

# Option for the Poor

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## INTRODUCTION

Supporting the poor and vulnerable is a key principle in Catholic Social Teaching, following the compassion Jesus showed towards people who were socially excluded. The needs of these most vulnerable members of society - overseas and at home - must be considered ahead of individual selfish interests. The rights of future generations to have the means to live in dignity and peace should be considered as well.

We hear regular news of disasters or hardships related to extreme weather and the rising numbers of environmental refugees. We notice that conflict is often related to tensions over natural resources. Earth systems and limits have not been respected, and the poorest people in the poorest countries are facing the worst repercussions. Vulnerable groups in Britain too - particularly those living in floodplains and in low-lying coastal areas - are facing hardship because of climate change.

How should we respond as individuals and as church communities? Perhaps this time we live in is what Catholic environmentalist Mary Colwell calls “a moment of grace” when we have an opportunity to face the problems positively and learn to live more simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

## Experience

Go round the group, eliciting feedback on study and action since the last meeting. Display and share the media clippings.

- *What have you learnt from them?*

## Feedback on Reading Sheets 1 and 2.

Identify justice campaigns you have been involved with in the past – such a **Poverty History, Jubilee 2000, Unearth Justice** and **Living Ghosts**.

- *What environmental aspects have there been to them?*

*CAFOD 'Unearth Justice' campaigners.*



*Tens of thousands of Christians were involved in the 'Make Poverty History' rally in Edinburgh on 2nd July 2005. It was attended by Catholic Cardinals Cormac Murphy O'Connor and Keith O'Brien.*

## Analysis

### Look at Appendix 4: Victims of climate change

- *Why are poor and vulnerable people everywhere suffering the worst impacts?*
- *How do you understand climate change in the light of God's command for us to love our neighbours as ourselves?*
- *In what ways do we use a lot more energy than people did 100 years ago?*
- *How far have we gone beyond simply meeting our needs?*

In November 2007, the World Development Movement released figures showing that flights from the proposed third runway at Heathrow Airport will release as much carbon as Kenya's total carbon emissions every year.

- Why is climate change a justice issue?

### Look at Appendix 5: Responses from the South

- *How far do you agree or disagree with the comments made?*
- *How can we connect our lifestyles and actions more positively with people in the South and in our own society threatened by climate change?*

- *What examples do you know of where responses have already been made?*

In 2001, Pope John Paul II called for an "ecological conversion" of the world's Catholics.

- *What might this mean?*

(See his full 2001 address at [http://conservation.catholic.org/john\\_paul\\_ii.htm](http://conservation.catholic.org/john_paul_ii.htm))

### Feedback from Reading Sheets 3 and 4.

## Theological Reflection

### Look at Reflection and Action Sheet 2.

- Spend 30 minutes reading and reflecting, using the questions given as a guide.

## Action

Members of the group undertake to read and list the main points in Reading Sheets 5, 6 and 7 in preparation for the next meeting.

### Look at the ideas and resources listed on Reflection and Action Sheet 2.



*Christian Ecology Link members and their children joined a climate camp protest against the proposed third runway at Heathrow Airport in August 2007.*



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## Appendix 4: Victims of climate change

### EXTREME WEATHER

“No one could sleep because of the pressure of the wind on the walls and roofs. In a lot of houses the water came in without mercy, making that the longest dawn of history. There was nothing to do, but wait for it to end. When the first lights of the day came, I went out in the street, and the city looked like a battlefield.”

*Saulo Machado, after Hurricane Catarina, struck Brazil on 28th March 2004*

### DROUGHT

“No-one is going to survive out here, unless they bring water. I am 70 years old now, and the temperatures are getting hotter and hotter as the years pass by. We cut down trees so we can make some money from charcoal, but those areas that we cut are turning to desert.”

*Habiba Hassan, Central Somalia*

### FOOD PRODUCTION

“The rain does not come at the right time. People start cultivating and there is no rain. Then it comes after a month, so the seeds die and again we have to plant.”

*Latika Sagar, clo The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief*

### MIGRATION

“The great instability in the seasons, and therefore unstable agricultural production, is causing increased migration to the United States.”

