

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUMAN BEINGS TO NATURE



The Dominican Episcopal Conference



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Introduction

1. On the 10th of August of 1982 on the eve of the installation of the new government, we said very clearly, "We can no longer fail to concern ourselves with the preservation and betterment of the environment in which we live. No ecological imbalance comes about by itself. The sin of humanity against nature always has its repercussions against humanity itself. The destruction of our forests, without an effective reforestation, is already bringing with it dire consequences for our rivers, our lands, and our climate. It is urgent, then, that there be a well planned and demanding policy concerning this serious national problem" (Pastoral Letter, August 10, 1982, no. 3). The situation has not only not improved but has actually grown worse and more serious.

2. Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) says: "Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian,' and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer.'"

3. In the Dominican Republic this is not a danger that one needs to conjure up, but rather a sad reality that must be faced and drastically remedied. We find ourselves obliged to no longer postpone a promise we made sometime ago of writing of the relationship between the human person and nature, that is to say, about the national ecological problems as they actually exist today.

4. It is heartening that in recent times there have been numerous voices speaking out to draw attention to this most serious problem and to call upon everyone to assume their responsibility and to act as a united force. Voices of experts in this matter; voices of serious and conscientious persons; the angry and indignant voices of those who have been daily witnesses and have seen with their own eyes concrete crimes against nature in the very places where they have been perpetrated.

5. In the midst of these voices there has been a consensus on five points that we would like to emphasize:

- Ecological problems instead of getting better have worsened.
- The determining factor in this situation is the impunity with which the offenders have worked against nature.
- Another serious factor is the situation of poverty of many Dominicans which all but forces them to destroy nature.
- There is a need for the establishment of a high ranking office that will have authority to legislate, coordinate, and direct.
- And, above all, there is a real need for a national policy that would permit the allocation of priority funds, human resources, resolutions, and actions both legal and educational that favor this basic element of our existence, the physical environment of our nation.

6. It gives us great satisfaction and hope to see the growing consciousness of our ecological problem and the sincere preoccupation of many as well as certain concrete initiatives that are now being taken and which are being carried out amidst difficulties of every kind, and in which Church personnel is also involved.

7. Undoubtedly, when speaking on this theme, the scientific and technical aspect is most important. We bishops are not experts in this field, although it interests us greatly and we must concern ourselves with it. But together with this double aspect, there is the moral and ethical dimension of the problem that clearly enters into our mission and function. It is this aspect which we would like to develop.

I. The Disturbing and Dangerous National Reality

Land

8. There are many among us who constantly say that we are a country that is greatly endowed agriculturally. The truth is something quite different, and all of us Dominicans ought to be very aware of this.

9. According to the statistics given us by the technicians, less than 13 percent of our country is made up of arable land; another 8 percent could be cultivated, but subject to serious limitations that would require very skillful and specialized management. About 25 percent is land good only for pasture, and a little more than half the country's land is adequate only for forests. We realize also that much of our farmland remains dry awaiting a good system of irrigation.

10. The country has a population of nearly 125 inhabitants per square kilometer and about half of these live in the rural areas.

11. These figures indicate that land is a very limited resource if we are to feed our population and provide productive work for so many Dominicans who live in the rural areas. Consequently, land is a resource that must be used with the greatest possible wisdom in order to extract from it what our people need both for now as well as for the future.

Forest

12. The experts tell us that of the 53 percent of our lands classified as apt for forests and necessary in order to protect our water resources, only about 14 percent remains today as jungle.

13. The destructive action of deforestation has extended to the Jose del Carmen Ramirez Park, the East Park, the Sierra de Neiba, to the Sierra de Bahoruco, to the Haitises and only with great difficulty have they managed to arrest this in the vital J. Armando Bermudez Park in the northern sector of the Cordillera Central. There is

an urgent need for reforestation in order to stop the soil erosion, to provide firewood for cooking, to reduce the price of imported wood, and to protect our waterways.

14. The farmers who "slash and burn," the charcoal makers, and other unscrupulous people have destroyed our forests, thus exposing our major waterways to the sun, leaving the soil seriously eroded and a prey to further erosion, drying up streams and reducing the flow of rivers at an alarming rate. Of course, the damage done to dams is incalculable. In this way we have wasted our irreplaceable resources, such as reservoirs, and have ruined our hydroelectric future and hindered the reclamation of extensive areas for future agricultural production through irrigation.

