



# The Cry of the Earth

A Call to Action  
for Climate Justice

*A Pastoral Reflection on Climate Change  
from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference*

2014



IRISH CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

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# Foreword

*God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work in  
the splendour of creation,  
in the beauty of human life.  
Touched by your hand our world is holy.*

— OPENING PRAYER,  
Mass of 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

**G**OD, IN WHOM we live and move and have our being, has given us the gift of this beautiful earth. Creation flows out of the heart of an infinitely loving Creator. Touched by God's hand, our world is holy.

Our earth is also complex. Its systems of life are interdependent and finely balanced. Small changes in one part of the planet's rhythms and systems can have significant, if not dramatic, consequences for the whole of the earth and its creatures. Hence global climate change is one of the most critical issues of our time. How we respond to climate change will have consequences for the future of every person and every form of life on the earth.

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has kept this message at the heart of his teaching. In the homily of his inauguration Mass he explained that protection of the environment is the responsibility of everyone:

It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and

as St Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.

In 2009 the Irish Bishops published *The Cry of the Earth*. It aimed to stimulate and resource dialogue and reflection on the critical questions posed by the challenge of climate change. The reflection was inspired by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, published earlier that same year. The letter emphasised that the 'environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.'

On the role of the Church, Pope Benedict stated: 'The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere' (nn. 48 and 51). Accordingly, in *The Cry of the Earth*

individuals, parish communities and all people of good will were invited to reflect on 'that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying' (n. 50).

This pastoral reflection proved to be a valuable tool for those who are concerned about the impact of climate change and want to take action to address its negative consequences. As more and more people in our society are becoming aware of the unjust impact of climate change on some of the most vulnerable communities in our world, this document has been updated for 2014, with supporting resources for dialogue at parish level.

The first part of this pastoral reflection helps us to inform ourselves by examining the science associated with climate change. It includes analysis from international groups of scientists such as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Environmental Protection Agency of Ireland and the experts on climate change we have consulted in Ireland. An overwhelming consensus exists among credible national and international organisations working in this area. The precautionary principal means that we should react now to the risk of serious harm posed by the plausible link between certain types of human activity and

the damaging effects of climate change.

The second part of this reflection sees our natural environment as 'a wondrous work of the Creator containing a "grammar" which sets forth ... Criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation' (n. 48). It offers such reflections on sacred scripture, key ethical principles and themes from Catholic Social Doctrine. They inspire and guide our vocation as stewards of God's creation. While scientific knowledge is constantly evolving, the principles that inform our approach, as Christians, to these developments remain steadfast, rooted in our faith.

Finally, this pastoral reflection offers some practical actions. The lifestyle individuals, parishes and others adopt can reduce the impact of many of our day-to-day activities on our natural environment and, consequently, on our global climate.

In addressing the challenge of climate change, everyone has a part to play. Every action taken in favour of a just and more sustainable environment, no matter how small, has an intrinsic value. Action at a global level, as well as every individual action which contributes to integral human development and global solidarity, helps to construct a more sustainable environment and, therefore, a better world.

In 2009 Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI called contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle, which,

in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of 'new lifestyles' 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. (n. 51)

This sentiment was echoed by Pope Francis in his 2013 Pastoral Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he defines solidarity as 'the creation of a new mind-set which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few' (n. 188).

Grateful to God for the gift of his creation, I encourage all people of goodwill to reflect urgently on how we can work together to take more responsible care of our planet now and for the sake of generations yet unborn. They deserve no less of us.

CARDINAL SEÁN BRADY  
*President of the  
Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference*





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—CARDINAL SEÁN BRADY





# Introduction

**O**UR HOME, PLANET EARTH, God's creation, is an extraordinarily beautiful and fruitful place. It is appropriately called 'the garden planet' of the universe. We humans, with every other species, depend totally on the proper functioning of the planet for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food that sustains us and the multiple other ways in which the earth supports us and every other creature. Though the earth appears very robust, we know that it can be quite fragile and that small changes, over time, can have enormous consequences for life.

Pope Francis wrote in his World Day of Peace Message 2014:

Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.<sup>1</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI also talked about the need for 'obedience to the voice of the earth' when he spoke to the clergy of the Diocese of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso on 24 July 2007:

Today we all see that humans could destroy the foundations of our existence, the earth ... We must respect the internal laws of creation of this earth, learn from these laws and also obey these laws, if we wish to survive. Therefore, this obedience to the voice of the earth, to life, is more important for our future happiness than the voices of the moment, the desires of the moment.

Earlier, in January 2001, surveying the wider ecological context, Saint John Paul II called for profound 'ecological conversion':

[I]f we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric spheres, and turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialisation, humiliating the flower-garden of the universe, to use the image of Dante Alighieri (*Paradiso*, XXII, 151). We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' that in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator's 'steward', but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Message Of His Holiness Francis for the celebration of The World Day Of Peace, *Fraternity, The Foundation And Pathway To Peace*, No. 7, 1 January 2014.

2. Pope John Paul II, 'God made man the steward of Creation', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 January 2001.





## PART I:

# What Scientists Say About Climate Change

**B**EFORE REFLECTING ON the ethical and religious dimension of climate change, it is important that we examine some of the fundamental elements of the science involved. As the scientists we consulted explain, the atmosphere of our planet is composed of a thin layer of gases which supports all life on earth. The principle gases, nitrogen and oxygen, are responsible for 78 per cent and 21 per cent of the atmosphere respectively. There are minute amounts of other gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane. If our earth did not have these trace gases in the atmosphere, the average global temperature would be around -18 degrees Celsius, which would be too cold to sustain life. With our present atmosphere, the average global temperature is +15 degrees Celsius, which makes it very conducive for life to flourish.

Scientists also inform us that at times in the history of our planet the earth has been almost a ball of ice. At other times, there was no ice on earth and tropical creatures swam in the Arctic Ocean. For 85,000 of the past 100,000 years, much of Ireland

was covered with glaciers. Such natural causes of climate fluctuation can also occur in shorter time scales, such as happened in Europe from the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, causing rivers like the Liffey to freeze regularly each winter.

