Grade School Catechetical Material on Creation

OPENING

“God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good (Gen. 1:31)”.

We, Filipinos, can easily relate to the beauty of God’s creation. Our own national anthem describes our land as the “Pearl of the Orient”. Our country is also rich in natural resources. We have thousands of different animals and plants. One of the biggest eagles in the world, the Philippine Eagle, is found only in Eastern Luzon, Samar, Leyte, and Mindanao. The largest clam, tridacna gigas, which has the largest pearl inside was discovered here in our country. The smallest monkey on the face of the earth, the tarsier, can be seen in Bohol together with the unique beauty of the Chocolate Hills. And the smallest fish, pandacca pygmaea, is found in the province of Camarines, Sur. Tourists are attracted to the near perfect cone of Mayon Volcano in Albay, Bicol and furthermore, they become enchanted with the crystal beauty of the stalagmites and stalactites in the caves in Bicol, Palawan, and Surigao. Recently, the Tubbataha River in Palawan has been recognized as one of the natural wonders of the world. These beautiful settings have become tourist attractions. But now, the beauty and wonder of some of these are either being destroyed or are on the verge of destruction. If people remain reluctant and apathetic to confront the ongoing destruction of our environment, soon the beauty of our land will be seen and remembered only in postcards and paintings.

CONTEXT

Grade School pupils learn that in the beginning God created the world beautiful, God is the Creator of all things that exist. God blessed His creations, gave them purposes and meaning. It means that all of God’s creations have integrity and are interrelated with one another.

But the beauty of God’s creation in the beginning is no longer seen today as it was before. Grade School pupils are aware of the different environmental problems that we are facing today such as: the effects of typhoons, flash floods, air pollution, dried up and polluted rivers, illegal logging, kaingin, denuded forests, eroded hills and improper waste disposal. The pupils know that natural resources are gifts given to them for our own good. But, in spite of their awareness, it seems that these pupils fail to recognize that they also contribute to the continuous destruction of our natural resources. This is seen when they throw candy wrappers anywhere they want, destroy plants, treat animals cruelly, and waste paper, water, and energy.

This catechetical material is designed to challenge Grade School pupils to take an active role in the task of caring for the world, as stewards of God’s continuing work of creation. Stewardship is “not a license to misuse God’s creation, not to be an absolute master, but to be accountable to the Creator and Giver of all good things” (PCP II 324).

This material is divided into four parts: each part is grounded in Sacred Scriptures (Genesis 1:1-31) that will help the pupils understand their role as stewards of God’s creation. The first part focuses on God creating the heavens and the earth and all of creation (Gen. 1:1-25). This part explains that God is the Creator and he created everything good. Thus, all creation is dependent on God. The Canticle of the Sun by St. Francis best describes the interrelatedness of all of God’s creation.

The second part discusses how God created man and woman in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). Human beings are the center of God’s creation. They are created in his image and likeness and given the capacity to think and to love.

The third part speaks about God giving human beings dominion over creation (Gen.1:28). The word “dominion” should be taken as a responsible gratuitous act shared with us by God who alone has sovereignty over creation. Misconception about “dominion” will be addressed in the light of Christian Faith.

Finally, the last part is about how God looked at everything he had made and found it very good (Gen 1:31). God’s creation has unique value and importance. As part of this creation, human beings are challenged to continue to respond to the call of stewardship.

EXPOSITION

I. God created the heavens and the earth and all of creation (Gen. 1:1-25).

God creates the heavens and the earth and all of creation (Gen. 1:1-25). God is our loving Creator who creates everything out of his goodness and love. The birds in the sky, the flowers that bloom, the air that we breathe, the soil where some small creatures live, the sun that greets us in the morning and the stars that twinkle at night - all are manifestations of how wonderful and great our God is. He blesses them and gives them purpose, meaning and a role which means that each of them has integrity. This implies that each of God’s creation has intrinsic value and importance. “God called the light day and the darkness he called night” (Gen.1:5). He made the dry lands for the green vegetation so that it will bear seeds and every kind of fruit tree. The seas where we enjoy swimming, the mountains that we like to climb, the wild and tamed animals that have gone before us and those still with us – all are created by God. He keeps and sustains everything in existence. All of them are dependent on him. They have their dignity because God created them and they were beautiful in His sight “God saw how good it was” (Gen. 1:12,18, 21, 24) and blessed them (Gen. 1:22).

St. Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Ecology, by his words and deeds showed us how to care for creation and relate to it as someone who is part of God’s creation. In his beautiful prayer “Canticle of the Sun” he exclaimed the interrelatedness of creation:

The heavens are telling, the glory of God
And all creation is shouting for joy
Come dance in the forest, come play in the field
And sing; sing to the glory of the Lord
Sing to the sun the bringer of day
He carries the light and the Lord in his rays
The moon and the stars who light up our way unto your throne. 1

This Canticle expresses St. Francis’ love for all creatures. He regards all of creation as his brothers and sisters because they are all made by one Creator, God.

