



The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

5727 Lockwood Road
Cheverly, Maryland 20785
301-322-1180

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org
info@catholicsandclimatechange.org

MEETING OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI WITH THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BOLZANO-BRESSANONE

Cathedral of Bressanone
Wednesday, 6 August 2008

Fr Karl Golser: Holy Father, my name is Karl Golser, I am a professor of moral theology here in Bressanone and also director of the Institute for Justice, Peace and the Preservation of the Creation; I am also a canon. I am pleased to recall the period in which I was able to work with you at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. As you know, the Catholic Church has deeply forged the history and culture of our Country. Today, however, we sometimes have the feeling that, as Church, we have somewhat retired to the sacristy. The declarations of the Papal Magisterium on the important social issues do not find the right response in parishes and ecclesial communities. Here in Alto Adige, for example, the authorities and many associations forcefully call attention to environmental problems and in particular to climate change. The principal arguments are the melting of glaciers, landslides in the mountains, the problems of the cost of energy, traffic, and the pollution of the atmosphere. There are many initiatives for safeguarding the environment. However, in the average awareness of our Christians, all this has very little to do with faith. What can we do to increase the sense of responsibility for Creation in the life of our Christian communities? What can we do in order to view Creation and Redemption as more closely united? How can we live a Christian lifestyle in an exemplary way that will endure? And how can we combine this with a quality of life that is attractive for all the people of our earth?

Pope Benedict XVI:

Thank you very much, dear Prof. Golser: you would certainly be far more able than I to answer these questions but I shall try just the same to say something. You have thus touched on the theme of Creation and Redemption and I think that this indissoluble bond should be given new prominence. In recent decades the doctrine of Creation had almost disappeared from theology, it was almost imperceptible. We are now aware of the damage that this has caused. The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur - as Creator and as Redeemer - we also diminish the value of the Redemption. Indeed, if God has no role in Creation, if he is relegated merely to a historical context, how can he truly understand the whole of our life? How will he be able to bring salvation to man in his entirety and to the world in its totality? This is why, for me, the renewal of the doctrine of Creation and a new understanding of the inseparability of Creation and Redemption are of supreme importance. We must recognize anew:

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he is the Creator Spiritus, the Reason that exists in the beginning, from which all things are born and of which our own reason is but a spark. And it is he, the Creator himself, who did and can enter into history and operate in it precisely because he is the God of the whole and not only of a part. If we recognize this it will obviously follow that the Redemption, being Christian, and simply Christian faith, also means responsibility always and everywhere with regard to Creation. Twenty-three years ago Christians were accused - I do not know if this accusation is still held - of being the ones truly responsible for the destruction of Creation because the words contained in Genesis - "subdue the earth" - were said to have led to that arrogance with regard to creation whose consequences we are reaping today.

I think we must learn again to understand this accusation in all its falsity: as long as the earth was seen as God's creation, the task of "subduing" it was never intended as an order to enslave it but rather as the task of being guardians of creation and developing its gifts; of actively collaborating in God's work ourselves, in the evolution that he ordered in the world so that the gifts of Creation might be appreciated rather than trampled upon and destroyed.

If we observe what came into being around monasteries, how in those places small paradises, oases of creation were and continue to be born, it becomes evident that these were not only words. Rather, wherever the Creator's Word was properly understood, wherever life was lived with the redeeming Creator, people strove to save creation and not to destroy it. Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans also fits into this context. It says that the whole of Creation has been groaning in travail because of the bondage to which it has been subjected, awaiting the revelation of God's sons: it will feel liberated when creatures, men and women who are children of God, treat it according to God's perspective. I believe that we can establish exactly this as a reality today. Creation is groaning - we perceive it, we almost hear it - and awaits human beings who will preserve it in accordance with God. The brutal consumption of Creation begins where God is not, where matter is henceforth only material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate demand, where the whole is merely our property and we consume it for ourselves alone. And the wasting of creation begins when we no longer recognize any need superior to our own, but see only ourselves. It begins when there is no longer any concept of life beyond death, where in this life we must grab hold of everything and possess life as intensely as possible, where we must possess all that is possible to possess.

I think, therefore, that true and effective initiatives to prevent the waste and destruction of Creation can be implemented and developed, understood and lived only where creation is considered as beginning with God; where life is considered as beginning with God and has greater dimensions - in responsibility before God - and one day will be given to us by God in fullness and never taken away from us: in giving life we receive it.

Thus, I believe we must strive with all the means we have to present faith in public, especially where a sensitivity for it already exists. And I think that the sensation that the world may be slipping away - because it is we ourselves who are chasing it away - and feeling oppressed by the problems of Creation, afford us a suitable opportunity in which our faith can speak publicly and make itself felt as a propositional initiative. Indeed, it is not merely a question of discovering technologies that prevent the damage, even though it is important to find alternative sources of energy, among other things. Yet, none of this will suffice unless we ourselves find a new way of

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living, a discipline of making sacrifices, a discipline of the recognition of others to whom creation belongs as much as it belongs to us who may more easily make use of it; a discipline of responsibility with regard to the future of others and to our own future, because it is a responsibility in the eyes of the One who is our Judge and as such is also Redeemer but, truly, also our Judge.

Consequently, I think in any case that the two dimensions - Creation and Redemption, earthly life and eternal life, responsibility for the Creation and responsibility for others and for the future - should be juxtaposed. I also think it is our task to intervene clearly and with determination on public opinion. To be heard, we must at the same time demonstrate by our own example, by our own way of life, that we are speaking of a message in which we ourselves believe and according to which it is possible to live. And let us ask the Lord to help us all to live out the faith and the responsibility of faith in such a way that our lifestyle becomes a testimony; and then to speak in such a way that our works may credibly convey faith as an orientation in our time.

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