*From Up in Smoke: Latin America and the Caribbean*

### HEALTH

“Mosquitoes are spreading into highland areas that were historically free from malaria. There is also an increase in water-borne diseases.”

*Tadesse Dadi, Ethiopia*

*Above quotes taken from the Up in Smoke series of reports, produced by the Working Group on Climate Change and Development. See [www.upinsmokecoalition.org](http://www.upinsmokecoalition.org).*

### In Europe . . .

#### HEATWAVES

At least 11,000 French citizens – most of them elderly - died in France’s record-breaking heatwave of August 2003.

#### FLOODING

Britain is predicted to have wetter weather in the future due to climate change. Greater number and severity of floods is expected. When exceptional floods in July 2007 caused severe flooding in Gloucester, parishes assisted those affected.



John Torr



*Fr Keith Miles, a Parish Priest in Gloucester, distributes bottled water to a nursing home after floods caused mains water supply to be disrupted in July 2007.*

**“Forget about making poverty history. Climate change will make poverty permanent.”** *Nazmul Chowdhury*

## Appendix 5: Responses from the South

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“The richest countries of the world, as represented by the G8, have a responsibility to help the poorest. This is not just charity, but a moral obligation. The world’s wealthiest countries have emitted more than their fair share of greenhouse gases. Resultant floods, droughts and other climate change impacts continue to fall disproportionately on the world’s poorest people and countries, many of which are in Africa. Rich countries must therefore help poorer countries in two ways. They must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions so that the effects of climate change suffered by Africa’s poor do not get worse. They also have an obligation to help poor countries adapt to the negative impacts of climate change, which cannot be avoided.”

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

“We have mobilised the country to march on the capital, to demand a logging ban. We are doing what the state is not; we are protecting forest and addressing the issue of climate change. People in other countries can research what is going on, and make the destruction and corruption internationally known. They can put conditions on aid and loans to the government, and create a timber certification law. They can also raise awareness so that people cannot enjoy, say, furniture or other products when they know that this enjoyment and these benefits are causing deprivation and misery among the Honduran people.”

*Fr Andres Tamayo, Director of the Environmental Movement of Olancho in Honduras*

“Industrial biofuels are being promoted as a source of renewable energy and as a means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, converting crops like soya, corn and palm oil into liquid fuels can actually aggravate climate chaos and the CO<sub>2</sub>

burden. Deforestation caused by expanding soya plantations and palm oil plantations is leading to increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. By 2022, biofuel plantations could destroy 98 percent of Indonesia’s rainforests.”

*Vandana Shiva, Indian environmentalist*

“One of the biggest challenges we are facing in our development work is increasing occurrence of natural disaster. What we have achieved over many years is being destroyed by storms and washed away by floods.”

*Kim Rattana, Caritas Cambodia*

**In September 2007, the Archdiocese of Manila became the first diocese in the Philippines to launch a programme of study and action to address climate change. “We are very concerned about the repercussions on our country,” said Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales. A one-metre rise in sea level in the Philippines would affect 64 out of the country’s 81 provinces, and the Manila Bay area faces severe flooding from sea level rise. An eco-desk is being set up in every parish in the Archdiocese.**



*Fr Sean McDonagh, an Irish eco-theologian of the Columban Missionary Society, spoke at the Archdiocese of Manila climate change conference in September 2007.*



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## Reflection and Action Sheet 2

### Reflection

The "economic" concept itself, linked to the word "development", has entered into crisis. In fact there is a better understanding today that the mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realisation of human happiness. Nor, in consequence, does the availability of the many real benefits provided in recent times by science and technology, including the computer sciences, bring freedom from every form of slavery. On the contrary, the experience of recent years shows that unless all the considerable body of resources and potential at humanity's disposal is guided by a moral understanding and by an orientation towards the true good of the human race, it easily turns against humanity to oppress.

A disconcerting conclusion about the most recent period should serve to enlighten us: side-by-side with the miseries of underdevelopment, themselves.