15. Without putting aside our preoccupation with our marine resources, now besieged by contamination and uncontrolled fishing, and without ignoring the pollution of the atmosphere caused by heavy industry, mining, and the abuse of pesticides and insecticides, we understand that all these environmental problems of deforestation and the destruction of the land through erosion, with the constant threat to our water supply are the most urgent. Land and water are the principal mainstays of our natural life both now and in the future.

16. This situation not only threatens the possibility of the life of future generations to whom we would be bequeathing a desert as their inheritance, but it also jeopardizes any hope of using water through the construction of dams and canals to produce electrical energy so that our people might live a fairly civilized existence as well as to irrigate the land in the arid valleys so that we could produce food and other necessities, thus solving the problem of hunger among our people without having to resort to imports.

17. Human beings are born, grow, and develop within a system that is complex, closed, and interrelated. Nature is the home in which they live. They depend on her for their existence and the quality of their lives. In turn, nature depends on human beings who with their intelligence and capacity (both scientific and technical) must preserve, defend, better, and perfect it. In this system of many and varied interrelated levels, the breakdown of or interference with one of these has a negative repercussion on all.

18. The tragedy of such a system is that these interruptions and their chain reactions can be such that it becomes extremely difficult, if not even impossible, to preserve the human species in a given place. This does not refer, then, to the greater or lesser richness of the place, but rather to the quality of life, even of life itself.

19. This is already a reality in the Dominican Republic, a reality to which Paul VI adverted: "By reason of an irrational and inattentive exploitation of nature, man can destroy it and become a victim of his own depravity" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 21).

20. Leading the list of causes we find ourselves confronted with is an accelerated population growth accompanied by an ever-increasing demand for food, resources, and energy, a general indolence, a lack of adequate means, the desire for luxury at any cost, and the misery of the people in areas, who are the very ones among us who are causing the impairment of the environment in which they live, so much so that the necessary balance between human beings and nature, as well as nature itself, is seriously threatened.

21. Therefore, the problem of the land and the forests is not only a technical problem but also one which has profound social and moral implications.

22. In the impairment of our natural resources, specifically the deforestation and the severe erosion of our land, it is not the impoverished campesino who has the greatest fault. There has been a great lack of vision, control, constant vigilance, and responsible and effective planning on the part of public authority. There has been negligence, complicity, and greed in many of those whom they have put in charge of overseeing this. There has been unpardonable avarice and carelessness on the part of the landowners who are unbelievably insensitive to the ecological problems.

23. It is also true, however, that there has not been lacking among us an undiscerning rural people. In most cases, nevertheless, the lack of land and technical preparation for adequate agriculture, the absence of any assistance, and the inaccessibility of necessary credit, poor living conditions, the lack of basic necessities, in a word, misery, is what has driven them to marginal lands with no other option than to make intensive use of the land without any caution, which is destroying the vegetation as well as the very soil itself.

24. If it is so that in the past lumber dealers wasted with impunity almost all the wealth of our forests which in their turn protected our lands and soil; and if it is equally certain that even in more recent times Dominicans took advantage of their influential positions in order to continue destroying nature for their own benefits; it is also true that a larger number of our own Dominican people, among them the poorest in the country, live in the forests without any other means of survival than "slashing and burning" in order to eke out their precarious living and who in this way endanger both our ecological system and our future well-being.

Fauna

25. What we have said of the forests, water, and soil can be said also of our fauna, that is, our four-footed animals, the birds, and fishes.

26. There is within us a certain destructive instinct. Any bird that flies in the air or lands somewhere is immediately threatened. We kill for the pleasure of killing.

27. On the other hand, hunting seasons are not observed. There is not the slightest scruple about violating such laws, eliminating with impunity certain species without the slightest consideration, even during the mating season. There is great negligence and thoughtlessness.

28. Thus we have arrived at a point that, in a country of such little variety in its fauna, certain species have completely disappeared and others are in imminent danger of disappearing forever.

29. Based on all that has been said, it is evident that the *recuperation* and *protection* of all the resources described is an unavoidable obligation that can no longer be postponed.

II. God's Marvelous Design on Nature

God's Plan

30. God in his wisdom and power created—brought into existence out of nothing that previously existed—the universe, and within that universe the planet earth, according to the marvelous laws which he bestowed on this universe created by him.

31. We know that on the earth the Lord created the mineral world and life: both vegetal and animal and finally, human life. To human beings he gave intelligence, the capacity to love, certain skills, and free will, and he put them in charge over the earth.

