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ETHICS IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES



SEAL OF THE GUBBIO CUSTODIA (14th-15th century)
Gubbio, Convent of S. Francesco
(Photo by Gavirati)

INTERNATIONAL "TERRA MATER" SEMINAR

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ETHICS IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES



1 • On the occasion of the United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) - Brasil, June 1992 - those who participate in the third International "Terra Mater" Seminar - representatives of the Franciscan Orders and of Associated Environmentalists, exponents of various cultures and religions, scientists and political workers - send to all men of goodwill a message of hope in the Spirit of the "Gubbio Document 1982" developed on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of Francis of Assisi, and of the document "Gubbio 1987: Towards the Third Millennium".

2 • The requirements of the appeal arise from a double certainty: on

the one hand there are seen attitudes opposed to the ethics which produce effects which are destructive of the environment and of man; on the other hand it shows signs of a new consciousness which is not overcome by catastrophic vision, but gives rise to and can turn to account germs of hope.

3 • These are the germs which must prevail, so that every man can reacquire an awareness of his role and of the dignity which is his due as the guardian and faithful keeper of the treasures of mother earth.

4 • On the other hand, the disturbing progression by which the environmental balances in the world are broken and the degradations which are consequent on that, make urgent the adoption of strategies which are capable of resolving the problems created by a disordered and dissipating development.

5 • Given a correct and loving agreement among men, which is extended to include all living species, humanity can find the resources and impulse to develop a sustainable and progressive uplifting. There will be opened then, the hope of a better tomorrow and with that, redemption from a type of precarious and confused life.

6 • The foundation of the message of "Terra Mater" is the franciscan thought which, from the experience of one who has a link with creation, has discovered again the original and necessary balance between man and nature. By reason of the recovery of his position and his role at the inside of created things, man arrives at the real understanding of himself. Immersed in an attitude of contemplation and of respect, man finds again the wonder and the joy of life. This makes him overcome the isolation and the feeling of being closed in on himself.

7 • The feeling of universal brotherhood which embraces all men and all creatures becomes a sharing and a continual search through dialogue. Thus, in place of diffidence and fear there can come confidence in confronting all the authentic traditions, cultural and religious, which become resources for reciprocal enrichment. It is only through discussion or dialogue that confidence in science and technology can arise in a critical confrontation.

8 • This new agreement can only be based on a profound change rooted in a true interior conversion which will permit man to renounce all pretence of possession, understood as dominion over the world, over all things and above all over beings which enjoy the gift of life.

9 • In this light, the moderation witnessed to by Francis becomes a sign of freedom and an expression of the need for a new balance in relations with the world, and a safeguard in those situations of poverty and misery which are the result of the dominant economic models.

10 • Conversion signifies change - personal change - and also a going against the current. For this great courage and hope are needed and must be supported by a deep conviction in order to follow a path which is not that normally offered by models of the actual society.

11 • Recognising himself as a creature among creatures, man can make authentic progress as regard the beauty and integrity of created things.

12 • A new link with all created beings will bring man to a true recognition of the rights whose exercise and guardianship have been entrusted to him. This recognition has, up till now, been obscured. This holds good always and everywhere, when people affirm the social, political and religious freedoms which are the basis of a civil and viable society as well as the

recognition of the interdependence of all living beings, according to the vision of St. Francis.

The participants in the third "Terra Mater" Seminar forcefully affirm the right of every creature to enjoy an environment which is sane and healthy and exhorts governments and other responsible organisations to retain in the new "Earth Charter" the principles of the "Gubbio Document 1982" and to update the existing charters of fundamental ecological rights and principles.

13 • Given the responsibility of man his relations to the ecosystem, all should feel obliged to better the conditions of life as far as possible, taking into account the requirements of other living beings. In order to safeguard the quality of life and the conservation of the environment and of natural resources, it is essential that a new link be established between science, technique, productive systems on the one hand, and ethical, cultural and religious systems on the other.

14 • The ethic of respect for nature requires that moral consideration is given to the good of every creature. To have power over living beings does not give licence to do whatever one wishes, nor does it mean that there are no moral limits to the exercise of that power.

15 • From the power over the ecosystem responsibilities arise: man must keep in mind the consequences of his actions. Towards this end are required a strength of reason and imagination which includes foreseeing for a long time ahead, the effects of human operations on the planetary system, on future generations and on other species.

16 • Only by rigorously respecting the interests of future generations of all the human family and of other species, can one base the concept of the quality of life and place it in the context of an environmental ethic reasonably founded as an ethic of responsibility.

17 • While research is free, its applications meet ethical limits as regards the human person, his dignity and the preservation of environmental conditions apt to guarantee the various forms of animal and vegetable life.

18 • The mythical illusion of an all-powerful science ought to leave room for a science of stability which would help man to fit into the great cycles of nature in ways that are not destructive.

19 • The correct use of science does not consist in dominating nature, but in living in harmony with it, keeping in mind that dynamics of production are not always in harmony with dynamics of biology.

20 • Research, however, ought to come up with concrete strategies. It is necessary to define a global strategy for the environment, establishing among the many imaginable and possible initiatives an order of priority, the means of approach and the means to adopt, a logical sequence with which to hold on to a reality from which one sets out so as to give the greatest probability of arriving at the wished for final end.

21 • A well-ordered political structure requires an international organisation to safeguard the essential environmental treasures. Especially such treasures, which do not have frontiers, if used improperly, may generate destructive effects which do not know geopolitical limits.

22 • The service of truth is an ethical and social duty for one who works in the scientific and technico-professional fields: the Seminar "Terra Mater" recommends the comparison of opinions and its publicity as the most efficacious form to verify and direct the decisions of civil and political societies.

23 • The process of growth of civil society and the affirmation of its values is confided to younger generations and to those in future who shall have and have now, the competence of bringing about conditions of life in which, given the contradictions and difficulties of different peoples and cultures, of all living things, we will have had the possibility of being and expressing ourselves in harmony with the environment, with others and with oneself.

24 • The education to this complexity understood as a systemic vision of reality whether in its scientific and ecological aspect or in the ethical and behavioural aspect, ought to be the basis of formation, even scholastic, of a culture inspired by a new worldwide humanism. Therefore, it is necessary to have a total change of perspective, namely, the universe or better the Earth, as a base for education for the formation of a responsible human conscience.

25 • The countries of the whole world must use cultural energies and financial resources in the field of education as regards the environment. This is to be directed to everybody at all times, but in particular, to students of every class and grade. This will be the most efficacious way to realise the message of faith and hope launched by "Terra Mater" for the future of humanity.

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