#### Common sayings in Ghanaian Culture:

***When the last tree dies,  
the last person dies.***

***The environment is your friend;  
respect her and keep her clean.***

***Water is life;  
do not contaminate or waste.***

***Short cuts are dangerous; in the quest  
for short-term results or returns we  
often ruin prized assets.***

unacceptable, we find ourselves up against a form of superdevelopment, equally inadmissible, because like the former it is contrary to what is good and to true happiness. This superdevelopment, which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups, easily makes people slaves of "possession" and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better. This is the so-called civilisation of "consumption" or "consumerism" which involves so much "throwing-away" and "waste". An object already owned but now superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer.

### **Chapter 28, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, 1988**

#### Questions:

- *What challenges does this text present to us? How far would you challenge excess at Christmastime?*
- *What stories and teachings in the life of Jesus suggest that he would like his followers to live more lightly on the Earth and to be responsive to the needs of the vulnerable? Jesus' story, 'Consider the lilies in the field', is but one of many teachings to lead us to deepen our understanding of God's love for us through the gift of Creation.*
- *How far is the Church's concern for poor people and for the natural world manifest in your parish?*

**Action**

Find out about CAFOD'S Climate Campaign at [www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange](http://www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange). See how vulnerable communities in the South are tackling climate change.

How healthy is your lifestyle for the planet? Play the **Planet Pulse** online game - <http://bigdeal.cafod.org.uk/action/liveit/planet-pulse>

The New Economics Foundation has been looking into the notion of 'living simply so that others may simply live' - and making the link with increased happiness and well-being. See [http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/hottopics\\_well-being.aspx](http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/hottopics_well-being.aspx)

Try Tearfund's **Climate Change Pentathlon**

<http://youth.tearfund.org/campaigning/climate+change/climate+change+pentathlon.htm>

**Books:**

*How Many Light Bulbs Does It Take To Change A Christian?*  
*A Pocket Guide to Shrinking Your Ecological Footprint* by Claire Foster and David Shreeve.

Church House Publishing,  
ISBN 978-071514127-4 (2007)

*Sharing God's Planet: A Christian Vision for a Sustainable Future* by Claire Foster;  
Foreward by the Archbishop of Canterbury,  
Dr Rowan Williams.

Church House Publishing,  
ISBN 0-7151-4068-X (2005)

*Christianity, Climate Change & Sustainable Living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White.  
SPCK,

ISBN 978-0-281-05833-4 (2007)

**Downloads:**

*Livesimply* comment: *Live Simply, Let others live* by Edward P. Echlin from the Progressio website  
[http://www.progressio.org.uk/shared\\_asp\\_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=93972](http://www.progressio.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=93972)

*Global Warming, Climate Change and Sustainability: Challenge to Scientists, Policymakers and Christians* by Sir John Houghton.  
[http://www.jri.org.uk/brief/Briefing14\\_print.pdf](http://www.jri.org.uk/brief/Briefing14_print.pdf)  
and *Big Science, Big God: Science and Faith in a strong embrace* by Sir John Houghton.  
<http://www.jri.org.uk/brief/Briefing15-print.pdf>

*Creed and Creation – a simple guidebook for running a greener church* by Gillian Straine and Nathan Oxley. Aldgate Press.  
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/links/forcreedandcreation280207.pdf>

**Lifestyle tips:**

Reconnect with the natural world.

- Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth. Use parks and allotments.
- Include the Earth in church liturgies.
- Plant baptismal trees.
- Support groups seeking to safeguard the local environment and nature conservation.
- Take an interest in particular groups of organisms, such as wild flowers, bees, or birds.

Buy energy efficient appliances, including light bulbs. When replacing appliances, go for A-rated products and recycle defunct appliances. Don't boil a whole kettle of water for just one cup of tea.

If you have a garden, use vegetable waste and biodegradable waste from the kitchen for compost instead of just throwing the waste away. Invest in a wormery or compost bin.



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## Reading Sheet 5: Catholic Earthcare Australia

The following extracts are from *Climate Change: Our Responsibility to Sustain God's Earth*, a position paper of the Australian Catholic bishops. It was presented by Bishop Christopher Toohy at Catholic Earthcare Australia's Climate Change Conference in November 2005.

