OPENING

What does taking care of the environment have to do with one’s relationship with God and others? In one way or another, this is the question that some of us are asking. Our Christian faith tells us that care for the environment is our response to the call to stewardship.

The growing number of ecological programs and activities such as Zero-Waste Management, Clean and Green, Reduce-Reuse-Recycle, Clean as You Go, clearly show people’s increasing awareness of the condition of the environment and the pressing concern to take care of it. However, in many instances, the need to take care of the environment is simply reduced to an ecological problem. Christians should deal with this issue not just as an environmental concern but as a moral obligation. This moral obligation is not just a social response to a pressing concern but a faith-response. By the very dignity of the human being created in the image and likeness of God, the Creator demands an active participation in his creative activity.

CONTEXT

We Filipinos are generally a clean people. Since childhood, we are taught and trained to keep ourselves clean. Our mothers educate us thoroughly in the proper way of keeping our bodies clean at all times. In school, we are also taught to value cleanliness in the classroom all the time. Even poor people in our society see to it that they are clean. They even go great distances to fetch water from a deep well just to be able to take a bath. At home, some of us are taught and trained to clean the house. It is a fact that we always maintain cleanliness at home and in our immediate surroundings. However, this concern for cleanliness is not extended to the outside surroundings. Garbage is thrown in the streets. Waste is dumped in rivers. Drainage is clogged. Canals are filled with stagnant water due to improper waste disposal. Air is polluted by factories and ill-maintained vehicles. Isn’t it ironic that we are so concerned with personal hygiene and cleanliness, yet we do not seem to care for our surroundings and the environment? This situation is also worsened by the consumeristic attitude of the Filipino people. Commercials and advertisements have been successful of making them to believe their wants as needs. People who have the means and ability consume more than their needs and wants. Adversely, the gap between the rich and the poor, powerful and weak widens. Obviously, the aggressive and persuasive, powerful and influential have the most of the resources while the less privileged compete among themselves for the remaining resources. The weak wanting to survive are easily tempted to use the natural resources in their own means and manner. More often than not, this leads to the abuse of the natural resources.

This catechetical material presents the teaching on the integrity of Creation as centered in the Triune God, creating, redeeming and sanctifying the world. The Father created all things on earth, uplifting the dignity of humans who share in God his image and likeness. He called them to be stewards of his creation, but sin continues to affect humankind. However, there is hope and meaning in the continuous struggle of being faithful stewards because the Risen Crucified Christ has redeemed the whole of creation. He sent the Holy Spirit, the love of God, to empower and inspire stewards to take care of creation. “The love of God has been poured out into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom: 5:5). The call to be stewards was a challenge yesterday, remains so today and will continue tomorrow.
EXPOSITION

I. CREATION

A. The goodness and beauty of creation

God created the world by his loving act. All that he created is good. “God looked at everything he had made and he found it very good” (Gen. 1:31). All that he made is beautiful. “How varied are your works, Lord! In wisdom you have wrought them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Look at the sea, great and wide! It teems with countless beings, living things both large and small” (Psalm 104:24-25). The psalmist cries out how everything exists with splendor and balance.

God gives life to all this good and delightful creation. He made and sustains it day by day, moment by moment. “When you hide your face, they are lost. When you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust from which they came.” Psalm 104:29-30 exclaims that God is the source of breath and life, and apart from him everything will perish.

We Filipinos also have reason to celebrate the wonder of God’s creation. Our country has majestic mountains covered with tropical rainforests; we have one of the longest coastlines in the world. Various tropical plants and trees and the rare and exotic animals are found only in our land. We have approximately 7,107 islands that manifest the beauty and richness of our country. We are indeed blessed to have all of these. We recognize and appreciate that they are from God.

B. Web of Life

The universe lives and abides forever; to meet each need, each creature is preserved. All of them differ one from another; Yet none of them has he made in vain (Sirach 42:24-25).

God is the Ultimate Source of everything. He made all creation and through him they continue to exist. “Yet for us there is one God, the Father from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6). All depend on God for their existence.

All created realities are finite and contingent. They depend greatly on God, the source of all, and on each other in order to survive. “We are fed by what the environment can offer. When we die, we decompose and become fertilizers and get mixed with the soil. We nurture the land and the waters, then we harvest the fruits of what we have sown. But when we destroy them, they cannot produce bountiful grains.”¹ The finitude and contingency of all reveal their interrelatedness to each other.