Scientists, notably those associated with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (ipcc), believe that the climate change we are now experiencing goes beyond the range of natural fluctuation and that this is caused by human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuel. Ice cores taken from the Arctic and Antarctic tell us that for the past 10,000 years, right up to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution 250 years ago, there was roughly 280 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere. In spring of this year the value approached 402 ppm, unprecedented over the past 800,000 years. Concentrations are rising by about 2 ppm every year.

The reason why global warming is called the 'greenhouse effect' is that gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and



hydrofluorocarbons trap infrared radiation, which would otherwise pass back out into space. As long as the percentage of the various gases in the atmosphere remains more or less constant, a balance is established which ensures relatively stable climatic conditions globally. When the percentage of greenhouse gases increase, temperatures begin to rise as human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuel, increases the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The average global temperature in 2008 was only 0.85 degrees Celsius higher than it was in the late nineteenth century, and yet the consequences of this small change have already been considerable.

### SCIENTISTS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Some of the likely consequences of climate change for humans were outlined in the second part of the *Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, which was published in three volumes over the past year. Some 800 of the world's top climate scientists were involved as authors and some 140,000 comments were considered from thousands of other experts. Representatives of the Irish government signed off on the report as they have on every IPCC Assessment Report since 1990. The main conclusions include increased risks as follows:

- ❖ Risk of death, injury, ill-health, or disrupted livelihoods in low-lying coastal zones and small island developing states and other small islands, due to storm surges, coastal flooding and sea-level rise.
- ❖ Risk of severe ill-health and disrupted livelihoods for large urban populations due to inland flooding in some regions.
- ❖ Systemic risks due to extreme weather events leading to breakdown of infrastructure networks and critical services such as electricity, water supply and health and emergency services.
- ❖ Risk of mortality and morbidity during periods of extreme heat, particularly for vulnerable urban populations and those working outdoors in urban or rural areas.
- ❖ Risk of food insecurity and the breakdown of food systems linked to warming, drought, flooding, and precipitation variability and extremes, particularly for poorer populations in urban and rural settings.
- ❖ Risk of loss of rural livelihoods and income due to insufficient access to drinking and irrigation water and reduced agricultural productivity, particularly for farmers and pastoralists with minimal capital in semi-arid regions.
- ❖ Risk of loss of marine and coastal ecosystems, biodiversity, and the ecosystem goods, functions and services they provide for coastal livelihoods, especially for fishing

communities in the tropics and the Arctic.

- ❖ Risk of loss of terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, biodiversity, and the ecosystem goods, functions and services they provide for livelihoods.

Many likely impacts constitute particular challenges for the least developed countries and vulnerable communities, given their limited ability to cope. In most cases they have made a negligible contribution to this global problem.

By any standards this is a worrying prospect and yet it is based on a 2 degree Celsius rise in average global temperature. According to the scientists we have consulted, a rise of 4 degrees Celsius, which could happen unless we take remedial action soon, would do enormous damage to the life-supporting systems of the planet. A global temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius is generally taken as the threshold beyond which recovery would be difficult. The longer we delay in making a transition to a low carbon world, the more difficult the task becomes. Unless dramatic steps are taken to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions within the next decade it will be almost impossible to avoid dangerous climate change.

While one cannot conclude that a particular climate event, such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 or Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, is a direct result of climate change, scientists say that



severe weather patterns will happen more often. A fingerprint of human-induced climate change can now be detected in some extreme weather events, such as heatwaves.

With climate change, sea levels are expected to rise significantly because of thermal expansion in the oceans and melting ice caps in Greenland and the western Antarctic, in addition to run-off from thawing glaciers on the Himalayas and the Andes. A rise of a single metre in ocean levels would make life impossible for millions of people who live in the delta area of Bangladesh. Many of the low-lying islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, such as the Maldives, Tuvalu and Kiribati, are already feeling the effects of rising sea levels. The storms which ravaged the coast of Ireland last winter were rendered more potent by slightly higher sea levels than they would have been a century ago.

Scientists estimate that climate change could cause the extinction of more than one million species on earth because plants, animals or fish will be unable to adapt to new climate niches. Losses of this scale have serious consequences for future generations.

Climate change is also affecting agriculture. The second part of the *Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, published in April 2014, predicted that negative impacts on the yields for the major crops

of wheat, rice and maize are likely from the 2030s, with declines of up to 2 per cent per decade for the remainder of this century. There is growing evidence that many crops in poorer countries will be adversely affected by climate change, which could give rise to more malnutrition, hunger and starvation.

### SCIENTISTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN IRELAND

Using models that have been constructed from a massive amount of data, climate change scientists from organisations such as the Irish Environmental Protection Agency predict that there will be an increase in temperature in Ireland of between 1.5 degrees Celsius by mid-century, with a further increase of 0.5 to 1 degrees Celsius by 2075. By 2050, the extreme south and south-west coasts may have an average January temperature of 8 degrees Celsius. July temperatures are predicted to increase by 2.5 degrees Celsius by 2050. Maximum July temperatures of the order of 22.5 degrees Celsius are likely to prevail generally, with areas in the central midlands experiencing mean maximum July temperatures of 24.5 degrees Celsius. There are also likely to be more heatwaves.

Overall, scientists predict that there will be increases in precipitation, especially in the winter months. The greatest absolute increases are suggested for the north-west. Marked decreases in

rainfall during the summer and early autumn months across eastern and central Ireland are predicted. Such rainfall patterns would put huge pressure on public authorities, especially in terms of providing drinkable water for Dublin and other cities and large towns situated in the eastern part of the country.

In terms of agriculture, such changes in climate would make it difficult to grow potatoes. It seems that the west will be too wet and the east will be too dry for this historic Irish crop. Other crops, such as maize, will benefit from the changes.

