

“The earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (1 Cor 11:26)

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND ECOLOGICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

“Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportion as to be the responsibility of everyone.” *Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 1990*

“There needs to be a decisive ‘yes’ in defence of creation and a strong commitment to reverse those trends that risk creating situations of irreparable degradation.” *Pope Benedict XVI, Message to Italian Youth, September 2007*

“God is the creator of the universe, we are the guardians, the kaitiaki, of this creation which is our world.” *NZ Catholic Early Childhood Curriculum*

Introduction

Catholic schools are becoming increasingly involved with teaching and practising sustainability, and they are fortunate to be able to link this practice to Biblical statements and Church teaching. For Catholic schools, taking care of the Earth is a spiritual issue, not just a scientific, economic, or political issue.

Schools have a moral and Christian imperative to educate students to care for the earth. It is good that some Catholic schools have become enviroschools, and that others are involved in recycling, composting, permaculture and worm farms, cleaning up local areas, and are monitoring their power use and paper use. For secondary schools, the new cross-curriculum Achievement Standards in Education for Sustainability will be worth investigating. All these actions and many more are imperative if schools are to fulfil the need to offer a practical example and education to students, showing them what it means locally to adopt principles of living sustainably, and preserving our global ecology.

This paper supports the work already under way in schools by providing a list of electronic resources that may be useful for teachers and for research by secondary school students. It concentrates on Church teachings, as schools may find these a little more difficult to source than general sites on ecology and the environment. Many of the resources come from the same site, <http://conservation.catholic.org>, which is a major collection of articles about ecology and environmental justice, with an emphasis on Biblical quotations and Papal statements.

Key articles available on line

www.caritas.org.nz is a vital source for environmental issues. It contains material specifically prepared for schools, and there are a number of other significant resources on the website under ‘Advocacy and Campaigns’ and under ‘News and Resources’.

http://www.catholic.org.nz/statements/0906_environmental_issues.php contains the NZ Catholic Bishops’ September 2006 Statement on Environmental Issues

<http://conservation.catholic.org/ecologicalcrisis.htm> The message of Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1 1990. Almost twenty years ago the Pope sent out a very strong message about the widespread destruction of the environment. The Pope described Adam and Eve's story as a choice to destroy the existing harmony between nature and humans resulting in disorder through which the earth suffers, and contrasted this with the death and resurrection of Christ which is an act of reconciliation, which makes all creation new. The ecological problem today is a moral problem, arising from a lack of respect for life.

http://conservation.catholic.org/john_paul_ii.htm 'The Ecological Conversion' is the text of Pope John Paul II's General Audience Address on 17 January 2001. It covers similar themes.

http://conservation.catholic.org/pope_john_paul_ii.htm This is another section of the URL above, The Ecological Conversion. Its ten (printed) pages contain longer and shorter extracts back to 1985 from a large range of speeches by the Pope.

<http://conservation.catholic.org.nz/declaration.htm> is the Declaration on the Environment signed by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople on 10 June 2002. It invites "all men and women of good will to ponder the importance of the following ethical goals:" In summary, those goals are 1. To think of the world's children. 2. To be open to study the true values based on natural law that sustain every human culture. 3. To use science and technology constructively. 4. To be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity. 5. To acknowledge diversity of situations and responsibilities. The affluent must carry a greater burden than the poor. 6. To promote a peaceful approach to disagreements about how to live on this earth and share its resources. This is a very powerful, brief document that needs publicity. The principles might be useful for developing a school commitment to ecological conversion.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070428_sienze-sociali_en.html This letter dated 28 April 2007 was sent by Pope Benedict to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on its 13th plenary session. It links charity and justice to the environment and sustainable development, and reflects on the Adam and Eve story as one about being prepared to live within limits

Websites that provide a range of Biblical quotations that could be of use when creating reflections on environmental themes:

http://conservation.catholic.org/Bible_1.htm (New Testament)

http://conservation.catholic.org/bible_2.htm (Old Testament)

Other resources

A Selection of Church Statements on Environmental and Ecological Issues is a hard copy document available from the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Dunedin

Pleroma Christian Supplies has a useful children's book *Poems and Prayers for a Better World*. Email management@pleroma.org.nz.

Quotable Extracts from Papal statements over the last 40 years

(Thanks to Lisa Beech, Caritas, who prepared this material for Social Justice week 2006.)

“God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings.” (note the ‘all’) (*Gaudium et Spes* Vatican II, 1965)

“Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it.” (Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 1971)

“Our generation must energetically accept the challenge ... to prepare a hospitable earth for future generations.” (Pope Paul VI, *Address to the conference on human environment*, 1972)

“It was the Creator’s will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble ‘master’ and guardian’ and not as a heedless ‘exploiter’ or ‘destroyer’.” (Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979)

“Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past.” (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990)

“We have been making decisions, taking actions and assigning values that are leading us away from the world as it should be, away from the design of God for creation.” (*Joint Declaration* of Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, 2002)

“The earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily at Inaugural Mass*, 2005)

You are invited to send examples of good practice to NZCEO, for publication.

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