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A role for Christians in the world ecology:
the integrity of Creation

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THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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A ROLE FOR CHRISTIANS IN WORLD ECOLOGY:

THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

A thousand million Christians mobilized

After the last world war in about 1950, when problems of ecology and man's relationship with his environment first began to be mentioned, the subject aroused indifference and incredulity, but also a feeling of distaste for the few who maintained its rightness and called for hard thinking. Those few were derided and seen as spoil-sports and inspired descriptions such as "prophets of doom" and "green militants".

Slowly the new, unpopular subjects became understood. Several large-scale disasters opened their eyes and people began to realise that not all was really well with the triumphalism of technological achievement, economic growth and well-being that was growing and dulling minds like a drug.

It is enough to name some places where massive ecological disasters have occurred in recent years to show how mankind is exposed at all times and in all places to grave perils of our own devising. Let us recall, for example, the great disasters caused by pollution of the atmosphere at Donora (USA) in 1948 and London (England) in 1952; in the Sea of Minamata (Japan) in the sixties; at Seveso (Italy) caused by dioxin in 1977; the nuclear disasters at Three Mile Island (USA) in 1979 and Chernobyl (Russia) in 1986; the oil-tanker *Torrey Canyon* in the English Channel in 1967; the chemical plant at Bhopal (India) in 1984 and *Le River Rhine at Basel* (Switzerland) in 1986 which spread to France, Germany and Holland; the forests destroyed by atmospheric pollution in Europe and North America (1975-1987).

A score of years or so on, in 1970 the Council of Europe sponsored a "European Year of Nature" which, thanks to the institution's prestige and the small committee of champions of ecology who were in at its start, broke down passive resistance and spread throughout western Europe the new ideas and a new awareness of nature. It is now time to declare a "European Year of Nature from the Atlantic to the Urals" as a prelude to a "World Year of Nature".

On the way to this the United Nations organised the world conference on ecology which was held in Stockholm in 1972, but the bursting and driving force of commerce, profit, prosperity and the industrial activity at work in technological advances failed to assimilate - and worldwide today still fails to assimilate - the lessons given by science and the ever clearer and more persuasive voices emanating from the spiritual world.

To the manifold effective lay ecological activities there is now allied the Church, which is moving from studying ecological ideas to the practical and serious operational phase of concrete developments: recognising the importance to mankind of man's duties to the environment which shelters and feeds us, teaching the concept of a healthy balance in the relations between man and nature and the need to have a better understanding of our place in creation. A veritable mobilization of Christians is imminent: one billion 150 million mobilized worldwide.

The stance is important: to contribute to improving the quality of life by giving man a better place in his environment. Peace among nations, a higher good, the worldly aspiration of every human being depends on their place in the environment in which they live.



on a harmonious relationship between man and nature.

We now have to organise ourselves so that the principles we have acknowledged do not remain mere statements but enter in and work in the reality of the life of those Christians who will need to be given not only admonitions but also the notions necessary to make them informed and convinced. It is a concrete organization that has to be conceived and made real in order to transform the principles enunciated into concrete acts, to provide all the activists with the evidence so that they in their turn can pass on the ideas, challenges and words of wisdom. A splendid and detailed operation which has to be set up and run with decision, simplicity, without delay, organically, pluriformly and in a way which varies with the different actualities with which we are concerned.

Informed and convinced in order to be convincing

In order to be convincing it is first of all necessary to be convinced, and this comes not only from the promptings of authority, but also from the quality of the information which is received and has to be passed on.

Facts, concrete data, the reality of past and present, prospects and ends have to be simple, unobscured and straightforward in order to be understood. Responsibility for the errors committed and their unfortunate consequences must not be passed over in silence or covered up. The merits and advantages we will gain by a sounder behaviour, for ourselves and our neighbour, society and the future, have to be explained and explicitly accepted, so providing the satisfaction of effecting not only actions that are necessary, but also actions that are beneficial for us today and for our descendants. Always and all for man

There is no lack of justification for resolutely taking on these tasks. In fact if we look broadly at the ecological situation of the world, even confining ourselves to a few examples of general significance, we find things which terrify us but which we can still put right.