A study conducted in 2007 for the National Botanical Gardens of Ireland estimates that 171 native plant species, making up 20 per cent of the total Irish flora, are vulnerable to climate change. Natural habitats for many threatened plants may no longer be able to support their indigenous species. Some of the plants and animals we take for granted in the Irish landscape may disappear.







## PART II:

# A Christian Response to the Challenge of Climate Change

**T**HE CALL TO 'ecological conversion' challenges us to look again at our attitude towards the earth we inhabit. God's earth cares for us by providing us with everything we need for our well-being. Our responsibility to care for the earth and for each other comes from the call to be stewards of God's creation. This call to stewardship is made clear in Genesis 2:15 when God took man and put him in the garden of Eden 'to till it and keep it'. The verbs 'till' and 'keep' used in this context have overtones of service and commitment. They infer part of a duty of care given to us by God to keep the earth from harm.

In his inaugural homily on 19 March 2013, Pope Francis appealed to all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: 'Let us be "protectors" of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.'

This theme is echoed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*. As he explains:

[N]ature speaks to us of the Creator (cf. Rm 1:20) and his love for humanity. It is destined to be 'recapitulated' in Christ at the end of time (cf. Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20). Thus it too is a 'vocation'. Nature is at our disposal not as a heap of scattered refuse, but as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order, enabling man ... 'to till it and keep it' (Gn 2:15). (n. 48)

The verse 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it' (Gn 1:28) is often used to accuse Christianity of being insensitive to the natural world. It is claimed that Christianity has used this text to see other creatures and the earth itself as a quarry, a resource to be plundered and which is exclusively for human use. The text does give humans dominion over the earth, but it is a dominion of service, of responsibility and care, patterned on God's own dominion over all creatures.

As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* explains:

God freely confers being and life on everything that exists. Man



and woman, created in his image and likeness, are for that very reason called to be the visible sign and the effective instrument of divine gratuitousness in the garden where God has placed them as cultivators and custodians of the goods of creation. (n. 26)

This call on us to be stewards for all life is made again and again throughout the scriptures. Central to the Noah story (Gn 11-9:17), for example, is God's commandment to Noah to conserve nature by taking two of every kind into the ark (Gn 6:19). Later, after the flood, when God renews the covenant it is not merely with humankind, but with all creation: 'I am now establishing my covenant with you and with all your descendants to come, and with every living creature that was with you ... everything that came out of the ark' (Gn 9:10).

Scripture also witnesses to God's wisdom embedded in the earth (Job 38:2). In the psalms we look at the earth's wonders and praise our Creator (Ps 148). The belief that the earth reflects the goodness, beauty, wisdom and power of God to us is firmly rooted in biblical tradition.

In a sermon to agriculturalists, Saint John Paul II said: 'Within the movement of nature, tranquil and silent but rich in life, there continues to palpitate the original delight of the Creator.' The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed it in these words:

'The World is charged with the grandeur of God.'

Acknowledging God's presence revealed through the wonder of all living things has also been a strong theme in the Celtic spiritual tradition. It has featured dominantly in Irish poetry.

I see his blood upon the rose  
And in the stars, the glory of his eyes,  
His Body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing of the birds  
Are but his voice – and carven by his power  
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,  
His cross is every tree.

JOSEPH MARY PLUNKETT

## CREATION AS THE WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY

We believe that this good and beautiful universe has been brought forth by the community of love that is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Creation itself is an act of Divine love. It is given to us as a free gift. Saint Paul writes that 'all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together' (Col 1:16-17). Saint Athanasius (296–373) expands on this theme when he writes that 'the Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit; for where the Word is there is the Spirit also and things created through the Word have their being from the Spirit by means of the Word'.<sup>3</sup>

In the incarnation we believe that God entered into the material world in a unique manner in the person of Jesus Christ. He fully identified himself with our humanity and thus with all creation. The importance of nature in the life of Jesus is highlighted in a particular way in St Mark's Gospel. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, Mark tells us, 'where wild beasts and angels looked after him' (Mk 1:12 and 13). It was during his sojourn in the desert that Jesus came to full awareness of the messianic ministry he was called to embrace. St John sums up the mission of Jesus when he writes, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10).

3. St Athanasius, *Epistle to Seraphim*, 3.4.

The Kingdom of God that Jesus preached envisaged a world where peace, justice and human well-being would be promoted and celebrated (Is 35:1-7; Mk 1:14-15). We know that human well-being cannot be achieved if the life systems of the world are irreversibly damaged, because healthy creatures cannot survive on a sick planet.

The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of a new creation (2 Cor 5:17-19). Through the reality of the resurrection all matter is transformed and taken up into the life of the Trinity. In the words of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 'The entrance of Jesus Christ into the history of the world reaches its culmination in the Paschal Mystery, where nature itself takes part in the drama of the rejection of the Son of God and in the victory of the Resurrection' (n. 454). Saint Paul states that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (Col 1:20). The Easter preface in the *Roman Missal* echoes this belief when it proclaims: '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 resurrection is also a cosmic sign of hope. All creation is united in Christ and, therefore, has a future in God. This hope is anchored in the presence of the Spirit in our world. We believe that the Spirit, whom we confess in the Creed to be the Lord

and Giver of Life, is inspiring people in our age to dedicate themselves to serve others and, in the words of the well-known prayer to the Holy Spirit, to 'renew the face of the earth'.

The Spirit calls us to hear what we might describe poetically as the 'cry of the earth' and to give it a central place in our discipleship of Jesus today. This in turn challenges us to look again at our attitude to wealth, to economic growth and how we distribute and consume the good of this earth.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*: '[W]hat is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new lifestyles* 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' (n. 51).

In his 1990 World Day of Peace message, Saint John Paul II also reflected on the link between certain approaches to affluence and ecological devastation and human deprivation:

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause ... If an appreciation of the value of the human person and human



Saint John Paul II was convinced that humans could build a civilisation of love if we harnessed these values of simplicity, not only in our personal relationship with God and nature, but also in our relationship with each other.





life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequence of the careless habits of a few. (n. 13)

True stewardship, therefore, requires a conversion of heart and a change of attitude. Our Christian faith has always placed great value on the virtue of self-control and moderation in the use of material goods. As well as promoting an internal spiritual and moral freedom, a life less focused on material gain and conspicuous consumption would contribute to a more just and sustainable world economy.

