



carmelngo

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"Life in many poor countries is still extremely insecure as a consequence of food shortages, and the situation could become worse ... Feed the hungry (cf. Mt 25: 35, 37, 42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods... Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources... What is missing ... is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally."

Pope Benedict XVI
Caritas in Veritate, 27



RIO+20 June 20-22, 2012 RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL

The Battle for Sustainability- from the Religious Perspective

The summer's United Nations Conference is 20-year review of the implementation of the conclusions of the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. That 1992 conference was itself a follow-up to the United Nations Conference held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden which focused on Human Environment. The Rio 1992 gathering was unprecedented for a United Nations conference, in terms of both its size and the scope of its concerns. One hundred seventy-two governments participated, 108 at the level of Head of State or government. Some 2,400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended with 17,000 people attending the parallel NGO forum.

The results of the two-week conference were Agenda 21, considered the blueprint for achieving sustainability worldwide; a declaration on environment and development; the statement on forest principles; the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

According to the UN, they "sought to help governments rethink economic development and find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and pollution of the planet."

At its close, Maurice F. Strong, the Conference Secretary-General from Canada, called the summit an "historic moment for humanity." So where are we, 20 years hence, in the battle for sustainability from a religious perspective?

Consumption of the world's resources has been a longstanding social and spiritual critique of consumerism in Catholic thought. Pope Paul VI, in his 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, linked heavy consumption to injustice, declaring that, "No one may appropriate surplus goods

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solely for his/her own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.... The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”

John Paul II added a spiritual dimension in his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, critiquing “a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards ‘having’ rather than ‘being,’” and urging people to “create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.” The Church’s

spiritual and social teachings are rich complements to modern environmental arguments against consumerism.

The current pope, Benedict XVI, is seen as needing to move longstanding Church teaching into concrete action. Benedict is seen by many as the first “green pope.” His encyclicals have continued the official discussion on issues such as the environment, society, and other themes linked to sustainability. There have been concrete steps as well. The Vatican installed solar panels on its 10,000-seat main auditorium building, and it arranged to reforest land in Hungary to offset Vatican City’s carbon emissions, making it the world’s first carbon-neutral state. Benedict has identified extensive common ground between sustainability concerns and a Catholic worldview-- adding weight to the argument that the world’s religions could be instrumental in nudging policymakers and the public to embrace sustainability. Despite the extensive archive of papal statements on the subject and some concrete actions at the Vatican itself, there is no evidence that Catholics consume less or differently than anyone else.

According to *Worldwatch Institute*, the other issue that must be dealt with in any discussion of sustainability is population. This “is more difficult for a Catholic leader to tackle, especially one with Benedict’s reputation for doctrinal strictness.” Yet Paul VI spoke on this issue, saying that the difficulty is not overpopulation but the unequal distribution of the world’s resources. Subsequent church leaders have repeated the idea of Paul VI in their own documents.

The idea that some must consume less in order that others get their fair share, also a key part of statements from the United Nations and Agenda 21 itself, have been most difficult to accept. Such calls are seen as hidden attempts for global government and the redistribution of wealth, a way of centralizing control over all of human life on planet Earth rather than a response to the Gospel imperative.

Another area which has developed tremendously since the 1992 Rio conference is the number of NGOs that are religious in nature, especially those who are Christian or Catholic, with affiliation to the UN. While both the terms “NGO” and “religious” can be somewhat ambiguous, a 2003 study found that of the 3,000 NGOs associated with the UN, 263 self identified themselves as religious. They represented 8.5% of all NGOs with ECOSOC status and 12.6% with DPI status. While not all NGO’s will have the same doctrinal basis to deal with the issues, most would share the same motivation: the value of the human person.

by William J. Harry, O. Carm.

