

# THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

**Message on the Occasion of the World Tourism Day 2008  
(27 September)**

## ***Tourism – Responding to the Challenge of Climate Change***

Vatican City has become the first sovereign state to have zero carbon dioxide (Co<sub>2</sub>) emissions with the creation of a wood on land it owns in Hungary in 2007. This plan, aimed at regenerating vegetation, comprises a significant ecological commitment to our planet, from the Catholic Church at its highest. Further evidence of how vitally important this issue is for the Holy See is manifested in the solar energy project which will give Vatican City a quantity of daily energy equal to a considerable part of its total consumption. These two concrete examples, which should lead to reflection on the difficult ecological future ahead, regard changes to the climate of our planet, which is afflicted by deforestation and global warming.

1. In this respect, and turning to our specific theme, tourism is one of the agents of current climate change, as it contributes to the process of global warming (cf. the speech in March 2007 by the Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization). Indeed, taking into account that more than 900 million tourists are currently traveling abroad (a figure that is expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020), their journey by land, sea and air, using polluting fuel, and the air-conditioned hotels that accommodates them, cause emissions of harmful gases.

Obviously, it is not only a question of tourism, as many other activities produce pollution, global warming and subsequent degradation of the atmosphere, with negative repercussions on climate and the environment. Indeed, we can say that we have reached a precarious and tricky phase in the history of humanity, namely a crossroads. We are standing before the two proverbial roads of good and evil, as taught in the Bible (cf. Deuteronomy 30:15; 1 John 3:14).

Thus the text of Genesis regarding creation has perhaps been the source of inspiration of the treaties that govern the world, but this has been practically forgotten. This is borne out by the belated decisions of even the most advanced nations in the field of global ecology, as well as by the reluctance of those nations which hesitate to ratify

international protocols aimed at protecting the environment and reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

If, however, we were to listen to the Word of God in its truth, beauty and poetry (Genesis 1, 1-31), the universe would seem like an offering to be preserved, a gift, an Eden, in which everything is combined together in harmony and in the joy of living. The earth is a garden, a place in which creatures praise the love of Him who created them and where equilibrium is the norm, indeed the rapture of a luxuriant garden full of fruit, trees and life.

But where beauty once reigned, contemplated by its sacred and inspired Author, now the gate has opened to the regime of freedom, one without truth and love, and continues to remain open to horror and sin. Equilibrium has given way to disorder; peace has been attacked by violence, torture and war, after luxuriant vegetation come drought and disaster. The alteration of light and darkness that marked the rhythm between work and rest has been replaced by excess and the tempo of confusion and chaos. The place where a dialogue of love reigned between men and women in the peace of the senses has been invaded by sin, Adam's accusation of his wife Eve, enmity, fratricide and the deluge.

The garden has thus become a desert, the flowers have faded, and the waters have engulfed and destroyed everything in the path of the rising flood, whilst other obstacles have been built, bombs have formed craters, contemplation has turned into usurpation, dialogue has become an omnipotent monologue, brothers have enslaved brothers and people no longer find the tree of life in the Garden because they have tasted the fruit of the tree of good and evil.

2. So what road should we take towards ecological good so that we may tackle harmful climate change, this year's theme for World Tourism Day? The great challenge consists in overcoming a kind of insane narcissism, in fighting selfishness and looking clearly and honestly at the earth which is at risk of destruction. This certainly doesn't mean that we should allow ourselves to be overcome by disappointment. On the contrary, it means assuming our individual and collective responsibilities in order to recreate the harmony that is possible after original sin and let the planet follow its life cycle, and help it to do so. Specifically, this means making no further contributions to the increase in global warming, through deliberate or unconscious actions, which forebode premature ruin. Evil lies in the structures and things that accelerate pollution and not listening to our inner voice that cautions us to become aware of limits, and not assessing the decisions to be taken in a perspective of fraternity and merciful kindness towards the generations to come and common universal good, with an eye to the future. It is not right that human beings should bring about the end of the world and interrupt the flow of generations through negligence or as a result of selfish decisions and rampant consumerism, as if others and those who will follow us counted for nothing. Indeed, there is selfishness with regard to the future that is revealed in the lack of reflection and perspective, and in indolence and neglect.

3. So what is the appeal that starts right here, for the pastoral care of tourism, inspired by the theme proposed by the World Tourism Organization, which we wish to embrace? It entails the cultivation of the ethics of responsibility, by everyone – and for us in particular by tourists. This type of ethics also implies respect for the future and for ecological and climatic conditions aimed at making it possible.

Moreover, specifically, we hope that everyone will make a contribution, including tourists, to the cycle of the earth on which we live, so that they may pay attention to behaviors and concerted actions which are least harmful to our planet, above and beyond any compliant, albeit legitimate, regarding imbalance, damage and potential failure.

Through their attitudes, tourists – in whose service we offer specific pastoral care – can in fact contribute towards the preservation of life on our planet and slow down the process of climate change that is causing such alarm. Therefore, we must choose – we have still two roads ahead of us – between being tourists who are for or against the planet. Perhaps we can travel on foot, opt for hotels and hospitality facilities that are closer to nature, and carry fewer luggages, so that means of transport emit less carbon dioxide and rubbish is adequately disposed. We can also eat more “eco-friendly” meals, plant trees to neutralize the polluting effects of our journeys, choose local handicrafts rather than more costly and poisonous items and make use of recyclable and biodegradable materials. We should also respect local legislation and make the most of the culture of the places we visit.

We have gone to the heart of the matter, daring to put forward ideal proposals that perhaps are not those with which everyone agrees, and solutions aimed at doing less harm to nature, listening to the voice of Him who knocks at the door to encourage us to create new ways of implementation tourism, one which is also sustainable.

4. In line with this “ecological” logic, it is extremely important to return to a sense of limits, against mad progress at any cost, and escape the obsession to own and consume. The sense of limits is also fostered when we recognize the otherness of our fellow men and women, and the transcendence of the Creator with respect to his creatures. This comes about when we do not take the place of alongside us, and by granting to others the rights we claim for ourselves. This means opening ourselves up to the awareness of fraternity in a world of and for everyone, today and tomorrow.

Every human being –and even more Christians –should respond to the notion of a sustainable planet, and the quality of our earth which will be theirs for future generations, All tourists, as well as the entire international community, should therefore comply with and encourage a “green” culture that respects the environment, characterized –especially for us Christians –by ethical as well as moral values. The book of Genesis speaks of a God who appoints man as a steward of the earth, so that it may bear fruit, Our Muslim brothers see man as God’s “major-domo”.

When man forgets to be a faithful servant both of God and the earth, the earth rebels and becomes a desert that threatens the survival. Therefore, strong bonds must be created

between generations so that a future is possible , A joyous austerity needs to be developed ,by opting for things that are not transitory and perishable .We also need to foster charity towards earth, disarming the logic of death and encouraging love for this precious space that belongs to us all ,in the memory of the gift ,in the responsibility of every moment and in the constant service of fraternity, also taking into account those who will come after us. In this way a culture of responsible tourism will develop, including one which also has a regard to climate change.

This is our wish and hope, and what we are praying for in this year of grace 2008

+ Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino,President

+ Archbishop Agastino Marchetto,Secretary

From the Vatican, June 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

---