For example, if the enormous amounts of money and energy spent on the prestige and (hypothetical) potential which the conquest of the planets and satellites can bring, and on other astronautical activities, were instead diverted to the ecological maintenance and reconstruction of the terrestrial globe, we should obtain real and concrete benefits which could reverse the current trend towards a general worsening of conditions in the world, turning it into a substantial and steady improvement. The human race needs this, and today we are in a position to say with certainty that it is feasible: we need the political will to do it, and in order to obtain this result, it is very important that people should be prepared.

This would meet with the approval of the entire world, which is alive to this need and is waiting to see put into effect the ecological recovery of the continents, oceans and atmosphere, the protection of living beings and the sensible management and maintenance of the environment. For all of this, the popular interest and consent, the scientific knowledge to set up a global plan of action, the understanding and technological ability and the necessary financial means exist. With the cooperation of all the nations and peoples of the Earth mobilised to manage the planet, we should and can achieve a global ecological strategy and get it working, gaining the added advantage of full employment of the work-force, which is available but at present largely unutilised, unproductive and underdeveloped. Armies kept as instruments mobilised for the service of the ecological maintenance of the world. Peoples mobilised morally to undertake the great strategy of overseeing and improving the quality of life.



The main thing is to safeguard the terrestrial globe and not neglect it. But there is a risk of being led to neglect it in that the new prophets of technocracy have for some years been making plans to build huge tubes in space for self-sufficient human colonies to live in with an environment that misleadingly copies nature here on earth.

Faced with the perplexities and doubts this gives rise to, the propagandists of this new brain-wave speak about it to the kids in the schools, where they naturally excite a fool-hardy interest and the reckless claim that they would gladly go and live in the space tubes. We have been smacked in the face by these juvenile opinions in order to show us the excellence of the project. Yet we are careering madly towards those exorbitantly-costly enterprises which, among other things, will have the effect of making people think that there is no longer any need to urge a more balanced ecological behaviour upon mankind in order to avert the destruction of the natural environment and even the whole world, because we will be able to go and live in tubes in space.

But the more disturbing aspect of these projects for transporting mankind to tubes in space is that they are planning to reconstruct there landscapes and environments, grow plants, raise animals, produce water and atmosphere exactly as we have them on Earth and which they realise we cannot do without. So why destroy everything on Earth in order to reconstruct it (if it were possible) in tubes in space? What is terrifying is the mass of half-baked idiocies on which, in good or bad faith, many scientists, engineers, politicians and false messianic saviours of mankind are dangerously wasting their time and spending excessive sums of money.

Meanwhile are we destroying our earthly home in order to go and live in tubes in space, about which nobody knows whether or how they can become a reality.

We are not indiscriminately against every such development, but we have doubts as to whether now is the right time to be undertaking them. The monumental cost of undertaking them could be used for a programme of ecological maintenance and global reconstruction. Put the world right first and the rest in due course.

It may be that the extra-terrestrial development of human life is not the real purpose of the planned construction of platforms and tubes in space, and that it is actually the essential condition for being able to control from outside the atmosphere the launching of a chemical, nuclear or biological war on Earth, or to withstand the outbreak of a war launched by others and so to wait in relative safety for the opportunity - if possible - to go back home. It would be nothing but a much greater folly, but of the same order of ideas as the previous ones, which with the lesser wherewithal of the time devastated parts of Europe in 1914-1918 and much of Europe in 1939-1945. Alas! the mentality and the wherewithal to do it are there: indeed, we have even heard it said that the world could be put right by the extermination of a billion people. That would be to postpone in vain a dozen years of problems and increase the difficulty of picking up again and going forward. The last state worse than the first.

But now perhaps those gloomy doubts that mankind has entertained for decades have been dissipated by a more serene international psychological climate that permits us to plan not the destruction but the safeguarding of the world and mankind.