32. To this “man”—to the whole of humanity—both present and yet to come, he gave as *common patrimony* the earth and all that it contains.

33. Given this patrimony of marvelous and at times most mysterious laws that include immense possibilities for the maintenance and betterment of the quality of human life through the combination of these laws, God gave humankind the task and the obligation to “rule and govern” the earth through science and technology and in this way make it ever more useful for the perfection of human beings and of society (cf. Gn 1:26-28; Ps 8:5-9).

34. Therefore, to use human intelligence and skills (science and technology) to destroy or to threaten the earth, or not to use them when difficulties or new and varied challenges arise, is a contradiction, an abuse of the divine plan, and an affront to the will of the Creator who is absolute Lord of the earth and of humankind.

Principles

35. There are various basic principles that stem from this plan and from which we derive fundamental moral imperatives that we would like to highlight:

- a) The earth with all its riches is the patrimony of humankind. It is an inheritance that we receive and which we must administer and distribute with justice and equity and which we must pass on to those who come after us, not in a deteriorated condition but rather in an improved state.
- b) The earth with all its riches is a challenge to the industriousness, the ability, and the intelligence of human beings taken both individually and socially.
- c) The destiny of the earth and all its riches is a universal one. The individual or group appropriation of any part of this patrimony is legitimate only if it is limited to means that are adequate for the fulfillment of the needs of an individual or a group or if it is used to bring about its true and effective fundamental universal destiny.
- d) Science and technology are the product and patrimony of humankind. Each of these, as important as they might be, is an integral part of the science and technology of humankind, which is always indebted to the achievements of others who have gone before us and to those working today. This social debt must be paid by respecting and bringing to fruition the social function of science, technology and all human effort.
- e) Human beings are only the users, administrators, perfecters and custodians of this common patrimony which is the earth and all its riches, functions which should be carried out with nobility and intelligence.
- f) Thus we read in the Book of Wisdom: *“O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who has made all things by your word, and by your wisdom has formed man to have dominion over the creatures you have made and rule the world in holiness and righteousness and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by your throne” (Wis 9:1-4).*

Nature demands from human beings wisdom, righteousness, justice and holiness and consequently forbids carelessness, ignorance, irrationality, avarice, exploitation, aggressiveness, perversity, and infidelity.

- g) God made the earth a paradise for humankind. Sin is what transformed this paradise into “cursed ground.” *“Because you have eaten of the forbidden tree,*

cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you.” (Genesis 3:17-18)

Morality and Ecology

36. In light of the above, the duties of human beings toward God and others include very serious obligations to nature on which we depend and which depends on us. These relationships of ourselves with nature and nature with us are not arbitrary, but are determined by God. The will of God is manifested to us in the very laws of nature and in Revelation. Of course, our relationship with nature also includes our relationship with others and with God.

37. From the principles set forth we derive a series of moral criteria for reflection and lines of action which we want to explicate:

Natural resources should never be exploited solely for the purpose of accumulating wealth rapidly, with a standard that might be called mining, without proper management and the replacement of the forests, but rather taking into consideration the needs of the whole human family both present and future. It is sad to say, but our forests, with rare exceptions, have been a typical example of this kind of abuse and depredation.

38. It is inadmissible that so many of our rural people, not having greater access to the land, find themselves permanently condemned to extreme poverty. This obliges them, on occasion, to a serious over-exploitation of the land causing deterioration and even complete destruction of the soil. Such destruction for want of arable land and the lack above all of the cultivation of the hillsides in the mountainous regions is as serious as the deforestation.

39. It is not just that those who have the highest incomes (countries, cities, groups, and individuals) tend to waste so much that, besides being an insult and a provocation to the poor, is a terrible misuse of natural resources so necessary for a dispossessed population.

40. Those who have power in society to set up guidelines for the use of natural resources cannot be influenced in their decisions by motives based on immediate economic and political benefits, without taking into account both the future and the generations to come.

41. Right ordering and the Common Good ought to lead us to establish and accept priorities in the limited resources at the disposition of the government at this time. Therefore, when reforestation is a serious national commitment, it is unjust and ab-

surd to complain and demand other works that, in the light of this national emergency, are quite secondary.

42. In the case of nonrenewable resources, the highly industrialized and developed countries may not exercise a sort of monopoly on the exploitation and use of these resources, without taking into account the present and future needs of the countries that are the suppliers of these resources. Nor can they, in their turn, for immediate economic motives, give away or misuse this present and future national patrimony.

