

Essay 8: Eco-Spirituality in a Latin-American Context

an excerpt from:

Eco-spirituality: The humble way of caring for the Earth.
(www.here-now4u.de/eng/eco-spirituality_-_the_humble_.htm)

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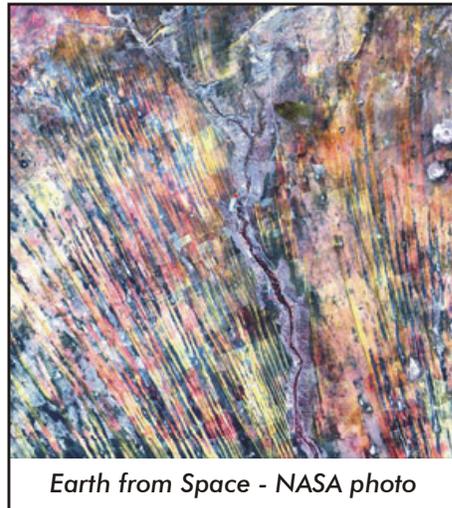
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The Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic has been involved for many years in preaching in favor of nature and the environment, also within the social context of the Church doctrine. In 1987 the Bishops of the Dominican Republic produced an unprecedented document in Spanish on the relation of [people] with nature, which analyzes the situation in their country, presents the doctrine that applies to the issue, and suggests the conduct to prevent further destruction of God's given resources. It is a call for ecological morality and action (Jakowska, 1988a).

It is against this background that we decided to introduce nature among those dedicated to preparing children for the First Communion and teaching religion in local communities. The

existence in the Youth Ministry, Patorial Juvenil Arquidiocesana, of an ecologically-oriented group, permitted presenting some ideas.

However, it was an International Consultation on God, People and Nature, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1988, that stimulated an

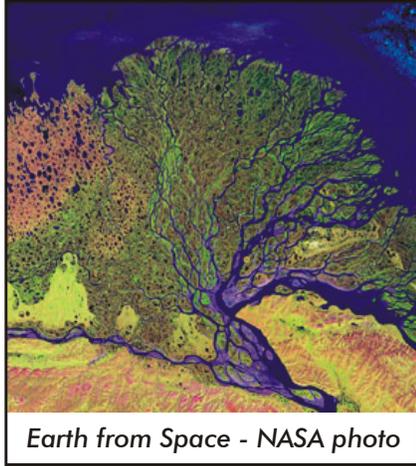


Earth from Space - NASA photo

experimental project in a small parish in Santo Domingo. It was meant to bring closer to nature, in a theocentric context, a small group of practising Catholics (Jakowska, 1988b).

It became apparent to us that the message of the Pastoral Letter of 1987 needed immediate “translation” into terms intelligible to children and newly alphabetized persons if it is to become known and applied.

In this small community we became convinced that the future of the country depends on individual “ecological conversion”, on a drastic change of attitudes towards nature and towards all forms of life, as well as on new ways of using resources, especially food and water.



It appeared obvious that this can be accomplished only by accepting the moral implications of our responsibility for God’s heritage, rather than on our use of science and technology, which have failed us to a great extent. We also believe in prayer as an instrument of social change.

A plan was designed to help achieve an individual “ecological conversion” in six simple steps, on the way to collective awareness raising. The plan was used in different format and circumstances: as week-end retreat, as one day retreat, as half-day sessions and even less than one hour treatment, depending on specific needs, in Spanish.

The most beneficial circumstances were in a chapel-garden setting, with brief introduction to each of the six themes, and individual meditation (in total silence and freedom of using the chapel or the garden) on brief quotations from the psalms, and other parts of the Scriptures. We tried to bring about the understanding that Nature is the first book of the human kind, and that God reveals Himself in all things and beings that He created, in the universal order, and in the mysterious processes of continuity of creation through evolution.

We pointed out that God requires that we care for this legacy,

recognizing how small we are in reference to the universe. Ours is the moral responsibility as heirs of God the Father, as the most privileged creatures on Earth, who recognize the rights and the obligations of each human generations for the just enjoyment of Earth's treasures, preserving the environment clean and healthy, trying to eliminate or to diminish pollution, and even modifying our way of thinking and talking about Nature, applying moral principles to our relations with Nature.

We also stated that God offers to us a legacy for legitimate use, for our sustain, and for the enjoyment of the beauty and other features of the natural world that appeal to our senses. With these privileges we have the obligation to preserve life in every form, not only for our own good, but also for the generations to come.



Earth from Space - NASA photo

Theme 1 refer to the greatness and the beauty of Creation, which calls for the adoration and praise of the Lord. Among the quotations are the verses from Psalm 19, 24, 29, 33, selection from Job 12, 7-12 and Revelation 4,11.

