

Rights and Responsibilities

INTRODUCTION

According to Catholic Social Teaching, everyone has a fundamental right to the basics for living a life of dignity – starting with food, water, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. These require justice and a healthy environment, including a stable climate. Human rights, and, increasingly, environmental rights, are being enshrined in international law and that is to be welcomed.

However, we face enormous challenges. Planet Earth is already at CO₂ concentrations that are likely to take us above 2 degrees of warming by the end of this century, or earlier. Poor countries are being hit worst for now, but, if we carry on as we are, all human society will endure devastating impacts and millions of other species face extinction.

Catholic individuals, parishes and schools are increasingly tackling structural injustice and taking their ecological responsibilities more seriously too. They are implementing a range of justice and environmental initiatives and undertaking political action. As people of faith we are today called to be good neighbours to all the world's peoples, to celebrate the splendour of God's creation, and to safeguard its integrity. The future is not simply somewhere we are going; it is something that each of us creates every day.

Experience

Feedback on action since the last meeting.

- *How have you got on with using less energy and using your LOAF?*
- *What have you found out about the Millennium Development Goals?*
- *How will climate change affect them being realised?*

Have you explored the work of some eco-theologians?

- *What do you know about the ascetic tradition in church history?*
- *How might it inspire us to undertake a deliberate downsizing – perhaps becoming witnesses against rampant consumerism?*
- *In what ways have you tried to reconnect with the natural world this week?*

Analysis

Look at Appendix 13: Operation Noah's key proposals for strong legislation

- *Why is it important to get involved in influencing legislation?*
- *How can your group become involved in the lobbying process?*
- *Who else do you think should be lobbied?*
- *What about the corporate world?*

Feedback from Reading Sheets 11 and 12.

Look at Appendix 14: Equipping prophetic witness by Mary Grey

- *How far do you think Christian communities could become prophetic communities?*

Look at Appendix 15: Eco-congregations and eco-schools

- *How important is it that parish and school communities take responsibility for healing the natural world?*

Theological Reflection

Look at Reflection and Action Sheet 5.

- *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 14, 15, 16 and 17 in preparation for the next meeting.

Look at the ideas and resources listed on Reflection and Action Sheet 5.



Appendix 13: Operation Noah's keys proposals for strong legislation

Operation Noah urges that MPs are lobbied on the need for decisive political leadership on climate change. In 2008, it wants the Climate Change Bill to be strengthened along the following lines:

1. **Cut emissions further and faster:** A 90 percent cut in emissions by 2030.
2. **Include the UK's share of emissions from international aviation and shipping.**
3. **Commit to policy consistency across all government departments:** At present the burden of policy rests with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The Department of Transport meanwhile pursues 'business as usual', building motorways and airports. The Prime Minister must pull together a government-wide cabinet committee to ensure that all departments contribute to tackling climate change
4. **Commit to cuts within the UK:** Meet our targets by cutting consumption of fossil fuels in the UK, not by buying emissions from poor countries.
5. **Give climate change science priority in decision-making:** The government's new Committee on Climate Change gives priority to business interests. The Committee's remit must be changed so that decisions on carbon budgets and cuts in emissions must be based primarily on scientific evidence rather than on business or financial vested interests.

Up to date lobbying material and template letters can be found at www.operationnoah.org.



Catholic missionaries and Justice and Peace campaigners join Ann Pettifor (left, holding banner) at London's climate rally on 8th December 2007

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

Alice Walker

Appendix 14: Equipping prophetic witness by Mary Grey

Mary Grey gave the following presentation during the 25th anniversary celebration of Christian Ecology Link in July 2007. She feels the focus of liberation theology, which addresses justice for the poor, should be widened to include the Earth.