We have to live in relation with the rest of creation. The plants, animals, humans — everything that exists — are dependent on each other in one way or another. We are interdependent

¹ Nelia Balgoa & the ISA Editorial Team, Spirituality of Authentic Witnesses in Postmodern Asia (Quezon City: ISA Publications, 2007), 75.
beings. We live and abide forever to meet each other’s needs (Sirach 42:24). Our interdependency manifests our intrinsic value that we are all created by God with meaning and purpose. All of us differ from one another, yet none of us is made in vain (Sirach 42:24). As such, we are called to respect the whole of creation.

C. Subdue and Have Dominion: A Call to Stewardship

God created the world and saw it was good (Gen. 1:31). He commanded man and woman to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion” over it. For many people, the word “subdue” means to conquer and bring into subjection. In the same manner, the word “dominion” is understood to rule or control. However, these interpretations are sources of confusion for many people. They regard the commandment to “subdue and have dominion” as a license to freely do whatever they want with the environment. Many people think that humans “can take arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the earth did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray.”

The original meaning of “dominion over the whole creation” as intended by God does not connote exploitation or abuse. “It is meant rather in the sense of the other classic form of dominion, that of kingship. It means the full responsibility of the ruler for the welfare of the people and country entrusted to him.” Neither does to “subdue” the earth (Gen. 1:28) mean to misuse nature in any way.

God is a loving God who cares (1 Jn 4:8). He provides nourishment for the ravens when their young ones cry out to God, and when they rove abroad without food. Look at the birds in the sky, they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them (Matthew 6:26). These two accounts show how God cares for creation. He made man and woman in his image and likeness. He commanded them to cultivate and care for creation (Genesis 2:16). This is a call to responsibly care for and to be stewards of the whole of creation.

The Greek word oikonomos means ‘steward’ and oikonomia is stewardship. A “steward is one who is responsible for managing, planning and administering matters related to the oikos-household.” While for the ancient Jews creation is God’s dwelling place, the house of God. “How lovely is your dwelling place, Oh Lord of hosts!” (Psalm 84:2), the steward is called to manage, plan and administer God’s dwelling place.

In the house of God, all human beings are God’s stewards. All are “stewards on behalf of God who has entrusted creation and its resources for our wise management.” Thus, the human person “has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations.”

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5 Ibid.

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field (Psalm 8:5-7).

Psalm 8 is often misinterpreted in terms of the superiority of the human beings. Rather, this psalm highlights human beings as the center and crown of creation. It points to the greater responsibility that man and woman have toward the whole of creation since they are the only ones endowed with intellect and will. In this regard, John Paul II points out that, “God entrusted the whole of creation to the man and woman, and only then -- as we read -- could he rest ‘from all his work’ (Gen 2:3).”

However, nowadays, caring for the environment and joining ecology-related activities and programs are reduced to another class activity where people can learn about the environment. The truth is, to be a steward is a moral obligation that calls for personal commitment. It is a faith-experience which calls for a share of mutual respect and love. “Even men and women without any particular religious conviction, but with an acute sense of their responsibilities for the common good, recognize their obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment.”

This obligation to care for creation is rooted in the identity of human beings as created in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), “Human dignity and responsibility are inseparable.” “Thus, the special status of humankind as the image of God is a call to responsibility, not only in relation to other humans, but also to all of nature.”

As the image of the loving God, we are to act lovingly in the same way. It is in our very dignity as adopted sons and daughters of the Father through the Risen Crucified Christ to take responsibility for the whole of creation in the Spirit of Love. Having a heart which cares for the environment is part of who we are, of our dignity. We are all individuals capable of caring and loving for we come from one God who is love (1 Jn 4:8).

II. Creation and Redemption

9 Ibid., 17.
11 Bernhard Anderson, From Creation to New Creation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 130.
“For God so loved the world, He gave us His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16). God created the world out of love. He revealed himself and his plan of salvation. Sin enters in the history of humankind and destroys the harmony of the whole of creation. The Father sent his only Son to become human to redeem the world from the slavery of sin. Through the Risen Christ in the Spirit, he made all things new.

A. Personal and Social Sin

The reality of sin can enlighten us as to why, in spite of the fervent call by the Church for us to be stewards of God’s creation, the exploitation and misuse of the environment continue.

Sin “continues to have also other disastrous consequences, both within each human being and on the environment in which we live. Thus, not only do we experience a painful moral weakness in trying to do what our conscience tells us to be right (cf. Rom 7:13-15), but also a certain inclination to evil, which has traditionally been called concupiscence.”