The protection of the environment a primary and global problem

So the protection of the environment has become the main problem for mankind. It includes the problems of ecological imbalance, famine in the world and insecurity due to the precarious or insupportable conditions of life of much of mankind, and the improvement of the quality of life in order to guarantee and consolidate peace. In view of the



poor outlook for the world's ecology, it is clear that those responsible for the government of the world who are aware of this situation must act decisively and urgently to put into effect the three basic ecological principles: firstly, to save what can be saved; secondly, to put a halt to the damage that is going on and prevent further damage taking place; thirdly, to reconstruct ecologically the environments that have been damaged or destroyed.

That this is necessary on a global scale and from the ground to the stratosphere is shown by some well-known facts, for example:

Ozone. The destruction that is taking place of the ozone layer which by reducing the penetration of ultra-violet rays protects living beings from the damaging effects of these radiations, a destruction attributable to chemical products released into the atmosphere.

Acid rain. The effect of the pollution by acid rain which has already changed the chemical composition of the atmosphere in the northern hemisphere with grave consequences for the survival of forests and the land and aquatic ecosystems. This includes the disappearance of a considerable number of animal and vegetable species, even before man had had time to identify them and possibly use them for his own advantage.

The greenhouse effect. The rise in the average world temperature (greenhouse effect) and its unfortunate consequences for the polar and mountain ice cover, on marine life, climate, coastlines, vegetation, agriculture, fauna and the desertification which is increasing dangerously on all the continents and has already reduced 43 % of the land above sea-level to arid, inhospitable and barren terrains.¹ In the last 20 years of this century the developing countries will lose 40 % of their forest cover.

Genetic resources. The continuous and progressive impoverishment of resources for animal and vegetable wild-life and the decrease in the number of animal and vegetable species that were reared and used in the past impoverishes the genetic inheritance available for man's development. This harmful trend has to be halted and turned back instead to con-

¹ According to the International Union for Nature Conservancy, from 1975 to 2000, 300 million hectares of land will be lost through desertification, as much again will be swallowed up by urbanisation, which 300 million hectares of new land will be brought under cultivation. On a conservative estimate of a human population of 6 billion 250 million in the year 2000, it follows that cultivated land per person will be half what it was in 1975: 0.15 hectares per head in the year 2000 as opposed to 0.31 hectares in 1975.

Cultivated land: world average in 1975 and 2000:

	1975	2000
World population	4,000,000,000	6,250,000,000
Cultivated land	1,240,000,000 ha	940,000,000 ha
Cultivated land per head	0.31 ha	0.15 ha

Current estimates of land areas on the basis of utilisation and potential give for arable land values between 2 and a half billion and 3 billion 200 million hectares.

In the decade 1970-1980 urbanisation taking place mainly on land suitable for agriculture has taken up 3 % of agricultural land in the United States, 2.5 % in Italy, 1 % in France and 1.2 % in the United Kingdom.

In the 70 years from 1882 to 1952 the land used for agriculture in the world has undergone a reduction of 50 %.



servation and the recovery of genetic varieties.

The fauna of the seas, desertification and famine in the world. The two subjects, the fauna of the seas and the desertification of the land combine to produce that of famine in the world.

The oceans and seas are ever more polluted and overexploited by senseless fishing. We now take every year as much as 80 % of the fishable maximum which will be reached within the century, after which, if fishing continues to increase, an unstoppable process of depletion will be set in train. This will rapidly accelerate if the insane plan to filter the waters in order to acquire for food purposes the microfauna and microflora, which are the indispensable basis of the whole productive process, is put into effect. It is a technological stupidity which is unfortunately possible and inexorably planned, and against which reason bids us rebel.²

Desertification and the consequent barrenness which have already hit 43 % of the land above sea-level are in a state of continuous and uncontrollable expansion because of the destruction of the equatorial forests and the rapid transformation of the soil into barren land. The wrong-headed and excessive exploitation of land until it has to be abandoned allows a short-term use which leaves lasting poverty in its train. In Mali, for example, according to the World Bank, in the last twenty years the Sahara Desert has advanced 350 kilometres southwards. The annual increase in desert areas throughout the world is put at six million hectares, i.e. 60,000 square kilometres, one and a half times the area of Switzerland.