We need an enlarged vision of prophecy, namely, developing the notion of prophetic community. We need prophetic communities, embodying the realities of the alternative lifestyle and way forward. I offer the following ten points:

1. We are responsible for the crisis – so the first thing the prophetic community does is call our culture to account.
2. Prophets see and imagine differently – they do not just denounce the status quo, but they resist it as the inevitable state of affairs. So, develop our prophetic imagination – refuse to accept what seems inevitable.
3. Prophetic communities are resistance communities. What do we resist? An economic system that seeks to preserve a way of life destructive to the earth and benefiting only the richer, fossil-fuel dependent countries.
4. Prophetic communities don't sink their hope merely in technological solutions or in short term solutions like carbon trading or carbon offsetting. They become transformed communities, changing desires and patterns of consumption and lifestyles. They look for deeper solutions.
5. Recognise the split between science and religion to the detriment of both. Religion tends to speak in

abstractions and/or to be individualistic/privatised. Science has been allowed to develop with limited ethical concerns and values.

6. Change our idea of time. Think Earth time - not time between elections, or time span of liberal capitalism, not even the time of our life-time, but generationally. Indigenous people encourage thinking in around a seven-generational span.
7. Develop the Liberation ethics focus on vulnerable people to encompass vulnerable life-forms and the life of the planet itself.
8. Cultivate deeper connections with each other, the human and non-human and with communities that are the victims of climate change. Prophetic communities rebuild and sustain broken connections. Relations between rich and poor nations need healing. Prophetic communities are where there is space to listen to the stories and to develop a compassionate response.
9. Rediscover Christian story as Earth story. What kind of theology sustains prophetic communities? I suggest belief in God's providence, the mystery of God's continuing care. Also reclaim the Wisdom traditions, where we acknowledge that we have scarcely begun to understand the wisdom embedded in creation for millions of years before we came on the scene.
10. Recognise Christ's Cross planted anew where life is vulnerable.

Appendix 15: Eco-congregations and eco-schools

CHURCHES

Eco-congregation aims to encourage churches to consider environmental issues within a Christian context and enable them to make positive contributions in their life and mission. Each church normally starts off with an environmental audit. Sample activities, which have led towards churches achieving Eco-Congregation Awards in recent years include:

Spiritual

- eco commitments made by the congregation in a service
- using home-made organic communion bread
- 'Time for Creation' over four weeks, looking at earth, air, fire, water
- green hymn written by children and set to music
- trees planted to commemorate Baptisms, First Holy Communions and Confirmations

Practical

- church members attended national climate change rally
- recycling unit in church foyer
- 25 percent cut in electricity usage
- cycle stands fitted and water heater replaced urns
- adjacent field managed sustainably
- trees planted in church yard and involvement in 'Living Churchyard' project
- used and distributed low energy light bulbs

Community

- Ecology Fayre held over two days for local people
- eco issues spreading out from congregation to local work places and community groups
- green Christmas workshops
- publicising local council recycling

- facilities and getting people to use them
- church people volunteering to conserve natural habitats in the local area
- gardening club run by church members for local primary school using an allotment in church grounds
- monthly parish walks, organised by the church but open to all

(From www.ecocongregation.org)

SCHOOLS

The Eco-Schools programme provides a simple framework to enable schools to analyse their operations and become more sustainable. Over 2,800 schools in Scotland, for example, are registered as eco-schools.

Sample activities include:

- encouraging 'waste free' packed lunches
- taking part in RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch
- litter picking sessions
- 'house' trees planted, linked to house colours.
- links made with eco-schools in Africa
- solar panels fitted to school roofs
- exchanging energy-guzzling computer games for books

(From www.eco-schools.org.uk and www.ecoschoolsscotland.org)



'Recycling rangers' in action at St. Teresa's school in Harrow, Middlesex.

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Reflection

God spoke to Noah and his sons,
 "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and
 with your descendants after you, also with
 every living creature to be found with you,
 birds, cattle, and every beast 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 a flood. There shall be no flood to
 destroy the Earth again."

God said, "Here is the sign of the Covenant
 I make between myself and you and every
 living creature with you for all generations: I
 set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a
 sign of the Covenant between me and the
 Earth. When I gather the clouds over the
 Earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I
 will recall the Covenant between myself and
 you and every living creature of every kind.
 And so the waters shall never again become
 a flood to destroy all things of flesh. When
 the bow is in the clouds I shall see it and
 call to mind the lasting Covenant between
 God and every living creature of every kind
 that is found on the Earth."

God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the
 Covenant I have established between myself
 and every living thing that is found
 on the Earth."

