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PAPAL PEACE DAY MESSAGE FOCUSES ON PLANET

Recalls Distinctiveness of Human Person Within Creation

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 15, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- As world leaders continue to hash out differences regarding climate change at a U.N. summit in Denmark, Benedict XVI's message for the Jan. 1 World Day of Peace was released today, affirming, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."

The Italian text of the Pope's annual message was published by the Holy See today, with an English translation forthcoming.

Cardinal Renato Martino, retired president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, presented the message today, saying the Holy Father made a deliberate decision to write on the theme of ecology, as 2010 is the 30th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's Easter proclamation of St. Francis as the patron saint of the environment.

In his message, Benedict XVI notes how "man's inhumanity to man" has caused "numerous threats to peace and to authentic and integral human development," including wars, terrorism and violations of human rights.

"Yet," the Pontiff continues, "no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect -- if not downright misuse -- of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us."

"Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?" Benedict XVI asks.

"Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of 'environmental refugees,' people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it? [...] Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?" He affirmed that all of these issues impact human rights, "such as the right to life, food, health and development."

Lifestyle change

Reaffirming an exhortation he's made on previous occasions, the Pope said that it is "more and more evident" that the degradation of the environment requires a re-examination of lifestyle.

He said the "prevailing models of consumption and production" are often "unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view."

And, the Holy Father asserted, the protection and care of the environment is everyone's responsibility -- and one that "knows no boundaries."

"In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity it is important for everyone to be committed at his or her proper level, working to overcome the prevalence of particular interests," he said.

Everything in its place

Benedict XVI did, however, raise a word of caution about "absolutizing nature."

While affirming the Church's "responsibility toward creation," he called for an "authentic 'human ecology.'"

He said that "a correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person."

"If the Church's magisterium expresses grave misgivings about notions of the environment inspired by eco-centrism and bio-centrism, it is because such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things," the Pontiff said. "In the name of a supposedly egalitarian vision of the 'dignity' of all living creatures, such notions end up abolishing the distinctiveness and superior role of human beings."

This leads to a "new pantheism tinged with neo-paganism," the Pope cautioned, "which would see the source of man's salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms."

Christian mission

Benedict XVI observed that the "quest for peace by people of good will surely would become easier if all acknowledge the indivisible relationship between God, human beings and the whole of creation."

He said that Christians have their own contribution to make in this endeavor, as they "contemplate the cosmos and its marvels in light of the creative work of the Father and the redemptive work of Christ."

But cultivating world peace, the Pope affirmed, also means protecting creation.