CarmeNGO is published four times each year and is distributed to those interested in the mission of the NGO. For more information or to add your name and address to our mailing list, please visit our website (carmelitengo.org) or write to us by email (jremson@carmelitengo.org) or by regular post at 1725 General Taylor Street; New Orleans, LA 70115; USA)

Some “Side Events” Hosted By Religious Organizations at Rio+20:

Arco Ecology Farming Can Feed the World: In Practice

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=180&menu=126

Empowering Youth Leadership for a Sustainable Future

(no link at this time)

Agriculture and Sustainable Societies: Food Security, Land, and Solidarity

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=369&menu=126

Green Economy and Equity

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=369&menu=126

Ethical Implications of Sustainability: Educational and Religious Perspective

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=401&menu=126

Achieving Sustainable Development Through Solidarity Economy

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=475&menu=126

Exploring Synergies Between Faith Values and Education for Sustainable Development

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=556&menu=126

The Other Half of Development: Patterns of Sustainable Consumption

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=487&menu=126

For more detailed information about the content of these Side Events, check the Carmelite NGO website: carmelitengo.org or www.uncsd2012.org/meetings_sidevents.html



Earth Is Home To All Of Creation

“The world’s biodiversity is down 30% since the 1970s with tropical species taking the biggest hit. And humanity is outstripping the Earth’s resources by 50% - essentially using the resources of one and a half Earths every year,” this according to the 2012 *Living Planet Report*, produced by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The *Living Planet Report* is designed to call attention to the Earth’s so called ‘invisible economy’. As of 2008, the most recent year for which data is available, humans were outstripping Earth’s bio-

capacity by 50%. Bio-capacity is the amount of renewable resources, land, and waste absorption the Earth can provide. The organization Global Footprint Network marks “Earth Overshoot Day” every year to draw attention to how fast humans use natural resources. Global overshoot occurs when humanity’s demand on the natural world exceeds the biosphere’s supply, or regenerative capacity. Humanity is currently using the renewable resources of 1.5 Earths to meet its yearly demands for energy, food, shelter, and the things we do and buy. In 2011, “Earth Overshoot Day” fell on September 27, the day humans used up Earth’s annual resources. At this rate by 2030 even two Earths will not be enough to meet humanity’s demands.

By determining each nation’s productive land capacity and comparing it to the actual population and consumption per person scientists can calculate a nation’s ecological footprint – an indicator of human pressure on nature. Ten countries account for over 60% of Earth’s total bio-capacity in 2008: Brazil – 15.4%, China – 9.9%, United States – 9.8%, Russian Federation – 7.9%, India – 4.8%, Canada – 4.2%, Australia – 2.6%, Indonesia – 2.6%, Argentina – 2.4%, Democratic Republic of Congo – 1.6%, Rest of the World – 38.8%.

The *Living Planet Report* also tracks biodiversity and species populations globally. It detailed the loss of biodiversity around the world from the 1970s – 2008. It reported a 30% loss of biodiversity on average in the number of different species of plants, animals and other organisms. Temperate species fared relatively well, but tropical species declined by 60%, freshwater tropical species declined by 70%, terrestrial species declined by 25% and marine (non-freshwater) species by 20%.

“Human beings were created for life and harmonious relationships with all created things and with God.”

The *Living Planet Report* highlights the tremendous pressure that humanity is putting on our planet. As Carmelites we need to ask ourselves, does the information contained in the Report help us in our role as prophetic witnesses in caring for and protecting creation? Does the Report help us with the challenging questions we must address if we are to be authentic witnesses? Are we called to be a prophetic witness to a vanishing Earth unrecognizable in its loss of biodiversity? Are we called to be a prophetic witness to restoring the Earth and its environment to the life-giving gift as intended by the Creator?

The position of the Carmelite NGO, *The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment*, states as its number one Principle; “The roots of the ecological crisis are linked to the way human beings relate both to the Divine and to nature.” This Principle demands that our ‘being’ be permeated with the conviction that the empowering love of God is not only found within human beings, but also within all of creation. Human beings were created for life and harmonious relationships with all created things and with God. We must not forget that the Earth is home to all of creation and we need to preserve the quality of life for all of creation. We have the capacity to create a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. But for this to happen governments, multi-national corporations, local communities and individuals must step up to the challenge.