II. God created man and woman in his image and likeness. (Gen. 1:26-27)

God’s creation is centered on human beings. Among all of creation, only human beings are created in God’s image and likeness. God bestows in them the capacity to think and love, which mirror God. Using this capacity, human beings may come to the knowledge of God, offer him praise and worship and acknowledge his goodnes. They are the visible image of God among creation, made little less than a God (Ps 8:6). They are the crown of creation.

God was so delighted with his creation, especially with man and woman whom he loved so much. Yet, they disobeyed God’s command.

Sin separates man and woman from the Creator and their relationship with him. It distorts their dignity as created in his image and likeness. Sin also disfigured their relationship with the rest of

1 Song book, Celebrate and Sing, compiled by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary: Phil. Province, p. 39
God's creation. For example, as punishment for eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, the land is cursed (Gen. 3: 17). In the biblical story of Noah, the world is cleansed and many creatures are destroyed in the great flood because of the sinfulness of human beings (Gen. 7:22).

Today, creation continues to suffer because of human sinfulness although people seem to be unaware of what they have done and the consequences of their actions. For St. Paul, “Creation is also groaning for redemption” (Romans 8: 22).

God loves humans unconditionally, to the point of sending his only begotten Son to the world. Jesus, the God made human, is the perfect image of God. He is the Word incarnate. He assumed the fullness of our humanity becoming like us in all things except sin. Jesus is the new Adam who by his obedience and fidelity to God brings redemption to all (Rom 5:15). In Jesus Christ he reconciled us to God and one another (GS 22).

III. God gave man dominion over creation.

(1:28)

Man and woman who are made by God in his image and likeness are entrusted with great responsibility to steward his creation. He made them ruler and gave them dominion over his other works.

But this generosity and goodness of God to give humans dominion over creation has been greatly abused. Human beings have gravely misunderstood this privileged task shared to them by God. Dominium has been understood as imposing one’s personal will on others, ruling over the weak, and taking advantage of the poor. This understanding quickly results in the fast destruction of our environment and creation. For many people, dominion over creation means that other creatures are less significant and merely subject to their desires. They fail to recognize their intrinsic value and dignity that originate from the one Creator alone. Most of the time grade school students fail to see that they too are merely part of creation and that the one Lord and Ruler of all who has dominion over everything is God alone (Ps. 24:1).

Today we are challenged to look at what is happening to this beautiful world God has created for all, especially our mother land, the Philippines, the “Pearl of the Orient,” and reflect on how we have responded to the task given to us by God to have dominion over his works.

People’s misunderstanding of dominion as seen in their selfish possession of the material wealth of this world and using it to serve their selfish interest has severely affected our ecological system.

On a larger scale, waters are being contaminated, forests are made barren, air is being polluted, and different animals and plant species are fast reaching extinction because of the human destruction of their habitats.

Fostering new attitudes for children today

a. Preserving the natural wealth of this world

The lack of concern for and deep appreciation of the intrinsic dignity and importance of the environment manifests itself even in our young children. Many children are so exposed to consumerism. At a young age they begin to develop the mentality of accumulating things even if they are not essential. Many of them are spoiled to get what they want rather than their needs. There is a rush among many to get the latest toys and electronic gadgets that are shown in TV commercials and other advertisements. After gaining these new materials, most of the time the old ones are simply discarded and end up in the trash. It is so easy to dispose of things without the awareness and appreciation that all of them are created out of the natural wealth of this world. So disheartening to know that this kind of attitude is even reinforced by adults themselves. For instance, sometimes children are oriented to have the newest and latest things or materials that will be needed for school, even before the opening of the school year. There is a clamor from both parents and child that all the school materials should be brand new, disregarding the possibility to re-use, reduce and re-cycle. Both children and parents want new pants, new shoes, new bags, new uniforms, and many other things. Among young students there is a feeling of uneasiness in using old books, or broken re-usable crayons, or short pencils, not mindful that all of these materials are made by consuming the natural wealth of this world. For example, one medium-sized tree is needed to make two reams of bond paper.

b. Recognizing God in the natural beauty of his works.

Another challenge is how to cultivate in the minds of the young a love for nature and simplicity of lifestyle. Now, beauty in the young minds of children is seen and experienced by having the latest electronic gadgets. They see the beauty of new cars, architectural structures and buildings. Most of the time “awe” for the beauty of nature is not being experienced. People living in the rural areas abandon their land in exchange for the glamour of city life. The opportunity now to commune with nature is very minimal. Children today prefer to be in air-conditioned malls that consume a lot of energy for maintenance rather than to commune with nature. People invest in building commercial malls to gain profit, rather than in maintaining and building natural parks which are free for all.

Teaching children today to go back to nature and see God in nature is a big task for all, especially for catechists and religious educators.