The power of Trinitarian love is captured by the poet Patrick Kavanagh in 'The Great Hunger':

Yet sometimes when the  
sun comes through a gap  
These men know God the  
Father in a tree:  
The Holy Spirit is the rising  
sap,  
And Christ will be the green  
leaves that will come  
At Easter from the sealed  
and guarded tomb.<sup>4</sup>

In such an economy, self-sacrifice would no longer be an unpopular concept. Such restraint and self-sacrifice would remind us that we are more than what we possess in terms of material goods. It may even contribute to a better quality of life, with people having more time to spend with family and friends, to make volunteer commitments to their local community and engage in health-promoting activity. A simpler lifestyle may also be a less stressful lifestyle, making inner contentment and peace more possible.

Saint John Paul II was convinced that we could build a civilisation of love if we harnessed these values of simplicity, not only in our personal relationship with God and nature, but also in our relationship with each other.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: 'Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society' (CV, n. 51).

The celebration of the Eucharist also challenges us to share the goods of the earth with everyone, especially the poor, and to be concerned for the well-being of all creation. In the Eucharist we do not use raw wheat or grape juice, but bread and wine, which involve a co-operative relationship between the fruitfulness of the earth and human

skills of farming, milling, baking and winemaking. In the Eucharist we give thanks to God for the blessings of both creation and redemption. As the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ for our nourishment, we are challenged to promote this harmony between humans and the rest of creation by the way we live our lives.

There is nothing new in this approach: the celebration of the Eucharist in the early church emphasised the importance of the created world. For example, the liturgy associated with St Basil (330–379) used language and prayers about the gathering of the grain for the making of bread and the activity of viniculture for making the wine. The bread 'which earth has given and human hands have made' and the wine which is 'fruit of the vine and work of human hands' are changed into the very substance of the crucified but risen and glorified body of the New Creation.

## KEY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

In recent years we have become more aware that we cannot have life to the full on a plundered, polluted and ailing planet. While climate change is a technical, scientific and economic issue, it is also a moral one. The core of the moral issue is that actions

4. The lines from 'The Great Hunger' by Patrick Kavanagh are reprinted from *Collected Poems*, edited by Antoinette Quinn (Allen Lane, 2004), by kind permission of the Trustees of the Estate of the late Katherine B. Kavanagh, through the Jonathan Williams Literary Agency.

which we take today can undermine the well-being of millions of people now, especially the poor, and condemn further generations to live in an inhospitable world.

Catholic moral tradition and social doctrine, based on the revelation of God's love for all creation in the scriptures and on the inherent dignity of every person, offer a number of core principles that can guide our response to the challenge of climate change. These include:

### **THE COMMON GOOD**

The earth is our common home. We are intimately interconnected with one another and with all the life-systems of the planet. Humans are part of, and have a unique responsibility for, the interaction between all living creatures and the atmosphere, land and water. Actions which undermine this well-being, such as the unnecessary and excessive burning of fossil fuel, have to be evaluated in light of our responsibility for the global common good. 'The common good of society is not an end in itself; it has value only in reference to attaining the ultimate ends of the person and the universal common good of the whole of creation' (*Compendium*, n. 170).

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasises this principle of the 'universal common good', highlighting the need for greater global solidarity and civic friendship around the

question of energy consumption in particular:

What is also needed is a worldwide redistribution of energy resources, so that countries lacking those resources can have access to them. The fate of those countries cannot be left in the hand of whoever is the first to claim the spoils, or whoever is able to prevail over the rest ... everyone must responsibly recognise the impact they will have on future generations, particularly the many young people in the poorer nations, who ask to assume their active part in the construction of a better world. (n. 49)

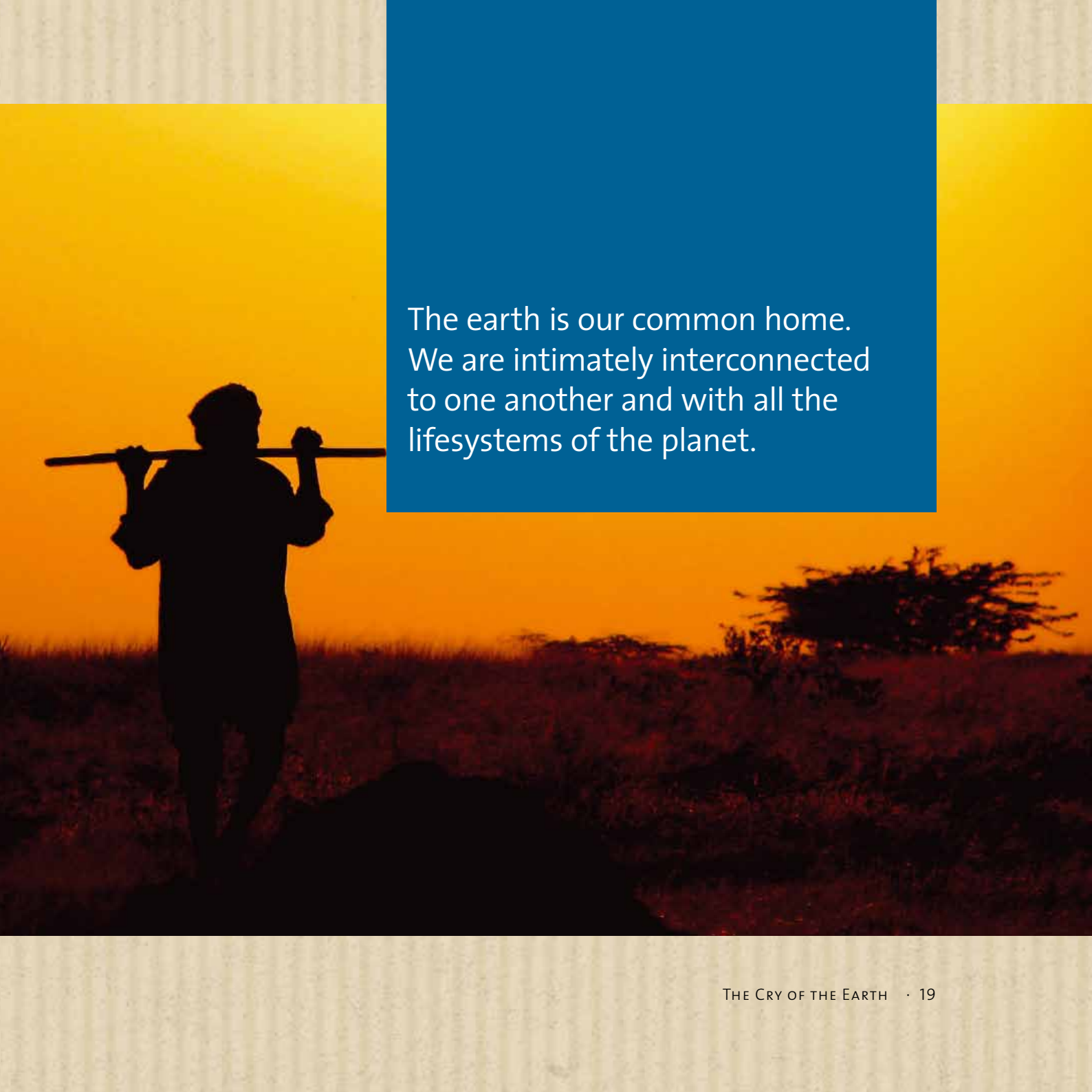
As we explained in our pastoral letter *Towards the Global Common Good*:

