



天主教會台灣地區主教團
Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference

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Pastoral Letter of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference for 2016

**“Celebrating The Jubilee of Mercy -
Caring for Our Common Home”**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On December 8th, 2015 Pope Francis will inaugurate the “Jubilee Year of Mercy” and with a merciful heart will share his concern for our common home with the whole world. Because of the dangerous crises our common home is facing, he urgently appeals to all the people of this earth to start “a dialogue” with each other. We have to promote a dialogue between political leaders at an international level in order not to further aggravate the situation. Pope Francis in his Encyclical “*Laudato si*” speaks about the climate change, water, air and land pollution, which is causing the world’s ecology to deteriorate (cf. *Laudato si*, no. 2); he is in particular seriously concerned about our poor brothers and sisters who are most affected by this ecological change. We all have to undergo a thorough conversion with regard to the Earth’s ecosystem, only then can we change the critical ecological situation. (cf. *Laudato si*, no. 218)

“Praise be to You, Lord, for our Mother Earth!”

Saint Francis of Assisi said “Praise be to You, my Lord! These words from his famous Canticle in praise of creation continuously resound, they remind us that our common home can be seen as a sister with whom we share our life, and as a beautiful mother who stretches out her arms to embrace us: “Praise be to You, My Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.” Today, however, our Earth is recklessly depleted, wantonly plundered, so that we can no longer praise the Lord wholeheartedly for her because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of goods with which God has endowed her. Pope Francis said, “Our mother earth groans in travail through the cries of the most abandoned and

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maltreated of the poor. We have forgotten that we are not the owners of this earth and its resources, forgotten also that our very bodies are made up of her elements, that we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.” (*Laudato si*, no. 2)

God created all things, He saw that all he had created was very good (Gn 1, 31), and He created mankind according to His own image and likeness (Gn 1, 26). Therefore, He entrusted the responsibility for the earth to mankind: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living creatures that move on earth!” (Gn 1, 27-28). From this we can see that in God’s plan of creation, He wants mankind to take care of His creatures and so reflect his wisdom and beauty. But man in his pride considers himself their owner to deal with them as he pleases. In this way he no longer reflects the wisdom and beauty of the Creator and the earth can no longer sustain mankind.

Together Caring for Our Common Home

“Caring for Our Common Home” is the main theme of the Encyclical. Pope Francis earnestly appeals to all people on the earth, all mankind should unite to face the urgent challenge of protecting our common home, and work for a sustainable overall development because we know that things can be changed. Mankind can fall, but it also has the capacity to stand up again, our Creator certainly will not abandon us. The serious degradation of the entire world is not a natural phenomenon, it has happened because of the selfish behavior of mankind and, therefore, we are together responsible for our common home. The natural environment and man’s social environment always deteriorate together. Only if we realistically deal with the causes of this natural and social degradation, we will not be able to stop the continual worsening of our environment. In fact, the more the environment and the society worsen, it is the disadvantaged who will be the first to suffer.

Worship of Science Supersedes Human Dignity

In science and technology God has given mankind a wonderful creative power. However, the global economy, the information network and the political institutions put mankind almost totally under their control. In the face of such a tremendous force, mankind lacks the wisdom to clearly guide its course. The fact is that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well” because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility,

values and conscience. (cf. *Laudato si*, no. 105)

Technology helps mankind improve their living conditions, however, at the same time all of mankind and the whole world also have begun to be dominated by those who utilize technology and who control the economy. Those people who totally accept the scientific progress, and for whom reaping the greatest economic profit from it is all they want, they never consider that this could have a very negative impact on humanity. The liberal economic market does not guarantee that mankind can enjoy overall development and social inclusiveness. “Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. At the same time, we have “a sort of ‘super-development’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation”, while we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources.” (cf. *Laudato si*, no.109)