Genesis 9:9-17

Questions:

- *What insight does this extract give to the relationship between the Creator and the Earth?*
- *What responsibilities are placed upon human society?*

Read the following extract from the Otin Tai Declaration (see Reading Sheet 4):

We would like to say a word about God's promise to Noah not to flood the Earth again. Some Christians view this covenant as a guarantee that they are not at risk of flooding from climate change. But the sea level is rising and threatening Pacific Islands with flooding from high tides and storm surges. This is not an act of God. It is a result of human economic and consumer activities that pollute the atmosphere and lead to climate change. Most of these polluting emissions come from highly-industrialised countries. Our response to God's covenant with Noah should be to act in love towards God's creation and to reduce the pollution that is contributing to climate change. By placing us on the Earth, God has given us both the right to use it and the responsibility to do so with care.

Question:

- *As we hear every day about the melting of ice around the world and about sea-level rise, how far would you agree or disagree with the above quote?*

Feedback from Reading Sheet 13.



CAFOD

Action

Look at the short film on the Greenpeace UK website; *'The Convenient Solution'* about energy options for Britain. Perhaps bring a lap top to the next meeting and show it to the whole group. See: <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/blog/climate/the-convenient-solution-20070718>

- *Have a chat to young people you know about climate change.*
- *What do they know about it? Are they studying it at school?*
- *What do they wish to see happen?*

The issue has been taken up by the Student Christian Movement (www.movement.org.uk).

Resources:

Look at the latest Operation Noah campaigning action on www.operationnoah.org. Also, see what other local groups have been up to.

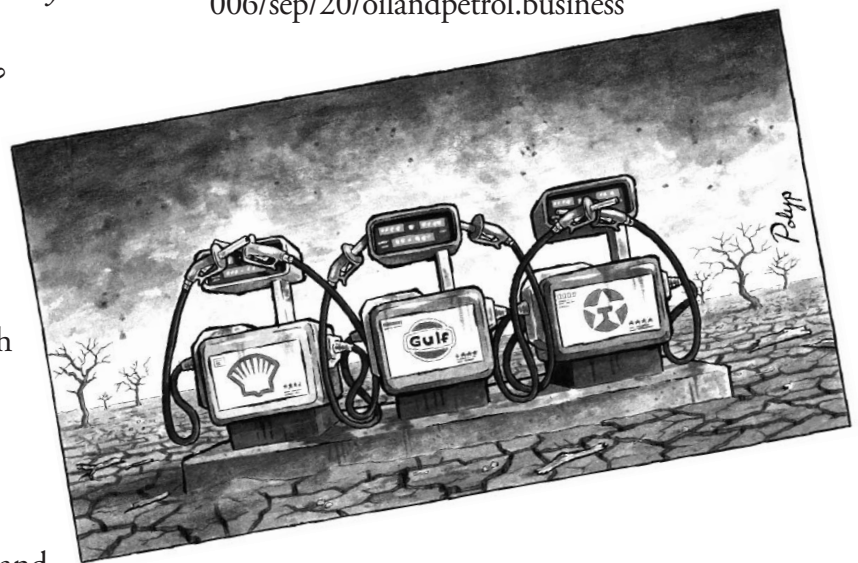
Explore the issue of organic food and air miles, by looking at the Soil Association document on www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/d39dda83e1f3c019802570ad005b4516/3a1c3d1cc0d10bff8025737f002d919b!OpenDocument

Download from the CEL website: ***Faith and Power, The Case for a Low consumption, Non-nuclear energy strategy***
<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/fp.pdf>

Energy Beyond Oil by Paul Mobbs.
Matador Publishing,
ISBN 1-905237-00-6 (2005).