Nations which embrace such solidarity soon recognise that commitment to the common good requires a change of mindset. It requires going beyond a model of international relations in which nations seek their own advantage often at the expense of others, to one in which national advantage will sometimes be limited by the need to find common solutions to common problems. This in turn requires a spirit of co-operation and a willingness to sacrifice short-term gains, or even national interest, for the sake of the global common good. (n. 4)

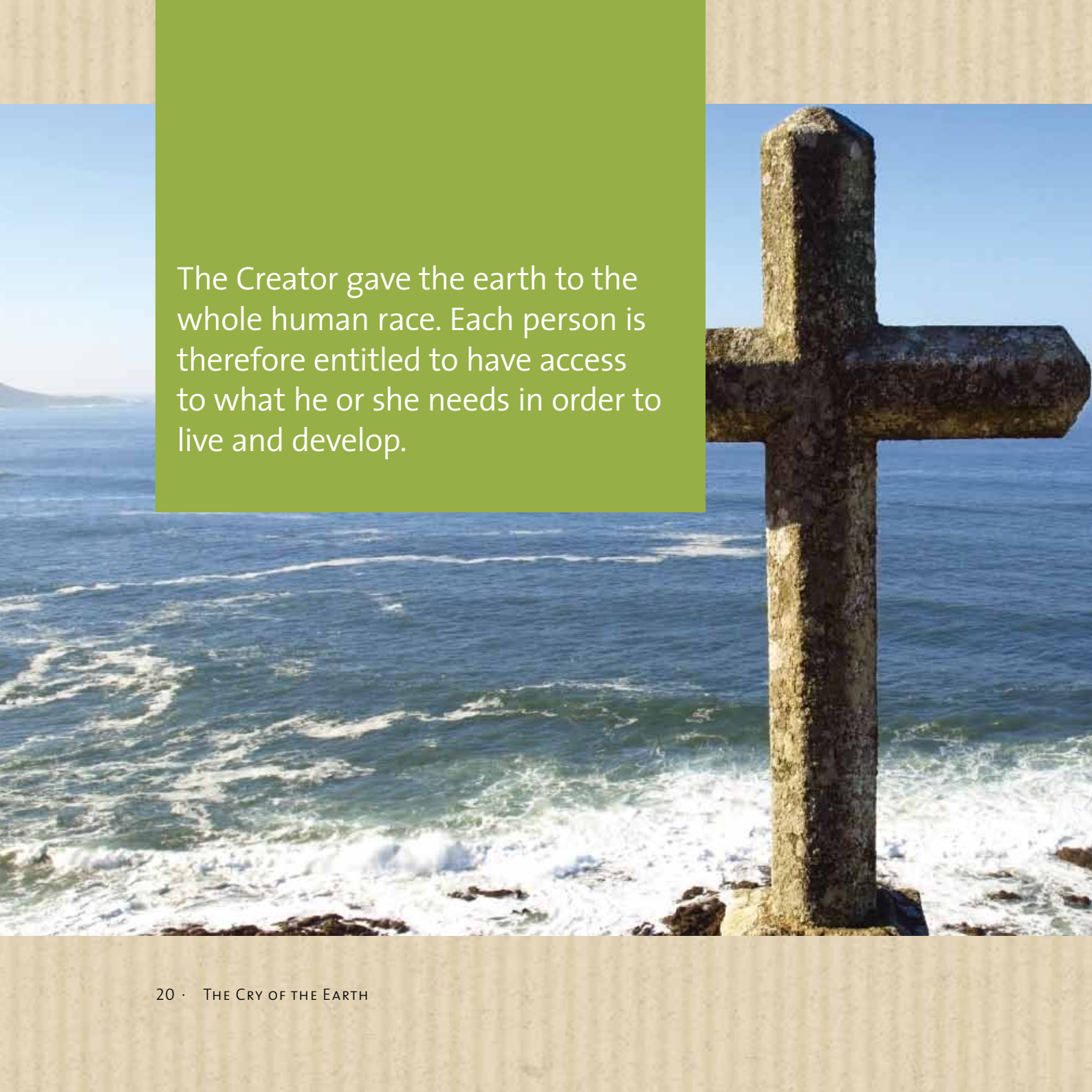
In the light of the more recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we therefore support the position taken by the European Union to aim to keep temperature rises below a 2 degrees Celsius rise above pre-industrial levels. We share the hope of others who have a concern for the future viability of the earth that a new international treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be agreed at the forthcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference, which will take place in Paris in December 2015. We encourage Irish government representatives to strengthen their commitment to these vital international agreements and to agree legally binding limits for greenhouse gas emissions that will enable us to keep global temperature rises below 2 degrees Celsius. With many others around the world we hope and pray that the political leaders meeting in Paris in December 2015 will take the courageous decisions needed to fulfil 'our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit and continue to cultivate it' (CV, n. 50).

