producto / de la más larga y dura / lucha humana.

No tiene alas / la victoria terrestre:  
tiene pan en sus hombros,  
y vuela valerosa / liberando la tierra,  
como una panadera  
conducida en el viento.”

Reflecting on Paul's letter to the Romans in which Paul writes that the world itself will one day become a form of living worship, the Holy Father during a July 24th Vespers service in the Cathedral of Aosta in northern Italy, said: "It's the great vision that later Teilhard de Chardin also had: At the end we will have a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host. Let's pray to the Lord that he help us be priests in this sense, to help in the transformation of the world in adoration of God, beginning with ourselves."

Lima, Peru  
January 14, 2010

**Possible question for discussion:**

When have you experience profound unity with the Creation and the Creator?

How can we bring out the ecological consequences of the Eucharistic celebration in our lives?

What are the implications for me in my community and/or mission? How will I bring what I have experienced to others in a practical way?

How can we help our fellow Catholics discover the social dimension of the Eucharist?  
Teaching the Social Doctrine of the Church & Benedict's Social Encyclical

Identify changes you can make in the "life" dimensions: economic, social, and spiritual. We are called to arrange our economic social, and, yes, spiritual life around our God-given role.

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