Personal sin is the sin committed by every individual. It refers to the selfish and indifferent attitude that hinders one from being sensitive to the needs of others. There are people who are aware that improper disposal of their waste and garbage can worsen the problem of the environment and eventually affect others and themselves. Businesses related to logging, mining, fishing and converting agricultural lands to trade and commercial centers know that without proper regulation can lead to the abuse of the environment. But the selfish desire to gain more profit and become rich weakens the moral imperative to respect creation and promote the common good.

Social sin refers to the “situations and structures that attack basic human rights and dignity, and infect social relationships between communities.” Some of the common social sins are corruption, injustice, discrimination, and poverty. One of the social sins that greatly affects the environment is consumerism.

We Filipinos have come to think that to have a good, successful and happy life means we have to have everything whether or not we need it. This is the kind of mentality that consumerism wants us to have, a mindset that appears to be propagated by popular media. Because of this mindset, we end up buying more, consuming more and disposing more and more material things. This results in an increase of production in order to supply the continuous demand of the people. Consequently, as more people consume and production increases, more natural resources are processed for consumption. In this situation, people have the tendency to focus more on themselves, gratifying their insatiable wants even at the expense of others, especially the poor. The improper use of natural resources now leads to the lack of respect for the natural cycle of the environment.

The Catholic Bishops in the Philippines in their pastoral letter, “What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?,” stresses that

“Our country is now at a critical point in its history. All the living systems on land in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. The damage to date is extensive and, sad to say, it is often irreversible. Humans have forgotten to live peacefully

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13 CFC 789.
with other creatures. We have destroyed our habitat and hunted relentlessly. The poor are as disadvantaged as ever and the natural world has been grievously wounded. Through our thoughtlessness and greed we have sinned against God and His creation.  

B. Paschal Mystery in Creation  

God planned that all creation be ultimately transformed into a new creation. The sinfulness of humanity, however, significantly obstructs God’s plan for all of his creation. Selfishness, indifference and materialism seem to reign in the human hearts. God took the initiative to restore our relationship with Him and bring back the harmony of all creation. Through Jesus’ Paschal Mystery all now become “new creatures.” This “new creation” then involves the transformation, perfection, and glorification of every redeemed individual person, the whole human race, and the material cosmos as well. “This means that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new. All this has been done by God who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). “Through his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus has won for us sinners, that is, reconciled all with the Father.” As Jesus Christ stands between God and his creation, he wants us all to share in his divine life. “God grants man to participate in his being in and through Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus has accomplished this divine will for creation, being the union of God and man in himself.”  

C. Active Participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ  

The Risen Crucified Christ’s redemption of all of creation is more than just Jesus reconciling us with the Father in the Spirit. We have to take part in this redemptive act of the Risen Christ. Participating in the redemptive act of Christ involves personal conversion from our sins and a life of loving service to others. We need to change our attitude of individualism and recognize the call to collaborate with other people particularly in respecting the integrity of creation. The change in attitude from selfishness to generosity, from a self-centered to other-centered attitude will lead us to care and commit ourselves toward the loving service of others. With the interior presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are to develop a Christ-like attitude of how we treat each other and become effective stewards of God’s creation.  

The Holy Spirit inspires us to ongoing conversion, frees us from selfishness to the love of God, and empowers us to be responsible stewards of creation. It is one way of participating in the Paschal Mystery and authentically embracing new life in Christ. We need to see that all human activities are daily endangered by arrogance and an inordinate love for self but have been purified and perfected by the cross and resurrection of Christ.  

God creates us to “serve one another through love” (Gal 5:13). The love for others includes the need to respect all of God’s creatures. As redeemed by Christ and made a new creation by the Holy Spirit, “man can, indeed he must, love the things of God’s creation: it is from God that

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**CFC 2079.**

**Ibid., 580.**

**Chul Won Suh, The Creation and Mediatorship of Jesus Christ (Amsterdam,: Rodopi BV, 1982), 2-5.**
he has received them, and it is as flowing from God’s hand that he looks upon them and reveres them.”

This means as part of the new creation, all need to renew their relationship with God by restoring their relationship with one another and with the environment.

III. The Spirit’s Creative Activity

“By the Lord’s word the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Psalm 33:6). The world is created by God through the Word in the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father and the Son gives life to each and every creature. Their Spirit dwells in us as God promised us in the Old Testament: ”My Spirit continues in your midst” (Haggai 2:5).

A. The Spirit as Life and Breath

Genesis 1:2 states “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.”

The Holy Spirit is symbolized as the mighty wind that hovers over the waters on the chaotic earth, giving it life through God’s Word.