There are important moral dimensions to the criteria which will be used for allocating global emissions targets among nations in the future. Care must be taken to ensure that the most economically, politically or militarily powerful



A silhouette of a person carrying a long pole over their shoulders, walking away from the viewer into a savanna landscape at sunset. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, and the foreground is dark with some vegetation. A blue rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

The earth is our common home.  
We are intimately interconnected  
to one another and with all the  
lifesystems of the planet.



The Creator gave the earth to the whole human race. Each person is therefore entitled to have access to what he or she needs in order to live and develop.



nations of the world are not in a position to take advantage of those countries that have fewer resources. Christians across the world have a vital role in forming the conscience of their governments on this issue.

In the race to secure the diminishing amount of fossil fuel and other resources in the world, we must ensure that the poor are not trampled under foot.

### THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF THE GOODS OF THE EARTH

God, the Creator, gave the earth to the whole human race. Each person is therefore entitled to have access to what he or she needs in order to live and develop.

Pope Paul VI emphasised this truth when he reminded us that:

God intended the earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should flow fairly to all. All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should in no way hinder it; in fact, they should actively facilitate its implementation. Redirecting these rights back to their original purpose must be regarded as an important and urgent social duty. (*Populorum Progressio*, n. 22)

In the words of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 'The climate is a good that must be protected and reminds consumers and those engaged in industrial activity to develop a greater sense of responsibility for their behaviour' (n. 470). Governments, industry and individuals have a responsibility to promote and protect the environment. 'God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods' (*Compendium*, n. 171).

The universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane and sustainable world. In the words of the *Compendium*, this 'requires that the poor, the marginalised and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force' (n. 182).

In an address to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome on 20 June 2013, Pope Francis made a very clear connection between climate change and food security in the world's poorest countries. He said: 'I greet the Director-General, Professor José

Graziano da Silva, whom I had occasion to meet at the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome. On that occasion he made it clear to me that the situation worldwide is particularly difficult, not only because of the economic crisis but also due to problems associated with security, the great number of continuing conflicts, climate change and the preservation of biological diversity.'

### SUBSIDIARITY

This principle holds that each person or group should take the appropriate action at a personal or local level when addressing an issue common to all. In our earlier pastoral letter, *Towards the Global Common Good*, we wrote that, where climate change was concerned, 'it is a moral imperative that the measures set out in the National Climate Change Strategy 2000 are implemented with greater speed'. All of us have our part to play in implementing that strategy: homes, schools, seminaries and theological institutes, parishes, businesses and governments. In this pastoral reflection we renew that appeal. As part of this document we have outlined practical steps that every individual, family and parish can take to help achieve this objective.

We also said in *Towards the Global Common Good* that 'whether it is the type of energy we use to heat our homes, the method we use to dispose of our waste, or the form

of transport we use to get to work, every decision we make in favour of a more sustainable environment is a decision in favour of the global common good' (n. 7).

#### **SOLIDARITY**

As Christians we cannot consider ourselves or our obligations in isolation from others or from the endangered earth and its creatures. Solidarity gives expression to this interdependence between individuals, the wider human community and all creation, which has never been as evident as it is today. But this solidarity is not a vague feeling of compassion. Rather, in the words of Saint John Paul II, it is a 'firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good of all ... because we are *all* really responsible *for all*' (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 38).

This responsibility extends to the whole of creation and to all the finely balanced life systems of our world, which may be threatened by even marginal changes in the earth's climate and by human behaviour. This includes having a humane and responsible attitude towards the well-being and sustainability of other species. As Pope Benedict XVI points out: 'Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature' (CV, n. 51).

#### **DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE**

This principle challenges rich nations, which over the past 150 years have been responsible for most of the greenhouse gas pollution, to provide adequate compensation for any unpreventable climate change damages they cause. An example of this principle at work is the Adaptation Fund, set up under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to help poor nations adapt to climate change that is already occurring. It is important that this Adaptation Fund is properly resourced. Similarly, resources and carbon-free technologies must be made available to poor countries to enable them to achieve sustainable development without these countries having to opt for a carbon-intensive route to economic growth.

Unfortunately, our missionaries and development workers suggest to us that little of substance is happening in this vital area of making clean, non-carbon based technologies available to people in developing nations.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: 'The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption, either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens' (CV, n. 49).

A key dimension of distributive justice in this context is what

is sometimes known as the 'polluter pays principle'. This principle stipulates that those most responsible for causing environmental pollution ought to be held most liable for its consequences.

For example, it is projected that Africa, which is responsible for less than 3 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, will suffer most from the impact of climate change with more droughts, disrupted water supplies and sea level rises. This would be a massive injustice to the people and ecosystems of that continent.

In addition, countries such as Ireland, which are major polluters, need to drastically cut their carbon emissions as quickly as possible. This must involve serious cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, through mandatory caps, carbon taxes and, possibly, cap-and-trade programmes. Care is also required regarding policies of switching areas of agriculture to biofuel production. There is a fundamental moral dilemma to be faced in any policy that involves burning food crops to supply energy for the rich and developing nations of the world, when hundreds of millions of people are suffering from hunger.

