

## **The Human Family, a Community of Peace by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI**

The family needs a home, a fit environment in which to develop its proper relationships. For the human family, this home is the Earth, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion. Human beings, obviously, are of supreme worth vis-à-vis creation as a whole. Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit toward nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves.

Nor must we overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all. Humanity today is rightly concerned about the ecological balance of tomorrow. It is important for assessments in this regard to be carried out prudently, in dialogue with experts and people of wisdom, uninhibited by ideological pressure to draw hasty conclusions, and above all with the aim of reaching agreement on a model of sustainable development capable of ensuring the well-being of all while respecting environmental balances. If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations. Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening the covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and toward whom we are journeying.

In this regard, it is essential to “sense” that the Earth is “our common home” and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the part of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions. Further international agencies may need to be established in order to confront together the stewardship of this “home” of ours; more important, however, is the need for ever greater conviction about the need for responsible cooperation. The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short. In order to face this situation effectively, there is a need to act in harmony. One area where there is a particular need to intensify dialogue between nations is that of the stewardship of the Earth’s energy resources. The technologically advanced countries are facing two pressing needs in this regard: on the one hand, to reassess the high levels of consumption due to the present model of development, and on the other, to invest sufficient resources in the search for alternative sources of energy and for greater energy efficiency. The emerging countries are hungry for energy, but at times this hunger is met in a way harmful to poor countries that, due to their insufficient infrastructures, including their technological infrastructures, are forced to undersell the energy resources they do possess. At times, their very political freedom is compromised by forms of protectorate or, in any case, by forms of conditioning that appear clearly humiliating.

Vatican translation of Benedict XVI’s message for the 41st World Day of Peace, celebrated January 1, 2008.