43. Knowing that certain natural resources have taken millions of years to attain their present form, their extraction demands reflection and prudence, realizing that their re-formation will again need millions of years or perhaps will never again become available.

44. The income generated by these nonrenewable resources ought to be invested in such a way that these investments might be converted into permanent solutions to the inhuman and unjust poverty that exists and in a manner that will generate income in the future for generations to come who will not have the benefit of exploiting these resources.

45. A substantial part of the benefits derived from operations that upset the natural ecological balance ought to be used in recuperating this lost balance insofar as this is possible.

46. Renewable resources such as forests, land, and water, so necessary for life, ought to be used in such a way that respects their constant renovation and that might serve future generations to whom they also belong.

47. It is necessary to be vigilant and to employ suitable methods so that neither the overwhelming desire for wealth nor the immediate needs of the poor redound negatively on the conservation of our natural resources.

48. When there were certain elite groups who benefited greatly and irrationally from these renewable resources, it is unjust that the burden of replacing these resources fall on the poor.

49. It is so contrary to the plan of the Creator to waste or misuse natural resources, or to impede their rightful use, with certain guarantees, in order to satisfy the needs of an entire population.

50. The maintenance and defense of the necessary ecological balance is the moral obligation of all and not the exclusive function of the government. To abuse natural resources (trees, water, minerals . . .) is to act against nature, the human beings who need these resources, and God, the Creator both of nature and of human beings.

51. The most extraordinary scientific advances, the most spectacular technical feats, and the most prodigious economic growth will militate against human beings and nature if there is not at the same time a genuine moral and social progress among individuals and in society.

52. An ideology of work as an unlimited domination and exploitation of matter is false. The search for the maximum yield or production profits as an end in itself is wrong. The myth of efficiency without limits and of a hedonistic consumerism is a trap that leads to wasteful mismanagement. There is both a risk and a danger in the fascination with and idolizing of science and technology that are capable of increasing and transforming natural reserves, but which cannot create them.

Spirituality and Ecology

53. Christ to whom all things are subject and have been freed from the slavery of corruption (Rom 8:21), taught us during his earthly life to admire nature and to respect it; to use it well and enjoy it without spoiling or harming it; to be inspired by it and to love it.

54. In order to explain different aspects and conditions of the Reign of God that he had come to establish on the earth, he used as pedagogical examples certain realities such as the harvest, the drought, weeds, the mustard seed, the fig tree, the vine, the sun, the rain, the lilies of the field, the birds . . . (Mt 13:18-23; Mk 4:13-20; Lk 8:11-15; Mk 4:26-29; Mt 13:24-30; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19; Mt 5:45; Lk 12:27; Mt 6:28; Lk 12:4-7). He always liked to go to the mountain to recollect himself and to pray (Mt 17:1; Mk 6:45), and it was from the mountainside, with no roof except the blue sky, that he proclaimed the beatitudes to the world (Mt 5:3-13; Lk 6:17-20). After having called the first disciples (Lk 5:1-11; Mk 1:19-20), he returned once again to the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias or Lake Genesaret in order to preach, to perform miracles, and to rest (Mk 1:21-28; Mt 13:1-52; Mk 4:35-41; Jn 21:1-14).

55. The ongoing perfection of human nature includes the growing perfection of the natural environment of which human beings are, as we have said, custodians and faithful and intelligent administrators.

56. The sweet and charming Francis of Assisi, patron of ecologists, always called nature "sister." And he treated her like a sister. He says in his Cantic of Sister Sun:

*Blessed are you, my Lord, for our sister mother earth
which sustains and governs us
and produces different fruits
with colored flowers and herbs.*

Francis of Assisi is a loud and clear call to reconciliation not only to men and women among themselves, but also between them and all of nature. For this reason, he is an extraordinary model and current figure.

57. Ignatius of Loyola, loyal servant of the Church, liked to see God in nature: "looking"—he says—"how God lives in his creatures: in the elements giving being, in the plants growing, in the animals sensing and in humans giving them understanding. And so in me giving me being, animating, feeling and making me understand" (Spiritual Exercises, no. 235), presenting in this profound way the linkage of each one with all of nature.

III. The Urgent Need for Action

58. Everything we have said will simply be like words blowing in the wind if little or nothing is done. There is a great need for effective and coordinated action.