Similarly, '[T]he hoarding of resources, especially water, can generate serious conflicts among the peoples involved. Peaceful agreement about the use of resources can protect nature and, at the same





The European EPA's document, *Transport and Environment: Facing a Dilemma 2006*, confirmed that transport emissions in Ireland had increased faster than any other country in Europe.



In 1979, Saint John Paul II  
proclaimed St Francis of Assisi as  
the patron saint of ecology.



time, the well-being of the societies concerned' (CV, n. 51).

'The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet' (CV, n. 50).

Many people believe that religions have much to contribute when it comes to educating people about the reality of climate change. Recently, Christiana Figueres – the Costa Rican diplomat who is the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC – called on religious leaders to speak out on climate change. She pointed out that the traditional corporal works of mercy – such as overcoming poverty, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry – will become more difficult in a climate changed world.

### INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Climate change points to the ethical issues involved in inter-generational justice. 'Projects for integral development,' Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, 'cannot ignore coming generations, but need to be marked by solidarity and inter-generational justice, while taking into account a variety of contexts: ecological, juridical, economic, political and cultural' (CV, n. 48).

At a concrete level this issue is very clear. When parents or grandparents look into the eyes

of their children or grandchildren and ask themselves if the way this generation is using fossil fuels or managing the other precious resources of the planet is going to have a detrimental effect on the lives of future generations, the answer can only be yes. Failure to act now could cause immense suffering for future generations.

This principle is closely connected to the precautionary principle and the virtue of prudence. We need to take action now to ensure the viability of the earth for future generations. It is 'incumbent upon the competent authorities to make every effort to ensure that the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognised with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations' (CV, n. 50).

### HONOURING INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Many of these principles, drawn from Catholic moral tradition and Social Doctrine, are reflected in various international agreements which have been made on climate change since 1990.

Since climate change affects every part of the earth, adherence to these international agreements is critical if the challenge of climate change is to be addressed. Climate change figured frequently in the speeches of the heads of state at the Earth

Summit in Rio De Janeiro in 1992. As a result, 154 nations signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. No mandatory limits on carbon emissions were set at this stage. This did not happen until the meeting at Kyoto in Japan in 1997.

Even though the IPCC scientists said that greenhouse gas emissions needed to be cut by between 80–95 per cent within the next thirty-five years to stabilise the global climate, countries have not been willing to put global needs beyond national self interest. Several failed attempts to legislate for reductions in Irish greenhouse gas emissions have now occurred and no mid-century targets are contained in the current draft law going through the Oireachtas. International commitments bind Ireland to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent compared with 2005 within the next six years. Failure to do so may result in fines and a further burden on the hard-pressed taxpayer. Currently Ireland has one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emission rates in Europe and the latest data does not indicate that the required reductions are occurring.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that meeting our international targets and developing more environmentally sensitive ways to progress our economy remains a key collective priority for each of us as well as for government policy. Special pleading, or seeking to get

the rules relaxed to suit us, is not the way to go as each country can identify particular emission sectors as a special case.

## DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

Ireland has a proud record of missionaries as well as development personnel working to alleviate poverty in many countries across the world. We realise that sometimes, in the past, development was promoted without taking due account of its impact on the environment. Concern for development and environmental protection must go hand-in-hand. The focus that Trócaire, the Irish Catholic Agency for World Development and many Irish missionary communities have placed on climate change in recent years will continue into the future as a vital part of the Irish Christian contribution to integral human development.

As Pope Benedict XVI points out, the road to authentic and integral human development implies a concern for the overall moral tenor of society:

The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are

linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. (CV, n. 51)

## ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

A model and source of inspiration for many in their Christian vocation towards the environment is St Francis of Assisi. In 1979, St John Paul II proclaimed St Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology. Three years later, on 28 March 1982, World Ecology Day, John Paul II wrote that St Francis ought to be an example for Catholics today, 'not to behave like dissident predators where nature is concerned, but to assume responsibility for it, taking all care so that everything stays healthy and integrated, so as to offer a welcoming and friendly environment even to those who succeed us'.

Francis did not look at the natural world from a utilitarian perspective. He did not see it as merely providing food, clothing and shelter for humans. Rather, his response to the gift of creation was joy, wonder, praise and gratitude. One of the great legacies of Francis is that he expanded the concept of 'neighbour' to include not only the human race, but the whole of creation and its creatures.

In his 'Canticle of the Creatures', Francis shows a kinship with and deep insight into the heart of all

creation – animate and inanimate – which, with the exception of the Celtic saints, is probably unique in the whole European Christian tradition.

## RESPECT FOR CREATION IN IRISH CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Celtic saints such as Patrick, Bridget, Ciarán, Gobnait, Kevin, Imy, Columba and Coloman were very sensitive to the presence of God in creation. Many legends grew up around Coloman, especially at the monastery in Luxeuil in eastern France. Squirrels and doves were pictured playing in the folds of his cowl. Birds also approached him and nestled in the palms of his hands. Even wild beasts were said to have obeyed his commands. In his sermon 'Concerning the Faith' he wrote, 'If you wish to understand the Creator, learn about his creatures.'

In the Celtic tradition, creation itself and each creature, however small, testifies to God as the source of all life. This was also a dominant theme in the life of another great Celtic and Franciscan theologian, Blessed John Duns Scotus. In 2008, we celebrated the 700th anniversary of his death in AD 1308. For Scotus, the universe was so wondrous as to be compared to a beautiful canticle, a symphony of joy and harmony.





I arise today:  
in vast might, invocation  
of the Trinity,  
belief in a Threeness  
confession of Oneness  
meeting in the Creator.

I arise today:  
might of Heaven  
brightness of Sun  
whiteness of Snow  
splendour of Fire  
speed of Light  
swiftness of Wind  
depth of Sea  
stability of Earth  
firmness of Rock.

Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ under me,  
Christ over me,  
Christ to right of me,  
Christ to left of me,  
Christ in lying down,  
Christ in sitting,  
Christ in rising up,

Christ in the heart of  
every person, who may  
think of me!

