

**Title:** Ten commandments for the environment  
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Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, has insisted on the importance of placing the view of nature within the context of the relationship between God and the human person.

Bishop Crepaldi defends that the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church steers a middle course between the twin errors of either seeing nature in absolute terms or reducing it to a mere instrument. Nature has been placed in the hands of mankind, but should be used responsibly and prudently.

The human person is unarguably superior to the rest of the created world, in virtue of possessing an immortal soul, Bishop Crepaldi said. Yet man does not have an absolute dominion over creation. Actions should be guided by a combination of conservation and development, and people should realize that the created goods of this world are destined for the use of all.

### **Responsible use**

Bishop Crepaldi summarizes the main points of the Church's teaching on ecological matters, basing himself on how the doctrine is presented in the social doctrine Compendium. The 10 guiding principles, or commandments, are as follows.

- 1) The Bible lays out the fundamental moral principles of how to affront the ecological question. The human person, made in God's image, is superior to all other earthly creatures, which should in turn be used responsibly. Christ's incarnation and his teachings testify to the value of nature: Nothing that exists in this world is outside the divine plan of creation and redemption.
- 2) The social teaching of the Church recalls two fundamental points. We should not reduce nature to a mere instrument to be manipulated and exploited. Nor should we make nature an absolute value, or put it above the dignity of the human person.
- 3) The question of the environment entails the whole planet, as it is a collective good. Our responsibility toward ecology extends to future generations.
- 4) It is necessary to confirm both the primacy of ethics and the rights of man over technology, thus preserving human dignity. The central point of reference for all scientific and technical applications must be respect for the human person, who in turn should treat the other created beings with respect.
- 5) Nature must not be regarded as a reality that is divine in itself; therefore, it is not removed from human action. It is, rather, a gift offered by our Creator to the human community, confided to human intelligence and moral responsibility. It follows, then, that it is not illicit to modify the ecosystem, so long as this is done within the context of a respect for its order and beauty, and taking into consideration the utility of every creature.

6) Ecological questions highlight the need to achieve a greater harmony both between measures designed to foment economic development and those directed to preserving the ecology, and between national and international policies. Economic development, moreover, needs to take into consideration the integrity and rhythm of nature, because natural resources are limited. And all economic activity that uses natural resources should also include the costs of safeguarding the environment into the calculations of the overall costs of its activity.

7) Concern for the environment means that we should actively work for the integral development of the poorest regions. The goods of this world have been created by God to be wisely used by all. These goods should be shared, in a just and charitable manner. The principle of the universal destiny of goods offers a fundamental orientation to deal with the complex relationship between ecology and poverty.

8) Collaboration, by means of worldwide agreements, backed up by international law, is necessary to protect the environment. Responsibility toward the environment needs to be implemented in an adequate way at the juridical level. These laws and agreements should be guided by the demands of the common good.

9) Lifestyles should be oriented according to the principles of sobriety, temperance and self-discipline, both at the personal and social levels. People need to escape from the consumer mentality and promote methods of production that respect the created order, as well as satisfying the basic needs of all. This change of lifestyle would be helped by a greater awareness of the interdependence between all the inhabitants of the earth.

10) A spiritual response must be given to environmental questions, inspired by the conviction that creation is a gift that God has placed in the hands of mankind, to be used responsibly and with loving care. People's fundamental orientation toward the created world should be one of gratitude and thankfulness. The world, in fact, leads people back to the mystery of God who has created it and continues to sustain it. If God is forgotten, nature is emptied of its deepest meaning and left impoverished.

If, instead, nature is rediscovered in its role as something created, mankind can establish with it a relationship that takes into account its symbolic and mystical dimensions. This would open for mankind a path toward God, creator of the heavens and the earth.