59. The measures taken, however, must be twofold: technical and ethical. Both are necessary. Neither of these is sufficient in itself.

60. We understand the difficulties involved in reforestation and the ordered use of our land due to the present state of deterioration, the chaos that prevails in this aspect of our material life, and the social structures that have brought about this chaotic situation.

61. Let us think of the wisest efforts to completely halt deforestation as the first of a series of measures in overcoming the serious problems of our national ecological deterioration.

62. We understand, nevertheless, what caused this, and we must take into account that different groups have a negative effect on our renewable resources. It is not right to judge them all equally. Each case requires special attention. Among these groups we would like to cite:

- a) Those who acquired their wealth through the destruction of nature.
- b) Those who take advantage of their position and influence look for ways to reap profits for themselves from nature at any cost.

- c) Those who destroy nature out of necessity, who have no other immediate option if they are not given to them.
- d) Those who, even though they might not be directly involved with these natural resources, depend nevertheless, in large measure, for their livelihood on these resources, such as poor who cook with charcoal and firewood.
- e) Groups of good faith who want to make a more productive use of the land through agriculture and lumber businesses that are beneficial to the country.

63. It would be unjust, in the name of assuring the physical survival of our nation, to treat all of these in the same manner. Of these, the campesino and the urban poor who depend on charcoal need special attention.

64. The margination of the campesino and his resultant poverty, the cause of many of our ecological problems, must be addressed simultaneously because it is not secondary to, but rather central to our ecological problem. The protection of nature is not an end in itself, but tends toward the balance of the relationship between the environment and humankind in order to bring about a more human world for all through a greater quality of nature.

65. Just as it is unacceptable to allow those engaged in the lumber business to continue their destructive ways, it would also be unacceptable to allow the poor campesino of the jungle to sink further into misery or those from the arid regions, to whom our society has left no other choice but nomadic agriculture or the burning and extraction of charcoal. It would be unacceptable also to cut the supply of the only fuel that the poor use to cook their food without first having sought an alternative solution.

66. It seems to us that some immediate steps that might complement the measures already taken against deforestation are the following:

- a) Continue a strict surveillance of the critical regions of our national territory.
- b) Organize, and this is indispensable, the production of charcoal in such a way that it might alleviate the situation of so many Dominicans who are indigent because they cannot find anything with which to cook their food, and which might also alleviate the situation of so many charcoal makers, who are amongst the poorest of our nation. This organization should be accomplished in such a way as to cause the least possible damage to our economic system, while actively looking for other alternative solutions that are more facile, viable, and economical.
- c) Take a census of the campesinos who live in the jungle areas and who are

most affected by the necessary restrictions on cutting down trees in these delicate areas, so as to begin the resettlement of these families on other lands or in another type of work by which they can earn a living.

- d) Examine the opinions of both national and foreign technicians as well as those of the campesinos from the jungles so that the confusion that seems to us to exist as regards the seriousness of the problem and the possible solutions thereof might be clarified.
- e) To restore the agricultural and tourism projects that might benefit the country and that might not adversely affect the economy.
- f) Allocate each year a good part of the national budget to reforestation.
- g) Not to forget to take into account the fruit trees in the reforestation project.

67. In a longer range plan, certain critical areas of reforestation must be looked at. According to the experts, we must reforest at least 600,000 hectares of the most important river banks, and preserve, among others, the two national parks of the Cordillera Central in order to assure the water needed by the nation. To do this over a prudent period of time demands the investment each year of amounts equivalent to one tenth of our national budget.

68. To prepare this work that can be delayed no longer, we would like to see a series of short term goals, among which we cite the following:

- a) To determine with both national and foreign technicians how each part of Dominican land should be used and revise our laws so that regulations legislating the adequate use of the land might be established independently of those who possess the land.
- b) To draw up a national plan for the reestablishment of the country's forests. This strategy as we understand it would be useless if it did not include the above measure, which would call for both specialized training of the Armed Forces and of the national police in this area and that the work of reforestation be a requisite for graduation at the secondary and university level.
- c) To design programs that would guarantee a way of life adequate for those who are actually obliged by their misery to live as pillagers.
- d) To educate the Dominican people in general about environmental matters by means of mass education as well as formalized education, insisting on the preparation of technicians and of campesinos who will dedicate their lives to agroforestral works.
- e) To encourage and take advantage of experiments that have been carried on in the nation to educate the campesino in matters related to agroforestral subjects.