The joys and hopes, the pains and anxieties of all people of this age are intimately linked with human history and Earth's cycles. As pastors of more than a quarter of the Australian population, we urge Catholics as a matter of conscience to cooperate in facing global warming as one of the major issues of our time and take roles of responsibility proper to them. Several times we have addressed environmental issues and recently called for ecological conversion. We now urge Catholics as an essential part of their faith commitment to respond with sound judgments and resolute action to the reality of climate change.

A wise response will address both the human causes of accelerated global warming and develop a strategy to manage the future development of our society. Given the gravity of the problem, detailed and resolute responses need to be both swift and radical.

We offer the hand of cooperation to all spiritual and secular leaders in Australia in an act of solidarity, knowing that Earth is our common home. In a spirit of dialogue, we want to learn from informed scientists and encourage the efforts of our church communities in addressing the causes, effects and solutions regarding climate change. We choose the path of dialogue, solidarity and cooperation that helps all sectors of the community go beyond sectarian interests, secular and religious differences.

The web of life on Earth is under threat from accelerated climate change. That web compares to a seamless garment and it needs the application of a consistent ethic to protect

it; one that considers life now and in the future, and ranges from protection of the unborn child to cherishing the diversity of species. Life is one, and human well-being is, at its base, interwoven with all life on Earth and the rhythm of its systems. The suffering of any one part means that all creation groans, and rapid global climate change dramatically displays that suffering.

We are indebted to the scientists, environmental activists, rural people, foresters, fisher people, writers, artists, photographers, educators, business people, government officials, society leaders and all who have helped humanity become aware of the dangers of climate change and create human choices for an alternative future. Scientists alerted us to the danger of climate change and we are to be grateful rather than fearful. Reports of the International Panel on Climate Change, a body of over 2000 international scientists, and other credible groups explain the problem and point to solutions.

We need to keep in mind the Precautionary Principle: *Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing remedial measures.* Its application in science, law and politics is a minimal requirement if wisdom and prudence are our values.

The amount of greenhouse gases humans are releasing into the atmosphere exceeds the absorption capacity of the ocean and land. We now face an unavoidable rapid change in global climate and all the consequences that will bring. If we act now, the changes can be slowed and ultimately halted and harm can still be minimised.

Of overarching importance, modern human society has developed on the assumption that the global climate is constant. Science has demonstrated this assumption is false, even in the absence of human-forced climate change.

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Much of our infrastructure – dam design and engineering; coastal works; irrigation networks and cropping systems – is locked into current patterns of rainfall and temperature and, therefore, may prove inappropriate under a future climate regime. The human and economic costs of human-induced climate change will be immense. The longer we delay in addressing the problems the more costly will be the solutions.

A critical part of the solution lies in the continuing development of alternative sources of energy that can substitute for greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuels. While a mentality of "technological fixes" may be grasped by some as an escape from the reality of global warming, nevertheless, there is a real need for scientific research into technologies which reduce greenhouse gases through increased efficiencies and the search for alternatives.

### **Our responsibility to the early victims of climate change**

The richer nations, Australia included, have a responsibility to help the poor developing nations deal with climate change because these nations will suffer most severely. More than periodic emergency relief, they need long-term structural help - debt relief, equitable trade policies and technological exchange.

Poorer nations are to be helped take their place in the human family of nations as ecologically responsible partners. As one of the world's biggest emitters, per capita, of greenhouse gases, Australians have a particular duty to recognise the fact that they are directly implicated in the causes of atmospheric pollution which is harming the many innocent peoples of the Pacific region. Ironically, the ecological footprint of the victims is considerably lighter than our own.

Global climate change has already had an impact in this region and the number of environmental refugees increases yearly. Australian citizens need to be informed. They need to debate how best to relocate these people. Of immediate concern are environmental refugees coming from our

Pacific neighbours. Their representatives have already visited our shores to alert us to their concerns and for our help.

### **God has not abandoned the world**

As a matter of justice and out of a pastoral concern, we bishops address ourselves to the Catholic communities and ask them to lead by example, to see care for our planet Earth as a 'vocation'. We encourage all Catholics to help our nation by developing an ecological ethic and to face up to the radical changes required for tackling global climate change. Our nation, in turn, may become an example to other nations, both for the wise choices it takes internally and the generous spirit it shows to developing nations. God is not mean, nor should we be.