Extreme Consumerism Leading to Ecological Imbalances

Modern technology tends to develop all kinds of new products and through aggressive promotion entices peoples’ appetite to buy, so that the majority of the people unconsciously follow the current trends, become enslaved to material possessions, or even fall into the whirlpool of unrestrained consumerism, thinking that this is a normal way of living. However, this excessive wasteful consumerism, not only depletes our natural resources, but it also leads to ecological imbalances and to worldwide catastrophe. Amid this confusion, postmodern humanity has not yet achieved a new self-awareness capable of offering guidance and direction, and this lack of identity is a source of anxiety. We have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends. (cf. *Laudato si*, no. 203)

In the face of excessive consumerism, only a change in the lifestyle of the consumers can give political, economic and social leadership and bring about the essential changes. Through a mass movement of boycotting certain products, one can successfully pressure the producers to critically examine their ecological footprint and production process. Important is the awareness of the social responsibility of the consumers for the present deterioration of the environment. This will ask all of us to examine our lifestyle because “acquiring goods always is a moral action and not just an economic behavior.” (*Laudato si*, no. 206)

Ecological Conversion, Restoring our Beautiful Home

The rapid ecological change is nowadays a global problem, like climate change, the disappearance of animal diversity, human trafficking, abortion, the gap between rich and poor, social injustice, etc. Over the last 30 years Taiwan has made great progress in environmental protection: water conservation, decrease of air and land pollution, development of mass transit transportation, garbage separation and recycling of discarded material, etc. But there is still room for improvement, for instance, regarding the prevailing “throwaway culture”, when people continue to buy the latest electric gadgets, when they improperly use polluting air-conditioners and automobiles, when they gradually leave no space for wild animals and plants and so on. Pope Francis repeatedly appeals to us to undergo a deep conversion, starting in our everyday lives, namely changing our lifestyle. Only in this way can we overcome our unconscious selfishness and exploitation.

It must be said that some committed and pious Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive and choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. These people need an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. Taking social responsibility means protecting nature with concrete actions, and promoting justice for the poor. (cf. *Laudato si*, no. 217)

Inner and Outer Conversion, Beginning with Oneself

Conversion to concretely protect the environment can start from within the family and parish, and toward the outside around the neighborhood and in greater society.

Conversion within family and parish

Starting by changing details of our daily living, cherishing all created things and so become real “ecological citizens”. Always examining oneself in food, dress, housing and behavior, whether one has an attitude of care for the environment, like using environmental friendly tableware, low carbon foods and moderate eating, limited use of air-conditioning, using public transportation, separating and recycling garbage, collecting used clothes for re-distribution, using all occasions to raise awareness, for instance in sermons and catechism classes in order to provide knowledge of the ecological crisis and encourage people to practically protect the environment.

Conversion in action toward the outside

Actively participating in the environmental programs of the local authorities, taking part in the environmental activities, like cleaning up, health walks, listening to related talks, reading environmental news, adopting waste land, participating in small farmers activities, and perhaps buying produce from small farmers as possible ways of contributing to the common good. “Ecological conversion” needs even more a change of heart besides examining our personal lives. It means cultivating the evangelical spirit of caring for the earth, uniting with others in a common endeavor to imitate the magnanimity of Christ in sacrificing oneself for the world and to dedicate oneself to do good works.

Conversion asks for an “awakening of love”. The love of the Lord of life continually urges us to search for new roads to the future; God the Father, the ultimate origin of all creatures, unites us all with the whole of creation. Together with all creatures we form one life community. Converting to this life community can instill in us a greater creativity and fervor for solving our global problems, and enable us to offer ourselves to God as a “living sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable to God.” (Rm 12,1)

With a merciful heart and lovingly care for our common home, let us pray together:

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.

They came forth from your all-powerful hand;

They are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.

Through the intercession of Mary our Holy Mother,

Help us to protect life

And work for a better home,

Full of your mercy.

Praise be to You!

Amen.

Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference

2015, November 22

The 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Feast of Christ the King