Tropical forests on all the continents are being destroyed at a rate of 30 hectare a minute, i.e. 160,000 square kilometres a year. One example: in the last 30 years Ecuador has lost a forest area equal to between 1/3 and 1/2 of the country's surface area.

Famine, the worst of the ills that weigh upon mankind is largely the result of past mistakes in ecological land management and they are still being perpetuated today in every continent. Add to these mistakes in the purely economic management of agrarian and livestock production which lead either to underproduction or nowadays in other places to a crisis of overproduction, requiring very costly storage of the surplus which ends by becoming unfit for use and is then destroyed, even when there are food shortages ravaging much of 3 continents.³

Genetic engineering. Taken up as fundamental scientific research and successfully

² It is thought for example that every year in the Mediterranean 350 million tonnes of solid material are unloaded which comprise about 1.000.000 tonnes of nitrogen, 500.000 t of hydrocarbons, 360.000 t of phosphorus, 90.000 kg of pesticides, 60.000 t of detergents, 25.000 t of zinc, 130 t of mercury, 3.800 t of lead, 2.400 t of chrome, 12.000 t of phenol, 2.500.000 t of organic matter plus an undetermined quantity of radioactive substances.

According to the OECD in 1983 3 million tonnes of industrial waste, 96 million t of mud and 5 million t of sewage found its way into the North Sea.

³ World food production is not increasing in proportion to the increase in population which is over 90 million a year. From a daily world average of 3,002 kilocalories per head in 1977, an average of 2,675.4 kcal ensued in 1983. If things go on as foreseen, in the year 2000 with a population of 6 billion 200 million there will be available on average per head less than 2,000 kcal a day, below therefore the minimum daily average per head necessary for the human organism, which is put at 2,400 kcal.



developed in fields important for mankind, this has ended by losing sight of any limit or any question as to the legitimacy of certain experiments that have been ventures but which until a few years ago were unthinkable: even the "creation" of new animal and vegetable species and the possibility of producing living beings that have been radically transformed and with new viable characteristics. To control and halt these developments is difficult, and the more time goes on the greater is the risk of finding ourselves facing undreamed of sinister and irredeemable predicaments.

Spellbound and puffed up by these successes, there are experimenters who think for example that an animal with a double brain is better than a normal one, that this eventuality will be possible and that it is predictable that it will be achieved in future even in man. But nobody knows whether a donkey with a double brain will be twice as asinine or half as asinine. There are already cases of essays that have released organisms into the real world - in this case microbes - with new characteristics, produced by genetic engineering. This has been done in countries that as yet do not have restraining laws, leaving them exposed without redress to possible unfortunate repercussions.

Compulsory control of human reproduction? The worldwide problems of poverty, famine, environment, unavailability of productive land and resources, and population growth lead people to think erroneously that the solution resides mainly in imposing a limitation on births and so in provisions for the compulsory control of human reproduction by means of statutory norms, economic sanctions, psychological treatment and even physical operations on male and female. The false premise, misunderstood by the people among whom it has been put into practice, has already caused political troubles and produced its victims (e.g. in India under Indira Ghandi) and will cause others, but we still go on along misleading and unsafe roads. Instead the safest way would be to stimulate sensible control of resources and the consequent lessening of the inter-continental imbalances between rich and poor, by improving the state of the have-nots.

Energy, a delusion and pitfall for the future. Energy, a subject on whose importance there is no need to dwell, is also being looked at from a point of view that is different from the traditional one, i.e. in relation to the tendency to look for sources that will provide ever cheaper or even free energy. But it has also to be considered that cheap or, still worse, free energy will be employed to use up still faster and more inexorably the existing natural resources - which are not inexhaustible and are mainly not renewable - bringing their extinction closer. And then what? Cheap or free energy could mean a speedier end to well-being for everyone, even if in the short term some peoples and nations will be able to improve fabulously, but temporarily, their own wealth and standard of living. If those who are developed technologically do not make this cheap energy truly available to all peoples, the imbalance in the standard of living between the privileged and those who are left behind will increase still more. Long life, wealth, superabundance for the few; a short and ever more miserable and hungry existence for the poor and the have-nots, who make up three quarters of mankind.