Christ in the mouth of  
everyone, who may  
speak to me!

Christ in every eye, which  
may look on me!

Christ in every ear, which  
may hear me!

I arise today:  
in vast might, invocation  
of the Trinity  
belief in a Threeness  
confession of Oneness  
meeting in the Creator.

From  
'The Lorica of St Patrick'

## IS THERE HOPE?

Is there hope? The *Fourth Assessment* of the IPCC, published in May 2007, claims there is hope. The report argues that the world has the technology and wealth to act decisively to stop global warming. Extreme climate change can be avoided, but it is clear that if we are to act prudently, in the interests of future generations, serious and concerted action involving governments, businesses, scientists, theologians, inventors and all sectors of civil society must begin now.

It is clear from the *Fourth Assessment* report of the IPCC that we are at a critical moment in the history of our planet. The potential implications of climate change are such that it can be aptly described as a crisis. If this generation fails to tackle climate change, then it is unlikely that any future generation will be able to undo the damage. Every human being and every creature in successive generations will suffer. As Cardinal Seán Brady said in his Christmas message for 2007: 'Then there is the challenge of global warming and climate change. The future of children born in Bethlehem, Belfast, Dublin or Dubai this day is by no means certain unless we alter our behaviour towards the environment as a matter of urgency. The simplicity of the stable into which the Son of God was born should challenge

us all to a lifestyle which is more sustainable.'

Yet in the midst of this crisis there is also a wonderful opportunity. It is an opportunity to create a more just and sustainable world, to develop a more simple and balanced style of life. In short, it is an opportunity to become more Christ-like, especially in our attitude to the poor and to the goods of this earth.

Catholics can rejoice in the fact that the Holy See is taking a leadership role in promoting environmental awareness. Every Catholic institution, diocese, parish and school should follow this good example by measuring their current carbon footprint over coming months and then devising ways of reducing their use of carbon by a specific amount per annum.

The challenges posed by environmental sustainability and climate change also provide an opportunity to build a more peaceful, just and sustainable human society while, at the same time, protecting crucial ecosystems across the globe. It opens up the possibilities for bringing forth a new civilisation of love, based on solidarity, where the needs of others, especially the poor, are met and humanity develops a new love and respect for the earth and all the peoples of the earth.

If this happens, many of the changes will be positive. New

work opportunities will present themselves as we move from a carbon-intensive economy to a low carbon one. Ireland is ideally situated for researching, developing and implementing alternative sources of energy from wind, waves and the tidal movement of the sea.

Responding to climate change will also provide opportunities for working with other Christians and people of other faiths as we confront together a problem that will affect everyone, especially the poor.

However, time is running out. We need to act *now* for ourselves, for future generations and for the integrity of God's creation. We 'must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. [We] must above all protect mankind from self-destruction' (CV, n. 51).





God, our Creator,  
You have given us  
the earth,  
and the sky and the seas.

Show us the way  
to care for the earth,  
not just for today  
but for ages to come.  
Let no plan or work  
of ours damage  
or destroy  
the beauty  
of your creation.

Send forth your spirit  
to direct us,  
to care for the earth  
and all creation.  
Amen.

# Proclaiming this Message in Parishes

The primary objective of this pastoral letter is to reconnect us with our responsibilities as stewards of the earth, entrusted to us by our Creator. It is not enough to assume that climate justice is a matter for hierarchy or leaders alone. Instead, each parish and community of believers must own this injustice and play our part in prayer, solidarity and action towards a solution for the common good.

There are a number of ways in which we can integrate an environmental message into our parish, rituals and daily communal and personal lives. These might include setting up a group in the parish to study the bishops' pastoral reflection.

The following resources may be helpful:

✂ Trócaire has produced a pastoral resource to accompany this pastoral letter. For more information please see Trócaire's website for more stories and information on how climate change is already affecting some

of the world's poorest people ([www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)).

- ✂ Form a study group who, together, might pray and study resources such as this *Cry of the Earth* pastoral letter, the parish pastoral programme that supports it, as well as Pope Francis' new encyclical.
- ✂ Gather a group of like-minded people and set up a social justice group in your parish that would focus from time to time on environmental/ecological issues.
- ✂ Set up a social justice group in your diocese.
- ✂ Suggest that your local parish pastoral council should have an environmental officer as a permanent role on their committee.
- ✂ Hold a parish Novena/Mission during September/October focused upon the theme of 'Creation & Climate Justice'.
- ✂ Re-think how your parish might celebrate the theme of 'harvest' (include the voice of farmers and people overseas as an example, and consider how climate change is affecting their lives).



- ✂ Invite a local drama group or the family Mass group to act out the Creation Story for the whole community (Gn 1:1–2:4).
- ✂ Invite the local primary school to share their ‘green school’ story with the entire parish community and see what you can learn from them!
- ✂ Invite a speaker to your parish (Trócaire or other) to give an insight into the issues the world faces regarding climate change and how it is already having devastating impacts on some of the world’s poorest people.
- ✂ Host a film event or a series of movie nights focused upon environmental Issues.
- ✂ Host an environmental audit of your parish and surrounding areas and share this information with your community. Highlight the more pressing issues and set goals for the community to work towards.
- ✂ Work with your local town council to become a fair trade town and a more environmentally friendly place to live.
- ✂ Create an eco-space or a ‘Garden of Eden’ in your Parish where people might come to enjoy the beauty of nature and to contemplate on God’s creation.
- ✂ Passages of scripture for contemplation:
  - Colossians 1:16-17 – ‘For by him all things were created.’
  - John 1:3 – ‘Through him all things were made.’
  - Isaiah 43:20-21 – ‘The wild animals honour me.’
  - Job 12:7-10 – ‘Speak to the earth and it will teach you.’
  - Psalm 104 – ‘Send forth your Spirit O Lord and renew the face of the earth.’
  - Psalm 64 – ‘In you creation finds its joy.’







And God saw everything that God made,  
and behold, it was very good.

— GENESIS 1:30

