

His Holiness Benedict XVI: Why do some call him the Green Pope?

By Cecilia Calvo and Dan Misleh

WASHINGTON, DC (April 9, 2008): Several important themes are emerging from Pope Benedict's teaching on the environment: urgency, threats to human life and dignity, and poverty.

Pope Benedict XVI is likely to address care for creation and the urgency of addressing climate change during his journey of hope to the United States.

Like Pope John Paul II before him, Pope Benedict calls us to care for creation to demonstrate respect for God the creator. In his [first homily](#) as pope, Benedict warned that today "the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction."

Pope Benedict is sometimes called the "Green Pope" because of his persistent calls for respect for all of creation. He is not embracing some new cause, but calling Catholics to recover and live out a duty anchored in Scripture, reflected in the lives of Francis and other saints, articulated in Catholic teaching and expressed in traditional virtues of prudence and sacrifice.

Action is Urgent

Pope Benedict has given concern for the environment new urgency and priority. In this year's [World Day of Peace Message](#), Pope Benedict XVI urges prudent action in the face of environmental challenges, with the "good of all as a constant guiding criterion" and with a special focus on the poor. Echoing his words to youth gathered in [Loreto last September](#), that action is needed "before it is too late" he states: "Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God..." (World Day of Peace, 2008, #7).

Care for Creation and Human Life and Dignity are Linked

Pope Benedict links the natural environment with human life and dignity. [Last year](#) he cautioned that "man can destroy the foundations of his existence, his earth" and therefore "can no longer simply do what we like or what seems useful and promising at the time with this earth of ours ... On the contrary, we must respect the inner laws of creation, of

this earth, we must learn these laws and obey these laws if we wish to survive.” He goes on to say that, “And if we must be obedient to the voice of the earth, this is even truer for the voice of human life. Not only must we care for the earth, we must respect the other, others: both the other as an individual person, as my neighbor, and others as communities who live in the world and have to live together.”

Focus on Poverty

Pope Benedict XVI warns that the poor and vulnerable—the ones least responsible for contributing to climate change—will likely suffer its worst consequences. If the protection of the environment involves costs, the pope insists, “they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations.” (World Day of Peace Message, 2008)

U.S. Catholic Leadership

Following the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI and drawing on their own statement, [*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*](#), the U.S. Catholic Bishops are offering a distinctive, authentic and constructive contribution to climate change discussions and public policy decisions. Working with [interfaith partners](#) and the [Catholic Coalition on Climate Change](#), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is [cautioning policy makers](#) that climate change and other environmental threats disproportionately hurt the poor and working to insure that public policy responses to these threats do not further harm the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world.

Benedict’s [Apostolic Journey](#) brings a pastor, teacher and leader who reminds us that the Earth is not for us to exploit, but “the Earth is the Lord’s.” Creation is God’s gift and care for creation is a religious duty and a test of our faith. This is a message of genuine hope for all of us and for the planet we share.

We urge you to share your thoughts on the Holy Father’s visit and his teachings about the environment. [Go to our Blog](#).

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