The Holy Spirit is the active presence of God. It comes from the Hebrew “ruah” which is sometimes translated ‘breath’. Job expresses “for the Spirit of God has made me, the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive” (33:4) The Spirit is the Breath of the Father and the Son that sustains the existence of all creation.

Genesis states: “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life and so man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Human beings come into existence because of the breath. This is true as well with the rest of creation. “When You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104: 29-30).

In the New Testament, Jesus himself attested, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (Jn 6:63). He also included in his teachings that unless we are born again in Spirit, no one can enter the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). The Holy Spirit is the source of life in the whole world; the energizing power of sustaining creation who breathes life into the emergence of bacteria, multicellular creatures, land animals, plants, hominids and modern humans. The Holy Spirit is creatively giving life, working the whole process of life giving, regenerating and sustaining life.

For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things for they are yours, O Lord. You who are the living God, for your immortal Spirit is in all things. (Wisdom 11:24 – 12:1)

\[18\] GS 37.

B. The Spirit of Love

The world came to exist because of God’s desire to communicate love. By the Spirit, God fills the universe with his loving self and where sin abounds, grace abounds all more (Rom 5:20).

Creation, then, springs from love. In this light, we Christians should see the presence of boundless love in creation. God loves each creature. Because of this love, the Spirit dwells in it; enabling it to exist within the community of creation – here and now, and promising its future.

In view of the Spirit’s work within nature, the Holy Spirit is the supreme ecologist, who has been sustaining life and giving love since the beginning, who forms and sustains the ecosystem which we inhabit. Therefore, ecology is a concern for this Spirit of Love, as it ought to be for us.

Since the Spirit dwells in every creature, this calls us to respect and care for all of creation – human and non-human. The world is the Holy Spirit’s “project” and our home.

C. The Spirit of Hope

God's Grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
crushed. Why do men then now not wreck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs --
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins(1844-1889), was a Jesuit priest and a leading Victorian poet of his time. In his poem “God’s Grandeur”, he presented the whole world as having been used improperly for human’s own growth, thus making it broken. This brokenness of the world and humanity makes people lose hope. They walk through their lives heavily, working and toiling without joy, gaining nothing, suffering from over - exhaustion and isolation from nature.

But the poem does not end there, it reveals something essential to us right now; it lies in the last two lines which say: Because the Holy Ghost over a bent, Word broods with warm breast with ah! bright wings. The Holy Spirit truly has given us hope, making us realize that this brokenness of the humanity and the world is not the end of everything. The sun may set in the West and darkness may come over the earth, but still, the next morning as the sun rises in the East there is a ray of
hope brought about by the bright wings. The Spirit of God, the giver of hope, opens our eyes to what is left of God’s magnificent creation.

Though we have stained and strained the world, God’s grandeur has never faded nor vanished. The reason for this is that the Father has sent his Son to walk on this earth and renewes the whole world with his Spirit.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to commit ourselves to be stewards of this world – the handicraft of God. Our call is here and now, with hope in our hearts brought about by the Holy Spirit indwelling in us. We should act and practice all that we know about preserving, conserving and taking care of the world entrusted to us as the crown of God’s creation is our participation in the work of the Spirit in the world today.

**INTEGRATION**

**Morals**

“We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion.”20 This we can do for we are filled with the Spirit of Love of the Father and the Son, empowering us to care for the environment. Even before God commanded us to “subdue and have dominion” over all creation, he had blessed us (Gen. 1:28). His guidance and inspiration remain in us.

**Worship**

“The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, ‘fruit of the earth,’ ‘fruit of the vine’ and ‘work of human hands.’21 Our offerings to God, signified with these words, are celebration of our mission as the sons and daughters of Him. For we are attesting that all of God’s creation comes to gather in front of the Almighty God who sustains all things and is calling us constantly to take part on working of our hands, participating in this divine work by developing the world entrusted to us as humans and offering every thanks and praise to God – joining the thanksgiving and self offering of Jesus our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What is the meaning and relevance of the whole of creation in the act of creating, redeeming and sanctifying of the Triune God? How does this truth help us grow and mature in faith?

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2. How is caring for creation not just an environmental activity but a faith-response?

3. How does every act of stewardship bring us into a more loving personal relationship with God and others?

4. How do the sacraments keep us grateful and appreciative of the beauty and goodness of God’s creation and committed to care for the environment?

Prepared by: The College Group: FIRE 2010
Joseph Legaspi, Jade Diaz, Martin Taganile Jr. Miguel Cariasso, Ferdinand Felicio