

Why I Am Catholic

Our concern extends beyond the human family and we see the relationship of all creation.

Each of us is called to move beyond a focus on ourselves to a focus on others; to have a concern for the common good. Most people think the "common good" is what is good for all humans. In reality, the "common good" is what is good for all of creation. Because, if it is not good for nature; it is not good for us. If the life of nature is threatened than eventually our lives are threatened.

A short term, short-sighted solution may come back and bite us. Nature does not have an infinite ability to recover from damage. It is just as fragile as we are. And all of creation is interconnected and intertwined. What happens in the rain forests will eventually affect us. A hurricane in south Texas affects us (*see gas crunch*). If one camp fire is not put out, it could destroy acres and miles of forests, animals, homes, and people.

In November 1991, the U.S. bishops released a pastoral statement, "Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching."

They remind us, that in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, "the pope insists that the state has the task of providing 'for the defense and preservation of common good such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces.'" (no. 40) "God has given the fruit of the earth to sustain the entire human family 'without excluding or favoring anyone'. . . Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family."

In October 1991, Pope John Paul II addressed a gathering "for the presentation of the Second Edition of the St. Francis 'Canticle of the Creatures' International Award for the Environment." "The goods of the earth, which in the divine plan should be a common patrimony, often risk becoming the monopoly of a few who often spoil it and, sometimes, destroy it, thereby creating a loss for all humanity."

The U.S. bishops call us to greater awareness. "We ask the *members of our Church* to examine our lifestyles, behaviors, and policies-individually and institutionally-to see how we contribute to the destruction or neglect of the environment and how we might assist in its protection and restoration. . . *As citizens*, each of us needs to participate in this debate over how our nation best protects our ecological heritage, limits pollution, allocates environmental costs, and plans for the future. We need to use our voices and votes to shape a nation more committed to the universal common good and an ethic of environmental solidarity."