



We Mercies

Care for Creation

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CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT PAPAL STATEMENTS



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In a recent article in *Eureka Street* magazine, Paul Collins reflects on the challenges Pope Francis faces as he prepares his forthcoming encyclical on the environment in time to influence the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris later this year.

Both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI – and already Pope Francis – have made progressive statements on the issue. However, Paul Collins points out two core issues still to be confronted, lest we continue to underestimate the magnitude and urgency of the environmental problems we face.

The first is our ingrained anthropocentrism. To be anthropocentric is to be focused on humankind and its needs to the exclusion of all other species. The earth exists for us and its total meaning is derived from us.

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Thomas Berry says that anthropocentrism is rooted in our failure to think of ourselves as a species, interconnected with and biologically interdependent on the rest of reality.

Given the immense age of the universe and the relatively very, very young age of homo sapiens, we alone cannot give meaning to creation.

The second core issue is that of population. This is a very delicate and difficult issue to discuss. Yet there is little question that the rapid growth of earth's human population puts enormous stress on the environment.

Paul Collins suggests that Pope Francis may find it helpful to bring into play the two virtues of humility and prudence if he decides to tackle these two issues.

Firstly, humility – the planet doesn't exist just for us; it has a *raison d'être* that far transcends us. The meaning of our existence is derived from the cosmos, not the other way around.

We are, therefore, under pressure to constrain our use of resources. Prudence demands that we act cautiously and make sure that all our actions are in accord with the natural law, the primary purpose of which, surely, is to protect nature.



MEASURE YOUR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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