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New Hope for Creation

The Glasgow COP26 summit comes to an end and we wait and watch for outcomes that may generate some hope and some serious planning for the benefit of all God's creation. Much has been written about the hoped-for initiatives and the action or inaction of various governments. It is clear that urgent action is needed to restrain the rise of the earth's temperature. The implications of this endeavour impact on every person, creature and life-form.

Last weekend I baptised a beautiful baby girl. During the ceremony we reflected on what kind of world we are wanting to leave for her, her children and grand-children and the responsibility we must shoulder in shaping their future.

In order to make our own contribution to the future, it is timely that we pause and reflect on the relationship that we have as members of the human race with all other living beings.

Since late mediaeval times, the Church has considered the human person to be superior to the rest of creation. Misunderstanding the creation narrative in Genesis, we saw ourselves as having "dominion" over the rest of the world rather than "stewardship". Creatures were there to serve us and that was as far as our thinking went.

As recently as some of Pope Benedict's writings in 2010, talk of care for creation assumed that the purpose of caring for creation was for the benefit of humankind. "Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others". (World Day of Peace 2010). And again: "When human ecology is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits." (Caritas in Veritate).

Offering a change of perspective, Pope Francis in "Laudato Si" stressed the interconnectedness of Creation and Creator noting that all non-human creatures have within them "the Spirit of Life." In his encyclical, Francis recast the natural world as an expression of God's own self. No

longer did we stand in dominion above creation but rather are called into a “sublime communion” with all living things.

Francis urges us to see creation as God does, to suffer with it, to bring it healing when we can and to enjoy the fruits that the earth provides.

This emphasis that Francis offers us is true to our deeper tradition and to the tradition of the Scriptures. It is not something novel but is rather in step with the gospel which speaks of the gentle inheriting the earth because they are the ones who have respected and cared for creation.

As in all other matters, our attitudes and language shape and are in turn shaped by our actions. Once we adjust our way of thinking about creation, our behaviour will be sure to follow.

We can engage in this conversion without being caught up in the ideologies of the Right or the Left. The proponents of each extreme, urge action of one kind or other without allowing room for the heart to listen, respond and change. They are often as much about winning their argument and forcing change rather than attending to the deep conversion that real care for creation requires.

They resist or demand change as an end in itself and their weapons of choice are often anger, prejudice, name-calling and condemnation. We’ve seen plenty of this on display in the streets of Glasgow these past weeks. Thankfully, alongside them there have been measured, thoughtful demonstrations calling for the change of heart that real care for creation requires.

This summit is an opportunity for each of us to look carefully at our language, attitudes and behaviours, seeking the grace that may make some transformation possible in each of our hearts and families.

And so we pray with and for each other: “Send forth your Spirit O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.”

Father Kevin

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Some material sourced from an article by Austen Ivereigh, “The Pope Tells a New Story”, London Tablet, 6 November 2021