69. As for nonrenewable resources, we are also concerned about the use that has been made of the benefits derived from our mines.

70. These mineral resources have been here for millions of years and belong to the present as well as the future generations of Dominicans.

71. Consequently, it is immoral that the benefits derived from these mineral resources should go principally to international companies, or that rulers should feel obligated to invest these benefits in current needs that have no priority. The extraction of these mineral resources is only justified if the profits are used for lasting investments so that future Dominicans might find a country where they might live and work as befits human beings.

72. The benefits derived from the extraction of nonrenewable natural resources can very well be reinvested, when they are over and above the needs of the moment, to cover the costs of the ecological recuperation of the country.

73. We are aware that the recuperation and the care of our natural resources is everyone's responsibility, but the government, as administrator of the state, has the obligation to orient and coordinate this great task and all citizens should understand this.

74. The state, as the representative also of future generations, must guarantee the use of natural resources in order to satisfy the present needs while taking into account the future generations.

75. We urge the strengthening of a high level department with real authority to animate, coordinate, reflect, and manage everything related to natural resources in their ecological dimension.

76. There is much that the Church can do in the moral sphere and in actual collaboration with technology in her promotional and assistance efforts, and from now on, faithful to a multisecular tradition, she commits herself to this.

77. Pastors, presidents of the assembly, ministers, laity, pastoral agents must stress the obligations of human persons to nature. Devise a special catechesis for this. Organize days of study and reflection. Creatively adapt the ancient Ember Days, today ferias, and organize special liturgical celebrations for such occasions as Arbor Day or at the beginning or the end of the harvest of a particular product (coffee, cocoa, sugar, tobacco, etc.). In your areas see that the people become aware of their sins against the

environment and against nature. Enthusiastically support any and all efforts in defense of and/or betterment of nature. Don't be afraid to suggest to us, for these ends, some kind of "lay ministry." There are, no doubt, places, for example, the parish and the communities, that are the ideal institutions to take charge of the local "tree farm" and "nursery" etc. in their zone.

78. We congratulate those pastors who are already developing initiatives and actions among their parishioners regarding the reforestation.

79. There are five Catholic radio stations in the country that exert a strong influence in the rural areas. They have justly earned the esteem and confidence of the campesinos. They are "Radio Santa Maria" in La Vega; "Radio Seibo" in el Seibo; "Radio Enriquillo" in Tamavo; "Radio Marien" in Dajabón; and "Radio ABC" in the capital. We ask them to make this cause their own. Join forces and together plan a variety of programs. Exhort, animate, inform, instruct, denounce all negative practices, propose others that are positive and necessary, support every advantageous initiative, collaborate with each other, and always be alert. There is a great deal that can be done in the area of ecology. Do it with enthusiasm and creativity.

80. We will see that the national Catholic weekly "Camino" supports this project. We will suggest that the other Catholic publications do likewise.

81. We will also publicly call upon Caritas Dominicana, a consciousness-raising promotional organization that assists the Church at the national level, and the various diocesan and parochial centers of human promotion to make the ecological problem in all its complexity an integral part of their plans and programs. We pledge our support and encouragement in this. The majority of these programs should be carried out in coordination with the pastors of the parishes.

82. Finally, we ask all Catholic colleges and the school system in general to include instruction on ecology from the very first years. Instill deeply in future generations a profound love and respect for nature and make them aware that morality extends also to this.

83. Let us conclude with some inspiring reflections from Ecclesiasticus:

"All things are the works of the Lord, for they are very good, and whatever he commands will be done in his time." At his word the waters stood in a heap, and the reservoirs of water at the word of his mouth. At his command what-

ever pleases him is done, and none can limit his saving power. The works of all flesh are before him, and nothing can be hid from his eyes. From everlasting to everlasting he beholds them and nothing is too marvelous in his sight. No one can say, "What is this?" "Why is that?" for everything has been created for its use (Eccl 39:16-21).

84. Finally, we wanted to write this pastoral letter on a subject that affects every Dominican, on the Feast of Our Lady of Altagracia, protectress of our nation. She has always effectively interceded in our favor before God. She has done so, above all, in moments of crisis and in times of difficult undertakings. We ask that, once again, she might extend her maternal protection and keep this work of the reforestation of our country under her protection and care, a task of utmost importance for the Dominican people.

Santo Domingo, January 21, 1987, Feast of the Virgin of Altagracia

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