Green Sisters, A Spiritual Ecology by Sarah McFarland Taylor.
Harvard University Press,
ISBN 9780674024403(2007)

In September 2006, the Royal Society, which involves Britain's leading scientists, wrote to the US oil company ExxonMobil, asking them to stop funding groups that attempt to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change. In an earlier letter to Esso, the UK arm of ExxonMobil, the Royal Society cited its own survey which found that, in 2005, ExxonMobil distributed \$2.9m to 39 groups that, the society said, misrepresented the science of climate change. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2006/sep/20/oilandpetrol.business>



See websites:

www.soundofmanywaters.org - based at Bristol's Catholic Cathedral.

www.progressio.org.uk/ecomatters
www.icount.org.uk
www.climatenetwork.org

In his 2007 Easter Sunday sermon Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Scotland said: "Only last week we saw the publication of the report on Scotland's global footprint, indicating that if all people on the earth consumed and wasted as we do here in Scotland, three planet Earths would be required to sustain us. We take and use much more than our share, and we cannot maintain this any longer."
See the whole sermon on http://www.archdiocese-edinburgh.com/documents/HOMILYFOR_EASTERSUNDAY2007.pdf

Reading Sheet 14: Peak oil by Sean McDonagh

In January 2008, crude oil prices hit a high of more than \$100 a barrel. This was a significant moment in the history of modern industrial society. A report, released in December 2007 by a German-based group called Energy-Watch, stated that global oil production peaked in 2006 and that we can expect at least a seven percent drop in oil production each year from now on. The report said: *“The world is at the beginning of a structural change of its economic system. This change will be triggered by declining fossil fuel supplies and will influence almost all aspects of our daily lives”*.

‘Peak-Oil’ does not mean that oil will run out tomorrow. What it does mean is that around 60 percent of the oil which was in the ground has already been used. Oil extraction follows a bell-curve pattern. Initially extraction costs are very low, but then, as oil becomes more difficult to access, the costs rise dramatically. For example in the 1940s, it took the energy value of one barrel of oil to produce 100 barrels of oil. By 2004, a barrel of oil used to extract oil produced only 10 barrels of oil, and the number is falling as the amount of available oil decreases and it becomes more difficult to access it. In 1999, when the UK’s oil fields in the North Sea peaked, they were producing three million barrels of oil each day. Today the figure stands at 1.6 million barrels a day. This dramatic drop in just eight years gives an idea of how quickly the effects of ‘peak-oil’ will be felt now that it is a global, and not just a UK, phenomenon. Oil production was down in 32 countries in 2006. These included Norway, Indonesia and Venezuela.

Even some oil companies admit that the era of cheap and readily available oil is over. In 2006, *Chevron*, the second largest oil company in the U.S. took out a double page advertisement in some of the world’s leading business newspapers, such as *The Financial Times*, and *The Economist*. It stated that, *“energy will be one of the defining issues of this century. One thing is clear, the era of easy oil is over”*.

The advertisement was signed by David O’Reilly, chairman of the corporation.

But, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has been telling us that there is no need to worry. They estimate is that there are 1,255 gigabarrels of oil still available. In terms of the current rate of consumption this should last for over 40 years. There are problems with these estimates. Matthew Simmons, chairman of a Wall Street energy investment company, told a conference in Edinburgh in April 2005 that; *“There is a big chance that Saudi Arabia actually peaked production in 1981. We have no reliable data. Our data collection for oil is rubbish. I suspect that if we had reliable data we would find that we are over-producing in most of our major fields and we should be throttling back.”* He went on to say that demand was pulling away from supply and that it could be catastrophic if we do not anticipate the arrival of ‘peak oil’.

With ‘peak-oil’ the supply becomes limited. Yet, the demand is increasing as growing economies like China, India, Brazil and South Africa need more energy. The demand for oil in China doubled in the past 10 years which is why Chinese economic and diplomatic activity in Africa has increased accordingly during the past decade. The Chinese want to secure as much oil as possible from diverse sources around the world. The oil corporations are slow to admit that oil is running out, but their predictions in recent years have become increasingly questionable.



Reading Sheet 15: The Call of Creation

The following is extracts from: *The Call of Creation: God's Invitation and the Human Response* by Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 2002

"True education about responsibility involves a genuine conversion in the way we think and behave" (Pope John Paul II, *World Peace Day Message*, 1990, Section 13).

Personal responsibility and conversion

Such a change of attitude calls for a fundamentally new orientation towards the purpose of material possessions. *"It is not wrong to want to live better. What is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards having rather than being and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself."* (Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Section 37). We are called to reflect on our individual roles and purposes in life and ask ourselves what we need to develop our human qualities, to grow in love of God and neighbour. In a context of environmental justice, this reflection will allow us to make serious choices - including the choice not to consume what we do not need or what is likely to harm others.