Dangerous world technological follies

As if these unfortunate facts deriving from man's environmental activities were not enough, a series of operations has been planned which is intended to bring about great environmental changes on the world scale.

For example in order to assist the reflection of electromagnetic waves, or to scramble their propagation and reception for warlike purposes, it was planned to sow clouds of gravitational copper needles in space, a plan which astronomers managed to have quashed because of the damage it would have done to astronomy.



Enormous mirrors in space have been planned to reflect sunlight to the earth during the night hours, and every now and again there is talk of it. They would like to divert the Gulf stream.

By damming the rivers in Siberia they wanted to prevent the flow of water into the Arctic Ocean so as to make it flow back instead and stagnate to form a sea in the interior of Siberia, but in 1987 the USSR government put a stop to the plan.

They would like to carry out this operation in the heart of Africa also, by damming the River Congo; and the damming of the Bering Strait has been planned as a means of pumping water from the Pacific into the Arctic Ocean and warming it; partial damming of the Straits of Gibraltar has been projected in order to cause the Mediterranean to evaporate and make new land.

There is no need to go on with further examples of projected technological follies that would throw the world into disorder.

Europe's ecology at risk

If from the global level we come down to that of the continent of Europe, which is of more direct interest to us, there is no lack of reasons for concern and incentives to intervene to put into effect the three basic principles of practical ecology.

When we are called upon to teach, express opinions, give advice, criticise, or work on the ground, it is only on the basis of a sound pan-European appreciation of the problems that we can intervene effectively.

In fact environmental damage knows no frontiers (e.g. pollution of the atmosphere with its effects on fauna, flora, soil, manufactured goods, works of art and public health; the migratory wildlife that moves and suffers harm from one end of Europe to the other; seas that are dying; rivers that carry poisons across frontiers; etc.).

So as to be able to suggest and adopt effective measures, as the situation and the interest of our peoples demand, it seems timely to form a base of knowledge that is really valid for Europe as a continent, from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean. The time is therefore ripe for making a conspectus of European ecology that combines western Europe's knowledge with comparable information for eastern Europe.

For western Europe there are many works of analysis-synthesis of the ecological situation in various important sectors, specially commissioned by the Council of Europe, the European Economic Community, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), besides other governmental and non-governmental international organisations, such as the FAO, WHO, IUCN, UNPE, UNESCO, WWF, etc.⁴

Some valid data for western Europe convince us that, albeit partial, our knowledge is

⁴ FAO: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
 WHO: World Health Organisation
 IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature and natural resources
 UNPE: United Nations Programme for the Environment
 UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
 WWF: World Wildlife Fund



alarming. For example, for fauna we can record that out of 156 species of mammals living in western Europe, including marine mammals (seals, whales, dolphins), at the present state of knowledge, 42 %, i.e. 66 species (including 31 species of bats), are considered endangered in various ways.

72 species of birds are endangered, i.e. 18 % of those nesting in Europe (400 species, not including the USSR).

13 species of amphibians are endangered in various ways (30 % of the 43 European species).

46 species of reptiles are endangered (about 45 % of the 102 European species).

Of the 190-200 species of European fresh-water fish, 103 (53 %) are endangered in various ways (8 species are probably extinct or becoming extinct since none have been found for years).

Altogether then of the 900 species of vertebrates in western Europe at the moment 300 are found to be endangered, 33 % of the existing fauna.

This dramatic situation can only get worse.

We do not possess comprehensive data on the lower orders of fauna for the western European area. Study of this fauna has been made difficult by many factors such as, e.g. the large number of species (estimated at 150 - 200 thousand) and incomplete knowledge due to the intrinsic difficulties of diagnosis and the difficult habitats in which it lives. Nevertheless some data show that this lesser fauna is also subject to ongoing destruction. This constitutes a basis factor in the balance of ecosystems and is consequently important for their protection and for human interests.