*Full text can be found at:*

*[www.catholicearthcareoz.net/POSITION\\_PAPER.html](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net/POSITION_PAPER.html)*

*Catholic Earthcare Australia was established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in May 2002. It is mandated, through the activities of research, education, advocacy and outreach to give leadership in responding to Pope John Paul II's call for an "ecological conversion" of the world's Catholics.*



*Bishop Christopher Toohy, Chair of Catholic Earthcare Australia, met with CAFOD Director Chris Bain (left) when he visited Britain in September 2007 to launch the 'Sound of Many Waters' initiative at Clifton Cathedral. See [www.soundofmanywaters.org](http://www.soundofmanywaters.org)*



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## **Reading Sheet 6: The ambiguity of the economic achievement**

The wild facts of today and their conflict with standard economic theory both have a well-known history. During the past two centuries, the economy has transformed the character of the planet and especially of human life. It has done so chiefly by industrialisation. Industry has vastly increased the productivity of workers, so vastly that in spite of the great population increases in industrialised nations, the goods and services available to each have increased still more. The standard of living has soared from bare subsistence to affluence for most people in the North Atlantic nations and Japan. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea share in this prosperity. These are immense accomplishments.

During the same period, the study of economy has matured, approaching the status of a science. Economics alone among the social studies is sometimes accorded that label by natural scientists. A Nobel prize is given in economics as in physics and biology. Other students of human society often envy and emulate the economists, much as economists emulate physicists.

Public policy has been deeply affected by the ideas and proposals of economists. Without this help the economy could not have grown to anything like the extent it has. Economists have reason to believe that if politicians and government bureaucrats would pay closer attention to their arguments, the purposes of governments could be more effectively realised. Again and again, they are able to show the waste of resources that follows from regulatory measures that ignore market principles. Even Eastern European economists are now arguing for greater reliance on the market, for reasons similar to those given by their Western counterparts.

But the industrial economy has consequences for the greater economy of life. Psychologists have been disturbed by what is happening to individuals. In 1937, Karen Horney cited the pressures on Americans created by their industrial, competitive, materialistic society. She noted that three basic value conflicts had arisen: “aggressiveness grown so pronounced that it could no longer be reconciled with Christian brotherhood; desire for material goods so vigorously stimulated that it can never be satisfied, and expectations of untrammelled freedom soaring so high that they cannot be squared with the multitudes of restrictions and responsibilities that confine us all”.

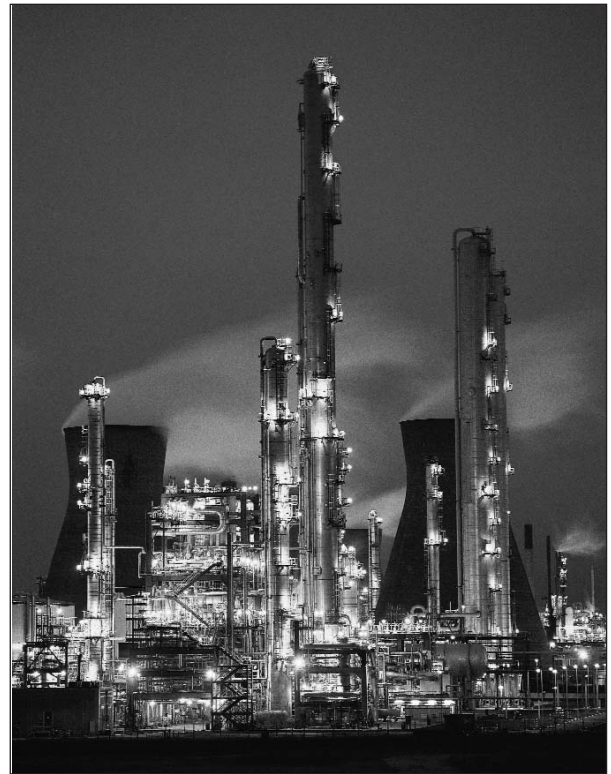
In the 1970s, Walter Weisskopf engaged in an extensive study of what the economy has done to human beings morally and existentially. He sees that it has worked against objective judgments of value and encouraged moral relativism. It has also emphasised a few aspects of human existence at the expense of others, and thus caused alienation.