The CBCP-NASSA (National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace) in their published, 2010 Alay Kapwa catechetical module on Citizenship Building and Solidarity towards a Culture of Peace and Integrity of Creation, called on every Filipino to a simpler lifestyle to manifest care for God’s creation.

Man’s lifestyle affects the environment. His desire for more and new things depletes the environment. Global disaster and climate change are forms of the environment’s wrath and these cannot be averted if there is no change in the luxurious lifestyle of the people and their abuse of the environment.

Environment is the source of support of living things, particularly human being. Man’s arbitrary use of the earth’s resources without restraint is a betrayal of his mission. Simplicity of lifestyle manifests love for the Creator and respect for the environment and fellow human beings who have equal rights to reap the fruits of the earth. We can establish a culture of peace and protect God’s creation if we stay simple.

Dominion should be understood in the context of love. God loves creation, blesses it and upon seeing the beauty of his work, declares that “It was good” (Gen 1:25). He is pleased to see his work and wills it to continue and be nurtured by people whom God endows with the capacity to love. He wills that they who are created in his likeness can see its beauty and praise it for its goodness and grandeur. God, upon seeing humans and all creation living in harmony and in union, saw them “very good” (Gen 1:31).

We are created in God’s image and likeness. God rules over us out of love and all of the laws of God reflect this message of love. God has dominion over us in love. Dominion over creation must be understood by us in the context and spirit of love.

2 CBCP-NASSA, “Citizenship Building and Solidarity towards a Culture of Peace and Integrity of Creation” (2010): 41
IV. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.
( Gen. 1:31)

These words from Genesis 1:31 tell us that everything God has made has an intrinsic value and importance. The harmony between God and creation pleases him. These words also reveal the meaning of what God has done. The heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the land and the sea, fish and birds, animals and humans — all are good. God’s wisdom and power are present in every aspect of the unfolding of creation (Proverbs 8:22-31). Creation manifests the greatness of God. God’s goodness is not just for human beings, but for all creation. We should appreciate the goodness of God’s creation and take care of it. This is our moral responsibility as caretakers of the environment.

All persons, then, are called to work with God in sustaining the beauty of creation. We must not forget that we are part of creation. Once we become irresponsible in our actions towards it, such as throwing garbage anywhere, consuming more energy, water, and our own resources, etc., these will also affect us. In reality, creation does not need us. It will continue to grow and multiply even without us. But without creation, we can’t exist.

Therefore, we are all asked to manage and to take good care of it. As responsible individuals, caring for the environment must be shown in our actions. These include proper waste disposal, garbage segregation, water and energy conservation, proper use of the resources of our world, observing cleanliness, planting trees, joining activities related to the preservation of our environment. Small acts of goodness to our environment will have a greater value not only for the preservation of God’s creation but also for us who are dependent on it.

INTEGRATION

Doctrinal: God is our loving Creator who creates everything good. All created things have purpose and meaning. God creates human beings in his image and likeness.

Moral: As God’s image and likeness, we are called to be responsible STEWARDS of God’s continuing work of creation. Being the stewards of God’s creation involves loving and taking good care of it. This includes proper waste disposal, garbage segregation, waste and energy conservation, proper use of resources, observing cleanliness, etc.

Worship: We praise and thank God for the beauty and goodness of his creation, as the Canticle of the Sun says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God”.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. Who is our Creator?
   Answer: God is our loving Creator who creates everything good out of his goodness and love.

2. How did God create us, human beings?
   Answer: God created us in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). He bestowed on us the capacity to think and love.

3. What is the unique responsibility that God has given to us as created in his image and likeness?
   Answer: The unique responsibility that God has given to us is to have dominion over creation.

4. How do some people today understand dominion?
   Answer: Dominion is often understood as imposing one’s personal will to others, ruling over the weak, taking advantage of the poor which results in the destruction of our environment and other creation.

5. What does God really mean when he said “have dominion over creation” (Gen. 1:26)?
   Answer: Dominion should be understood in the context of love. To have dominion then means that we, as created in the image and likeness of God and loved much by God, must be responsible stewards of creation.

6. What does responsible stewardship imply?
   Answer: Responsible stewardship implies that we are all called to manage, take good care of God’s creation.

7. As Grade School pupils, how can you become responsible stewards of God’s creation?
   Answer: Responsible stewardship can be shown in our actions, by proper ways of disposal, water and energy conservation, re-use, reduce, re-cycle of our things, contentment with what we have so we do not consume more than what we need, in other words, simplicity of lifestyle.

Sources:

Sacred Scripture:
Gen. 1:1-31, 2:3; Romans 1:20; 8:23-24

Church Teachings:
CFC@321-324, 341, 349, 1146
CBCP Pastoral Letter “What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?”
USCB “Renewing the Earth”
PCP II #324 “Integrity of Creation”
CBCP – NASSA “2010 Alay Kapwa”
“Canticle of the Sun” by St. Francis of Assisi

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