For example, the forest ants of the *formica rufa* group found with a million nests in the Italian Alps are thought to kill off during 200 days of active life a year 14 million kilograms of insects many of them harmful to the forests, and in the entire Eurasian zone 700 thousand tonnes a year.

Pollinating insects, mainly bees, fertilise 80 % of the plants cultivated by man and make them productive. 85 % of the 250 thousand species of Angiospermae in the world (i.e. those that produce flowers and fruit) depend upon insect pollinators for their fertilisation.

In our climes where 50 % of food is derived from vegetable products, 50 % of this and 50 % of the food of domestic livestock depends directly upon insects and other pollinating animals. Upon them, then, depends 33 % of our vegetable and protein diet. Mankind is therefore dependent upon the existence and completeness of the invertebrate fauna.

No less worrying is the state of the European fauna which (excluding the USSR) embraces 11,000 species: 22 % (i.e. 2,375 species) are variously endangered.

In central and northern Europe 31 million hectares of forest have been damaged by atmospheric pollution, but even in the Mediterranean areas forest mortality is to be found. Along with the loss of the forest goes the whole dependent ecosystem which is changed or destroyed.

From ecological ruin to reconstruction

In looking for the causes of today's state of ecological imbalance some have sought an explanation in the Judaeo-Christian religion, which appears to view man as the master who by divine command is to have control of the earth.

This critique does not take account of the fact that, long before the advent of the



Christian religion, vast tracts of land under the influence of other religions in Asia have in fact been made desert and that contemporaneously with Christianity this ruination goes on even today in every other part of the world. The Sahara, once a richly-watered earthly paradise covered by forests and populated by animals, was reduced to infertile sand by man's improvident exploitation thousands of years before our time. Man has been ever thus, everywhere, regardless of civilisation, politics, philosophy or religion. Only a few peoples have been saved and will be saved, unless we commit the crime of destroying them or forcing them against their will to accept our outlook and barbaric culture of forced labour and intolerance: the African pygmies, the Amerindians of the Amazon and the Papuans of New Guinea. On behalf of these voiceless peoples who still live in harmony with their environment we must raise our voices for their survival in face of the threat of extinction posed by our intrusion into their environment.

The Christian finds in scripture the inspiration for a sane ecological comportment. In this faith and science agree.

According to the Bible (Genesis 1,26) God said: "Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth." And to man whom he had just created he said (Genesis 1,28): "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth." Then God said (Genesis 1,29.30): "See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth I give all the foliage of plants for food." And so it came to pass; this was the sixth day.

But it is a long way from these words to interpreting them in such a way as to justify man as master without responsibility; instead the agreement has been turned upside-down. In fact if man has to live off creation, as God bids him, he neither can nor may destroy it, because he would be destroying himself. In order to survive he has to coexist with nature, and so has the obligation and responsibility for keeping a balanced relationship. Francis of Assisi understood that and acted upon it. The Buddha and then Muhammad and Gandhi preached it in vain.

After the flood God said to Noah and his sons (Genesis 9,8-11): "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again."

See then how in the words of Genesis God confirms his desire that all living beings may continue to people the earth alongside mankind. Not man the irresponsible master of nature, who is justified though he destroys all living beings: that would be indeed to fly in the face of God's will as it is found in the words of scripture. But that is just what we are now doing.

It follows that a Christian must make a covenant with creation just as God did with every living being, must save it from destruction and prevent the extinction of species, because, if he does not do so, he will encompass his own disappearance, despite of God's word. "Wait before you do any damage on land or at sea or to the trees" (Revelation 7,3).



THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF PREACHING IN VAIN

"If in a wise man's dwelling there is precious treasure and oil, the fool will gobble it up."

Solomon, Proverbs 21,20 (10 Cent. B.C.)

"The forest is an organism of boundless gentleness and kindness which asks nothing for its sustenance but generously lavishes the produce of its vital activity; it affords protection to all, even giving shelter to the lumberjack who destroys it."

Buddha (6 Cent. B.C.)

"There is no species of animals on earth, nor of birds that fly with their own wings, that do not form communities like yourselves."