All religious traditions encourage simplicity of life, often even a certain austerity. In the Christian tradition, this wisdom derives from the Lord's own profound saying, *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be too"* (Matthew 6: 21). The desire for affluence, for more and more possessions, for almost anything new, can begin to dominate us. In a consumerist age, the pressure exerted on us by the advertising industry and by the visibility of luxury goods all around us encourages the assumption that it is our right to use the gifts of creation entirely as we wish. It will require continuing reflection about how our habits of life can all too easily become excessive and wasteful, and how they affect the well-being of others, to counter these pressures.

Individual actions may seem insignificant but together the small steps of many people can have an astonishing impact. Each person's joyful choices can be a visible example to others and give them courage to follow. Public pressure

becomes powerful when it reflects a mature moral vision that respects the rights of others to a decent life now and in the future.

Acting in partnership: other Churches and Faiths

Many different groups are to be found where people come together to support and encourage each other towards environmental justice. Amongst these are numerous church-linked programmes and activities. Christians can work together ecumenically at parish level and nationally. The Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland provides one such ecumenical forum. The network Christian Ecology Link has an active Catholic section. At a continental level there is the European Christian Environmental Network, open to all the Christian Churches. Christians can also give common witness to the value and goodness of creation with other faiths, not least Judaism and Islam which share our belief in God, the loving Creator of all that is.

Conclusion

Christians, particularly perhaps Catholic Christians, are reminded of the precious gifts of creation at each Eucharistic celebration. In the ancient prayer over the gifts of bread and wine we praise God our Creator, and remember that these material goods are given to us by God and are fashioned through the co-operation of Creator and creature: so our own daily living is to reflect our gratitude for the gifts that have been given to us. Again, in the Eucharist we join in the self-giving, the sacrifice, of Christ himself, and in this sense the offering of our own lives - time, convenience, money - for the good of others can itself be Eucharistic, a 'sacrifice' for the good of others. In the Eucharist we, the priestly people, the Church, are empowered to transform and use what we have been given. This act of transformation is a sacred act. But it is for all, to nourish all, for the life and salvation of all.

Full text at: <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/resource/GreenText/>

Reading Sheet 16: We are not alone by David Hallman

Dr. David G. Hallman, Co-ordinator of the World Council of Churches Climate Change Programme, gave this talk at the launch of Operation Noah on 9th October 2004 in Coventry Cathedral.

Thanks indeed that God is with us. We would be lost without the presence of God's Spirit. We feel not only alone but pretty overwhelmed when confronted with the immensity of problems such as human induced-climate change. The impacts of the warming of the atmosphere are affecting people all over the world – residents of low-lying Pacific Islands threatened by rising sea-levels; people in the Caribbean, Mexico and the southern U.S. devastated by major hurricanes; Europeans who suffered through the record-breaking heat waves in the summer of 2003; Africans alternating between wretched droughts and floods. Many other members of the community of life besides us human beings are similarly hurt by the mounting impacts of human-induced climate change. We can also feel pretty small when we consider the powerful forces that are propelling the economic, social and political systems forward towards ever-increasing production and consumption with their excessive energy use emitting the greenhouse gases that are leading to climate change.

The World Council of Churches and its member churches thus view human-induced climate change as having profound ethical implications – there is an international justice dimension in that it is being caused largely by the rich but it is the poor who will suffer disproportionately. There is an inter-generational justice dimension because it is being precipitated by the excessive energy consumption of this generation but it is future generations who will suffer the consequences the most.

But in this struggle where we can feel overwhelmed by the consequences and the forces causing climate change, we are assured that we are not alone. God is with us, with us in many ways. We experience the presence of God's Spirit in the quiet centres of our souls. We feel it in the abundance and beauty of the natural world.

We encounter the Spirit constantly through other peoples' care and dedication to making life better for their neighbours of both the human and non-human species. You who are involved in Operation Noah and this Rainbow Pilgrimage represent this manifestation of God's presence. The Spirit also surrounds us in the midst of our communal worship times together such as this moment.