Everything we do makes a demand on nature. The food we eat, the cloths we buy, the way we travel, everything. To reduce our ecological footprint our actions must address

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Action and Advocacy for Climate Change: A Resource Guide for Religious Communities

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate multi-religious cooperation for climate change action and advocacy. It is intended for religious leaders and communities (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, monasteries, religious orders, etc.), prayer and study groups; women’s, men’s and youth groups; faith-based organizations; service providers; religious institutions and individuals. It contains information about how to advocate for climate change action, as well as ideas for local conservation and examples of faith communities already responding to climate change.

What Year Is It?

International years are declared by the United Nations to draw attention to and encourage action on major issues. The UN is observing two special years during 2012: the International Year of Cooperatives and the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All.



The International Year of Cooperatives is intended to raise public awareness of the invaluable contributions of cooperative enterprises to poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration. The Year will also highlight the strengths of the cooperative business model as an alternative means of doing business and furthering socioeconomic development.

local, national, regional and international levels.



The International Year of Sustainable Energy for All presents a valuable opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of increasing sustainable access to energy, energy efficiency, and renewable energy at the

local, national, regional and international levels.



Days of Prayer Draw High Interest From Around the World

On June 5, the Carmelite NGO celebrated World Environment Day by providing resources for a Day of Prayer on Rainforests. Over 1100 unique visitors came to the Carmelite NGO website in the month leading up to the event; 208 of these visitors down-

loaded our resource booklet. The top number of visitors came from the USA, Romania, India, Great Britain, China, Australia, Canada, the Russian Federation, Italy, and the Netherlands. In addition to World Environment Day, the Carmelite NGO celebrates Human Rights Day on December 10.

Carmelite Youth Caring, Responding and Enhancing our World Carmelite Secondary Schools in US and Peru Open Environmental Blog Website for Students, Faculty

At a meeting of administrators from Carmelite secondary schools in the United States and Peru, the desire to work together on environmental education led to the establishment of a blog on the internet which would facilitate discussion among students at Carmelite high schools around the world.

Entitled "Carmelite Youth Crew" –with "Crew" being an anagram for "caring, responding and enhancing our world"– the site will allow students, faculty and staff members of the Carmelite schools to share activities, photos, reflections, prayers, and plans relating to environmental sustainability.

"We want to be good stewards of our environment. Our hope is that collectively we can share our ideas and projects as we care for the world around us," the website says in its welcome to viewers.

The Carmelite Order ministers at schools in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Puerto Rico, USA, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, the Congo, and Zimbabwe.

The blog is located at: cycrow.blogspot.com/



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the sources of the biggest impacts humanity has on our planet - energy and food.

The most important thing we can do for our planet is to drastically reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. The amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases released by human activity is far more than ecosystems can absorb. These excess gases are responsible for climate change, the greatest threat to biodiversity and humanity. Our carbon footprint accounts for over half our total ecological footprint. Simple and immediate ways that we can reduce our carbon footprint is by being energy efficient in our choices – basically, reduce our use of fossil fuels.

Unsustainable agriculture and fishing practices are threats to species and habitats around the world. Throughout the developing world, external investors are scrambling to secure access to agricultural land for future food production. Since the mid-2000s, it is estimated that an area almost the size of Western Europe has been transferred in land allocation deals. High demand for timber in Europe, Japan, the U.S. and China drives illegal logging, one of the main causes of forest loss. Every day, about 270,000 trees are flushed down the drain or end up as garbage all over the world.

Reduce, reuse, recycle should be our mantra whether at work, at home, at play or out shopping. The lifestyle changes we make as individuals are vital, but we also must make our voices heard by governments and corporations because policies made by decision makers are essential to saving our planet. We need to re-think the way we manage our natural resources and re-act by putting our words into actions that protect our planet's biodiversity as well as provide enough food, water and energy for all.

Although education and civic participation in decisions regarding our relationship with nature are necessary, perhaps the most important for Carmelites is expressed by Principle #8 in *The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment*: "The Carmelite path can help people appreciate the beauty of Creation and see a way to preserve it for the good of future generations." For this to happen, Carmelites must own their prophetic witness to care for and protect creation.

by Jane Remson, O. Carm. - Main Representative

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