Muhammad, Koran VI,38 (7 Cent. A.D.)

"It is arrogant conceit to claim that human beings are the lords and masters of the lower creation. On the contrary, being endowed with more things in life they should be the guardians of the lower animal kingdom."

Gandhi (20 Cent. A.D.)

So from the distant, historical biblical eras, from ancient times up to our own days, men of all faiths have been warned not to dissipate nature's goods but to keep the world well looked after and in good working order and to respect all creatures, animals and plants.

But alas! "Fools spurn wisdom and discipline." (Solomon, Proverbs 1,7)

Pessimists or optimists?

Which can we be, pessimists or optimists?

Pessimists unless we resolve to keep our heads and give up destructive activities, unless we resolve to repair the damage done to planet Earth and to get its ecological recovery under way. But can we do it?

Optimists because the answer is a firm yes: we shall be able as long as world politics realises the need to do it. We shall be able because the foundations for doing it are there: science has done its part, technology has the answers to hand, the economy has the means to do it, and the assessment of mankind's interest and priorities for action is obvious. The ecologists preach, but they have only the force of reason.

It is politics that has to create the conditions whereby ecological principles may be put into effect, and it is reassuring to note that it is in the rarely heard words of an Italian politician that we find proclaimed the need to turn over a new leaf in mankind's total behaviour towards the world:

"Today, the well-founded alarms of scientists challenge us to work out a global strategy for survival. In order to put such a global strategy for survival into effect the United Nations Organisation must, by itself, take full cognisance of the change in the nature and source of the dangers that threaten mankind and make the appropriate decisions



Three strategies are necessary: a 'global strategy for peace', a 'global strategy for progress' and a 'global strategy for survival'. In order to put this threefold strategy into effect a fundamental change in countries' attitude towards the [U.N.] Organisation is necessary" (A. Fanfani, 1975).

It would need an ENVIRONMENT UNO with the formal aim of providing for the sensible ecological management of Earth and its upkeep for the survival of mankind, but the worldwide political will for the protection and ecological reconstruction of planet Earth is still lacking today. Existing organisations, whether technological or combined technological and political, are unsuited for operating decisively on the world scale since decisions on a world scale belong to a political body. But UNO, as it is, is concerned, constitutionally and traditionally, with other matters.

People would certainly welcome with enthusiasm an institution endowed with the statutory political power to provide on a world scale for the ecological protection and reconstruction of the planet: realisation of the planet's dramatic state does in fact exist. We have to ask ourselves whether people would be capable of working for this. The answer is certainly affirmative. One can think of the behaviour of those populations that were stricken by the disaster of the last world war: from the ruins they rebuilt nations, and life was resumed with a rapidity which, to judge by the present, beggars belief. These are values perennially present and available in people; it is a question of using them once more to rebuild the ecological ruins we have created in the whole world. But who is to revive these latent energies? Only a political resolve which is aware that these positive energies are there and available in humanity can achieve it. A sign of these energies and of their availability for works of reconstruction, albeit only in the cultural field: when UNESCO launched a worldwide campaign to save the Egyptian temples at Abu Simbel from submersion by the rising Lake Nasser in Egypt, the financial wherewithal was assembled, plans and technical resources were got ready, men ready to work in an infernal climate were found, and, to cut a long story short, the miracle happened: the sense of the cultural duty to save the temples and the work ethic provided the impulse for them to cut the mountain containing the temples into blocks and lift them 70 metres above water-level to rebuild and save the wonderful architectural complex.

Another sign of people's capability can be seen in the field of sensible ecological land management to meet the needs of human life: since the twelfth century the huge operation has been going on of transforming the forest in the plain of the River Po - from the western Alps to the Adriatic Sea - into productive agricultural land wonderfully balanced from the point of view of ecology and of providing food for people. A productive ecological transformation that has lasted eight hundred years (but one in which technology is now shifting the balance).

We have looked at two cases, two examples that show hope already justified: it depends on what we do. Ecology goes along with and assists the economy and the requirements of a balanced human development in a long-term perspective. It requires us to sacrifice the insane destructive principle, "pull up the ladder; I'm all right". [Lit. "all for us at once, others will pay later". - Trans.]