God's assurance of the presence of the Spirit gives us the energy, courage and humility to pursue our commitment to addressing the problem of human-induced climate change. God's Spirit reassures us that our modest little efforts within our own homes and lifestyles to reduce our energy use do matter and do make a difference when complemented by similar efforts of many people around the world. One of my privileges as Coordinator of the World Council of Churches' Climate Change Programme is to work with people from every region of the world who share your dedication to making a change for the better. And like you, they are not only making such efforts in their own lifestyles but they are engaging with political and industrial leaders to pressure for change by those who have power over major societal and economic decisions.

We in the World Council of Churches build on these local, regional and national initiatives to make the presence of an ethical perspective on climate change felt within the international negotiations on climate change sponsored by the United Nations. We can all go out from here knowing that we are not alone. We have each other. We have the support of networks of people of faith around the world. We have the presence of the Spirit of God.

Please join me and repeat after me each of the following lines of this benediction:
We are not alone. **WE ARE NOT ALONE.**
We live in God's world. **WE LIVE IN GOD'S WORLD.** Thanks be to God. **THANKS BE TO GOD.**



Reading Sheet 17: Sustainable living and the ascetic tradition by Edward P. Echlin

Throughout the Bible, and in the ascetic tradition, all creatures praise God, glorifying God by being what they are and acting according to their natures. The thirteenth century Cistercian Sister Mechtilde of Hackeborn noted: "There is no reason to deny that all created beings are able to present themselves to God as living persons." And her contemporary, Dominican Sister Gertrude of Herckenheim, said: "The Song of the birds, the buzzing of the insects like a prayer, a hymn of recognition to the author of all things." Psalm 148 - sung daily by the first Franciscans - mentions people last, after the angels, and other heavenly and earthly creatures.

In Jesus, God enters our Earth community, becoming one of us, sharing our flesh, and our climate. The anonymous eleventh century Celtic writing, 'The Evernew Tongue Here Below', describes Jesus, in his humanity, as a microcosm of the cosmos: "Every material and every element and every nature which is seen in the world were all combined in the body in which Christ arose." Here within our living tradition is a fine testimony to the harmony, in Jesus, of creation, incarnation and redemption. The early Celtic ascetics lived in harmony with Earth and sea creatures, with plants and animals. St Cuthbert shared his hermitage on the Farne with eider ducks. Like St Antony, the first hermit, he gardened accompanied by the birds, and told them not to eat his vegetables.

But what is our sustainable lifestyle in practice? The Benedictine balance of prayer, work and reading is a stellar guide for local sustainability. The work should include local food production and distribution, even in cities. Town food growing can become an alternative wilderness in built areas and assists the climate. Local sustainability means we are a counter-cultural alternative to our globalised culture, which promotes long distance trade, holidays, and consumption, with massive dependence on fossil fuels. Follow the 'proximity principle'. Purchase food, drink, and clothes, produced in our own locality.

Grow some organic food. Avoid, except where necessary, air travel, and air and lorry food miles. Import only essentials (certainly not apples, potatoes, wine, and wool, for example) which northwest Europe cannot provide. Export what other regions cannot produce, as well or better, for themselves, such as alternative energy technologies, insulation expertise, medical and hydrological science, and pharmaceuticals.

The blind pursuit of endless economic 'growth' and 'progress', makes localism difficult. We are told to uproot plum, pear and apple orchards, grow chemical barley for export, and make ourselves dependent on southern Europe and California for fruit. Purchasing as near to home as possible, the proximity principle, takes time, sometimes costs more, and cannot always be arranged. We do our best. A second major obstacle from the prevalent culture is that we will be accused of disregard for 'underdeveloped' regions, which, we are told, we should encourage into globalised export/import. Nothing could be further from the truth. We encourage all people to appreciate, and use, and conserve, their local soil fertility, water, forests, wildlife, minerals, and other resources, including climate. Nearly two billion people are short of drinking and sanitation water. To export avocados and biofuels is to export water. We help them not to export their resources to us.

In conclusion, we Christians are here to sacramentalise the Earth, to join our hands and voices with other Earth creatures in glorifying our Creator. Beginning with ourselves, our family, parishes, schools, and neighbourhoods, living sustainably locally because we are God's representatives, in an Earth filled with Christ, we make explicit the Earth community's praise. We join the Earth community in a cosmic liturgy.

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