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Other critics have pointed out the negative social effects of economic progress. In moving words, Karl Polanyi, a great economic historian, described the social developments associated with the rise of the market as the “Satanic Mill”. The opening sentence of his 1944 work states: “At the heart of the industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century there was an almost miraculous improvement in the tools of production, which was accomplished by a catastrophic dislocation of the lives of the common people”. Joseph Schumpeter was equally troubled. He saw economic thought as part of the utilitarian philosophy that dominated the nineteenth century. “This system of ideas, developed in the eighteenth century, recognises no other regulatory principle than that of individual egoism..... The essential fact is that, whether as cause or consequence, the philosophy expresses only too well the spirit of social irresponsibility which characterised the passion, and the secular, or rather secularised state in the nineteenth century. And in the midst of moral confusion, economic success serves only to render still more serious the social and political situation which is the natural result of a century of economic liberalism” (Schumpeter 1975).

Recently, it has been ecologists especially, and those whom they have aroused, who have turned on the economy as the great villain. They see that the growth of the economy has meant the exponential increase of raw material inputs from the environment and waste outputs into the environment, and they see that little attention has been paid by economists either to the exhaustion of resources or to pollution. They complain that economists have not only ignored the source of inputs and the disposition of outputs, but also they have encouraged the maximisation of both, whereas living lightly in the world requires that throughput should be kept to a minimum sufficient to meet human needs.



Most economists have ignored these criticisms. They are convinced that the great majority of people are far more interested in the economic goods - whose production economists have encouraged - than in any psychological or environmental losses. They suspect that those who speak of the suffering accompanying industrialisation exaggerate. They show that the industrialising nations grew rapidly in wealth, a wealth which most shared, albeit unevenly.

And they are convinced that those who worry about the future of the environment underestimate the capacity of a prosperous economy to take care of that too. Where there is capital and ingenuity there will be technological breakthroughs. Now that the environment is a concern, inventive genius will be directed to solving these new challenges.

*From the Introduction to: **For the Common Good: Redirecting the economy towards community, the environment and a sustainable future** by Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb Jr.*



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## Reading Sheet 7: A Theology of Creation by Sean McDonagh

A Christian theology of creation has much to learn from the attitude of respect which Jesus displayed towards the natural world. The disciples of Jesus were called upon to live lightly on the Earth: *“take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics”* (Lk 9:1-6). Jesus constantly warned about the dangers of attachment to wealth, possessions, or power. This, in many ways, is what is consuming the poor and the planet itself: *“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God”* (Mk 10:23; Lk 16:19-31; Mt 19:23-24; Lk 18:18-23). *“Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?”* (Lk 12:16-21). There is no support in the New Testament for a wasteful, throw-away consumer society which destroys the natural world.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed an intimacy and familiarity with many of God's creatures as well as the processes of nature. He was not driven by an urge to dominate and control the world of nature. Rather, he displayed an appreciative and contemplative attitude towards creation which is rooted in the Father's love for all creation: *“Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them”* (Lk 12:24). We need not be constantly fretting about acquiring more goods. God will provide for our legitimate needs: *“are you not worth more than the birds?”* (Lk 12:24).

The gospels tell us that nature played an important role in Jesus' life. At his birth, Luke tells us that, *“he was laid in a manger in a cave, because there was no place for them in the inn”* (Lk 2:7). He was first greeted by people who were *“keeping watch over their flocks by night”* (Lk 2:8). Mark tells us that the spirit drove him into the wilderness, *“and he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him”* (Mk 1:13).

The time which Jesus spent in the desert was the most formative for the messianic ministry which he was about to embrace.