In conclusion we have to recognise that not all man's works are evil, that all is not lost and that to have taken to heart the mistakes made should help us to build a future that lets us avoid and correct them.

Anyway we can always hope and dream for the best with the will to bring it about, even if today it can look like a Utopia. But today's Utopia can be tomorrow's reality. There is some truth in the Brazilian proverb: "When I dream, it is a dream, but when we are many dreaming the same thing, it can be the start of tomorrow's reality."



Will this come to pass? We should all be working so that it may Culture, economics, politics, faith together for an ecology fit for human beings.

We are passing through a confused and confusing phase in regard to the meaning of man, his moral values, rights and duties, role and prospects; we are in the process of discovering the mistakes we have made and are making, but we also have the power to mend our ways. In this process it is becoming ever more urgent to find good, humanitarian solutions. Set in the wrong environment man is restless. When environmental ruin hits whole peoples and nations, peace itself is in peril. So we need to hurry up and find and establish a sober balance among the need for development, environment, technology and the quality and sacral character of life.

Ecology is an instrument of peace; our best ally, the most human of the sciences because it teaches us how to use the world and how to regulate our presence in the world in order to ensure survival and improve the quality of life.

We have attained and made available to a small part of the human race extraordinary achievements in improving life. The remaining greater part of humanity is still waiting to share in it.

In various ways these same activities of ours run the risk not only of causing us to lose the benefits already achieved but even of robbing us of our great expectations. Here we have to be careful; we have to accept some necessary limitations and think of the future. It seems that there is a tendency to give more and more value to what is contingent, that to successes big or little we attribute values that they really do not possess when looked at in a wider perspective, one open to the future towards which we have a responsibility for whether our descendants will be advantaged or damaged, just as we were bettered or damaged by our forefathers' behaviour.

We hear it stated with dogmatic presumption that the progress of science should recognise no limits and that no limits should be set to her daughter, technology.

It is with apprehension that I think about the seriousness of these affirmations which allow of mirages that are attractive but full of concrete dangers and about the suggestion that they can be put forward in the name of that science which, if misdirected and misused, might be used to justify anything.

It is not science we should fear, but man who does scientific research and uses its results. Indeed, by going on, as has been the case until now, often haphazardly and contrary to all true scientific information, we have begotten many misfortunes and are putting all at risk. To try to put things right we should reconsider many of our philosophical and ethical positions and see whether it is not right to declare that in many cases it is necessary to subordinate even scientific research and technology to an ethic of life.

We need a bioethic that is valid in this way and for these aims. We are all conscious of the fact. We must also think out a cosmoethic because we are already upsetting the universe.

The task of science is to discover the phenomena of nature and explain them convincingly. The task of ethics is to tell us how to come to terms with them and live with them.

We need certainties such as only science, a straightforward ethic, national laws and international treaties can give us. But moralists and legislators taken by surprise by the rapid advances in scientific research, the applications of technology and moral and social awareness have not been able to see ahead and we are therefore in a moral and legal vacuum. That begets painful uncertainty, a vague but very widespread feeling of



bewilderment and uneasiness and the need for firm grounds for belief. So it is proper that the view is being affirmed by most of those responsible that, at least in certain new delicate and risky cases, it is desirable that the need for a preeminence of ethics will be established.

Justice and peace are basic longings of all peoples, as is the hope to live in a better environment. Christians, those one billion 500 million men and women who represent the largest group of people united by a common spiritual principle, can join those of every other faith in a planned global strategy for the improvement of human life in accordance with the hopes and expectations of all mankind.

It is a duty for all, Christians and men of good will of all faiths, to make their own contribution to the emergence of a new mentality and a more correct behaviour in the use of nature, the environment and the energies and resources at their disposal.

The position that will be adopted by the European bishops and faithful may be seen as a crucial inspiration for all the Christians in the world, a reason, uniting us with peoples of other faiths, for marching side by side with them and going forward all together. We need it on a world scale.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

