



To till and keep the garden of the world - The human meaning of ecology

Our relationship between humankind and nature was for a long time strongly influenced by the first biblical story of creation. There God gives Adam and Eve the mandate “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). This has encouraged “the unbridled exploitation of nature”.

Pope Francis emphasises God’s command in the second creation story “to work and keep” the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 2:15) In ‘Laudato Si’, he develops a new and profound theology of creation which looks at human beings as part of nature and as God’s responsible co-workers in creation. There can be no well-grounded ecology without a sound anthropology.

✿ We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us... The biblical texts...tell us **“to till and keep the garden of the world”** (Gen 2:15). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. (Laudato Si 67)

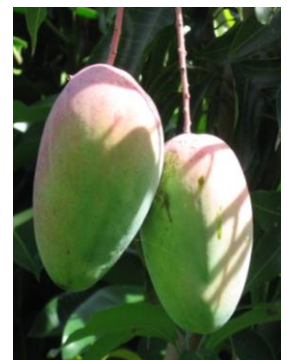
✿ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word ‘creation’ has a broader meaning than ‘nature’. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas **creation can only be understood as a gift** from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. (76) Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. (12)

✿ Many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of **cooperation with the Creator**. God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature. (80) The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. (233)

✿ If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind **the modern myth of unlimited material progress**. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power. (78)

✿ Modernity has been marked by an **excessive anthropocentrism** which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed **attention to reality and the limits it imposes**; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. (116)

✿ (The human being) is **not just something, but someone**... How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!... Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. (65)



Natural resources are there for us to use. But it is a moral obligation for everyone to leave natural resources in their condition. For instance, you are travelling through a bush area, you find scores and scores of fruit trees...you will eat what you need to eat. You leave the rest for others who are coming behind you.

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