In order to be fully open and receptive to his call, Jesus forsook the company of people and regularly returned to the hills to pray and commune with the Father (Mt 17:1; Mk 6:46; Mt 14:23). We know that he prayed on the hills before making important decisions such as choosing his disciples (Lk 6:12). His ministry was not carried out just in synagogues or in the temple. In Matthew's gospel, the Beatitudes and subsequent teaching were delivered on a mountain (Mt 5:1-7:29). Much of his teaching and miracles took place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Mt 13:1-52; Mk 4:35-41; Jn 21:1-14). The miracle of the loaves occurred in a *“lonely place”* (Mt 14:15-21; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13).

Many of his parables centred on sowing seed (Mt 13:4-9, 18-23; Mk 4:3-9, 13-20; Lk 8:5-8, 11-15), vines (Jn 15:1-17; Mk 12:1-12; Mt 21:33-44; Lk 20:9-19), lost sheep (Lk 15:4-7; Mt 18:12-14), or shepherds (Jn 10:1-18). His teaching is regularly interspersed with references to the lilies of the field (Lk 12:27), the birds of the air (Mt 6:26), and the lair of foxes (Lk 9:58). He was Lord of creation and could calm the waves (Mk 4:35-41; Mt 8:23-27; Lk 8:22-25), walk on the water (Mk 6:48-49), or, when food was needed, multiply the loaves (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 8:1-10; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13).

Like most great religious personalities he was a great healer. He cured the sick and restored them to health (Mt 12:9-14; Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11). He cured the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12), the man with a withered hand (Mk 3:1-6), the woman who had been stooped for many years (Lk 13:10-17), the man who had been paralysed for 38 years (Jn 5:1-15), and he restored sight to the man born blind (Jn 9:1-41). While individuals are restored to health by each act of healing, the healing ministry of Jesus was not confined to individuals.

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Each healing was a sign that challenged the social or religious prejudices of the time. They also sowed the seeds of healing within the community itself, as it was opened to the transforming power of God's compassion and graciousness.

In his preaching Jesus, identified himself with the natural elements of water (*Jn 4:13-14*), bread (*Jn 6:48*) and light (*Jn 8:12*). He presented himself as the good shepherd (*Jn 10:11; Mk 6:30-44*) who came that, "they may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn 10:10*). He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (*Mt 21:1b-5*) and in Mark's gospel (*16:15*) the disciples were called to take the gospel to all creation. Finally, in and through his death Jesus participated in the most radical way in one of the key processes of nature.

### **Christian faith in Jesus as centre of creation**

The ministry of Jesus was not confined to teaching, healing and reconciling humans and all creation with God. Paul tells us that Jesus himself is the centre of all creation:

*"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (*Col 1:15-18*).

Jesus is the word and wisdom of God who existed with God from the beginning. In the prologue of John's gospel, the birth and life of Jesus is framed within the widest context of cosmic history. He is active in bringing forth creation; through him the universe, the Earth and all life was created (*Jn 1:3-5*). All the rich unfolding of the universe, from the first moment of the fireball, through the formation of the stars, the moulding of planet Earth, the birth and flowering of life on Earth and the emergence of human beings, is centred on Christ. Hence all of these crucial moments in the emergence of the universe have a Christological dimension.

In the man Jesus, God, who was active from the beginning in bringing forth the universe, "became flesh" (*Jn 1:14*). The redemption which he accomplishes does not come by way of discarding, denigrating or abandoning the material world, but by transforming it from within. In John's gospel Jesus' incarnation is seen as an outpouring of God's love for the world: *"for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (*Jn 3:16*).

The leadership which Jesus gives in the New Testament is always a leadership of service. In the contemporary situation, Christian service must mean working for a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Only in this way can people of this and future generations experience the abundant life which Jesus promised (*Jn 10:10*).

The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the new creation (*2 Cor 5:17-19*). The writers of the New Testament are at pains to affirm the visible, bodily nature of Christ's resurrection. Through the reality of Christ's resurrection all visible created reality is touched, given a new significance, transformed and taken up into the life of the Trinity. Paul states, *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"* (*2 Cor 5:19, cf. Col 1:20*). In this text Paul is affirming that all reality is interconnected, sequentially linked over time and ultimately grounded in God.

The Preface of Easter IV in The Roman Missal echoes this belief: *"In him a new age has dawned, the long reign of sin is ended, a broken world has been renewed and man is once again made whole. The joy of the resurrection fills the whole world."*

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