The topic is introduced with some familiar examples to which persons may relate easily, as they are asked to seek out the reasons for adoring and praising the Lord of all Creation.

Theme 2 concentrates on the great diversity of the gifts of Creation, what scientists refer to as biological diversity or biodiversity. We must give thanks to the Lord for all we personally experience as gifts of nature, starting with our own life as God's gift, and for all that makes life on Earth possible for people in different parts of the Earth.

Selections for meditation include among other Psalms 104, Psalm 50, and other forms of thanksgiving from the Scriptures. But it is also

important to awaken at this point a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation of the natural world.

Theme 3 brings us to consider the damage caused by humankind to the integrity of Creation, the disappearance of so many plant and animal species, and a profound sorrow for any personal involvement with damaging God's world, and also a shared guilt for all the damage to the environment that occurred in the past and occurs now, e.g. Through area destruction and pollution of air, water, and soil.

We consider here some of the problems close to home, of pollution and of deforestation, of garbage accumulation and excessive consumerism among those who can least afford it. We try to bring in some consideration for defenseless creatures people use and abuse.

Theme 4 is the essential part of this activity - it must bring about a personal conviction that we cannot continue to be active and/or passive



participants in the destruction of the Earth, a sort of "ecological conversion" based on our responsibility to the Lord, the Creator. This personal act must involve repentance and the sincere commitment to sin no more against Nature.

The selections to guide towards this "ecological conversion" may include quotations from the Pastoral Letter of the Dominican Bishops of 1987, also from Rom. 8,20 and other texts that may inspire

us.

Theme 5 is the product of this conversion and determination to collaborate with the Lord in the protection and restoration of Nature. We must accept the responsibility on a personal level and establish a link between God-directed wisdom to carry out His work.

Psalms 104,30 etc. may inspire us to consider some matters to prepare us for a wiser use of natural resources, the true gifts of the Earth. We may also consider our role in terms of the document of Vatican II called *Gaudium et Spes*, 35. We may orient towards developing solidarity with the Earth and its creatures.

Theme 6 calls for us to translate our Faith into action. This is often considered beyond individual power because people think environment can be saved only by government or other massive effort. But we often forget that small humble acts may lead to great changes that are appreciated by many. This is the moment where the entire program must come to fruition in small acts on personal level that will add up to visible appreciable results.

We may seek inspiration in 2 Cor. 6, 1-2, or in Isaias 58,12. Psalm 84 may help us to meditate. We must remember that every creature is here to serve, in life or in death, the rest of the living community. We, too, are called to serve and to improve the natural environment for which we are responsible before God our Lord. We cannot achieve perfection without service to others, including the Earth that needs us.



The Pastoral Letter of 1987, 55, may help us consider our role and direct our thoughts towards many small ways in which we can contribute.

How can we judge the value and the effectiveness of this modest program aimed at raising of individual spiritual awareness of the natural

world?

This depends on many factors, on the leaders and the participants, on the frequency of the “good” message and the sincerity in the acceptance of the six guiding steps toward change. It may be manifested in small victories in the war between the material and the spiritual forces.

Today, in growing cities, full of rural “refugees,” where the quality of life is rapidly spiralling down, we are only armed with prayer.

We also have experience that tells us what the Earth needs and how it can be helped and healed.

Yet, we face the ignorance and greed of powerful modern “pirates” who constantly attempt against the remaining natural green areas and bodies of water still left relatively healthy to sustain the future health of

its growing human population. Every day we learn about destruction and pollution, and public indifference to the slaughter of the sacred.

But green is the color of Hope, and we must be sustained by this virtue, necessary to carry on our mission. Only with Hope, and our Faith to guide us, we can hold on to our values and pray for the spiritual strength to resist the attacks against our Mother Earth.

Permit me to finish with a prayer, reproduced in Sacred Spaces, a publication of Canadian Coalition for Ecology, Ethics and Religion (Jakowska, 1993).

Lord, you gave us this planet on which we live with all it contains as a common inheritance to share with other creatures and other human beings.

Help us understand the mysteries of nature in order to respect your Creation and to use your creatures according to your laws.

Help us use your gifts wisely and justly, thinking not only of ourselves but also of other people in other parts of the world who have the right to share them.

Do not permit that through our greed and negligence the Earth becomes poorer in forests and rivers, in plants and animals, and other wonders of nature that glorify you with their presence.

Help us love your Creation in every form of matter and in every form of life, but especially in our human brothers and sisters.

Help us serve one another as other creatures do according to your will, using wisely what we may use of your gifts and sharing them with all the living creatures of our planet.

Help us preserve our environment clean and healthy for all and make the right decisions to restore what has been destroyed,

So that we may serve you better in harmony and peace with nature. Amen.

(see references next page)

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