

Jesuit Responsibility for the Environment

A Survey

Uta Sievers, Social Justice Secretariat, 17 March 2009

[Annexes B and C \(Annex A can be found in the main document\)](#)

Annex B: Further suggestions

B1 – The term “Ecology”

Some have suggested being cautious in the use of the term ‘ecology’, which originally designates a branch of biology, and now is popularly used to mean a ‘environmentally friendly’ way of thinking, often with ideological undertones. Maybe we should use the term "natural environment" (and focus on the cultural, political, social and ethical aspects of our being rooted in this world), rather than "ecology", since we are generally looking for an ethical, political, social and cultural response to the problem (rather than a scientific or ideological one).

There is a need to spread awareness of different models being proposed for the care of the environment and for development: the maximalists insist on *conservation* at all costs, the minimalists speak of small acts of *protection* while ignoring the macro issues at global level, some promote *sustainable development* as a magical solution, using unrealistic models or avoiding concrete issues, others speak of *humanising the biosphere* insisting that the main issue is tackling poverty and hunger and that caring for the earth should be understood within the context of caring for people, not vice-versa. Each model has ethical and theological implications; hence, no model should be adopted naively no matter how fashionable it may seem at the moment. If we are to be consistent, we can only promote models that are compatible with our worldview; maybe we should venture as far as to propose new models that are rooted in our worldview.

B2 - Suggestions for additions to the text of GC35

1. More emphasis is needed on the inherent goodness of creation itself. Our focus is on preserving creation because it is useful to human beings. We must move beyond an anthropocentric approach and take a creation centred approach. Creation is valuable because it comes from God and not because it is useful to humans. We have to gradually move towards that vision wherein we will also see the plants and animals as our brothers and sisters.
2. A paradigm shift is required in our worldview (*3 contributors*). Even analyzing causes of poverty, ecological damage, etc. is not sufficient. Our present way of seeing, thinking and acting is based on a poor relationship with the Creator and Creation. We have to ask our universities to re-think through the various disciplines (economics, sciences, philosophy, theology, liberal arts, etc.). It is more than analyzing the causes of poverty and over-exploitation of the natural resources. It is the very philosophy, theology and spirituality that we have had of our relationship with creation that causes the problem of poor relationships with the earth.
3. Three dimensions of nurturing right relationships with creation, at the service of the poor:
4. Ecological/Environmental activism; Developing new structures to replace the old ones as they fall away; Birthing a revolutionary shift in consciousness (from economic, political, and religious people planetary people). Three dimensions of this new consciousness: realisation that human-human relationships are diminished as Earth-human relationships are deteriorating (a social justice issue); Divine-human relationships become less meaningful; both relationships are strengthened when Earth-human relationships are enhanced.

5. In the email, you say that “GC is telling us (Jesuits and partners in mission) that we need to *establish right relationships with creation, at the service of the poor*”. This working title, probably based in GC35, d.3, n.13, needs to be revised, according to one of the interviewees. All human persons are concerned by the imperative of establishing right relationships with creation; insofar as such relationships enable a global increase in social justice, poverty will diminish and hopefully disappear. A sustainable use of our resources may change the actual panorama radically. In some areas of the Third world (desertification in the Sahel, deforestation zones in the Andes and in the Tropics...), the poorest people have been pushed to exploit natural resources unsustainably, which in turn has worsened the economic and social situation of such persons. The phrase ‘at the service of the poor’ could be ambiguous,
 - a) since we are seeking to eradicate poverty, not to maintain it so as to be able to ‘serve the poor’;
 - b) since it may denote a naive anthropocentrism (if our relationship with creation is conditioned – in a simplistic way – by our relationship with the poor, we may end up allowing exploitation of nature, supposedly to reduce poverty and exploitation of people, but this backfires against people in the long term); and
 - c) since right relationships with creation (if we were to adopt a deep-seated anthropocentrism) must be at the service not of a particular group of persons (poor-rich, city dwellers-country dwellers, citizens of Northern or Southern countries...), but of humanity as a whole.
 - d) the discussion of the environment must also include the redistribution of wealth.
 - e) It must also include a discussion of the mutually reinforcing relationship between environmental degradation/destruction and military conflict.
6. We must always provide a consistent message of hope.

B3 – Detailed suggestions for practical action in communities

Also, see Annex C2 for practical action that is already being done in the Society.

1. Encourage Jesuit Communities, Institutions and Ministries to undergo any number of either free or contracted "Energy Audits" that are available in some countries. These audits can be invaluable in assisting communities and ministries in looking at several crucial areas including but not limited to: water use, energy use, waste streams, and most importantly creative approaches for new construction, new vehicles, and developing educational opportunities.
2. Do an “Environmental Impact Statement” (EIS) as is done for US Government projects - mining, logging, dam construction, etc. A simple example of how this could be used is when a community plans the construction of a new house or apostolate a new building. An environmental review would be conducted according to established criteria to assess the overall 'carbon footprint' and other environmental impacts of the project. Perhaps a committee comprised of Jesuits, architects, urban planners, ecologists, engineers, etc could be formed to develop this unique lens for our institutions to use when evaluating the 'environmental audit' for planned projects, based upon principles of sustainability stewardship.
3. Depending on the location and context, attempt to audit energy use, carbon gas output, food sources, and trash output. These items are critical areas, yet many Jesuits are not conscious of these aspects of daily life¹. Then let's set goals and try to meet them on an annual basis. One of these goals is to move closer to carbon-neutrality.
4. Encourage our institutions to apply for certification according to ecological standards, like some companies do – e.g. ISO 14001.

¹ The person suggesting this idea is speaking mostly from within his context, namely the U.S.

5. Educate in our schools and universities about energy audits, EISs, ecological standards - telling people and politicians that the multinational investors need to do them before embarking on big projects; training students to do such work.
6. Links to video-conferencing software: <http://www.vmukti.com/>, <http://www.voip-sol.com/7-leading-browser-based-video-conference-tools/>, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Web-Conferencing:-The-Advantages-of-a-Browser-Based-Online-Meeting-System&id=95112>

B4 – A reflection on visibility

by René Micallef SJ

Besides proposing concrete actions and structures, it is very important to reflect upon the ‘visibility’ of what we do in the field of environmentally-friendly lifestyles and institutions as well as eco-advocacy, education and transmission of information. This is not to be understood primarily as a PR exercise, whereby the Society “shows off its being ‘green’” to look good and modern; rather there is a prophetic dimension in declaring publicly that we would like to be more ‘ecologically-minded’ in all that we do as Society, that we are striving to do so in concrete ways, and that we would like to be accountable for our environmental practices in public. A company that boasts of its ISO 14001 certification seeks to attract customers, because it knows that most people are not indifferent to ecological issues. We should make our ecological credentials visible, however, not as a means to attract the faithful or as a ‘technique’ in vocations promotion, but as a form of advocacy within the Church and society, telling environmentally-conscious churchgoers and nonbelievers alike that the environment is not something that stands outside of our Christian living.

We, as Jesuits, care for the environment, because all Christians and all persons should do so; we make this ethical option even if it is costly and demanding, because everybody should; we would also like to be challenged when we fail, and praised when we succeed, because, whether we like it or not, people expect us to lead the way in ethical living. If businesses and corporations seeking little else but profit can excel in environmental credentials, then, we should fare even better, since we have a moral statement to make with our way of life, our way of doing things and managing institutions. Furthermore, we should encourage the faithful, the lay people, and all those who do their part in protecting the environment, by showing them that together with other ‘official Church bodies’ and ‘religious institutions’ we are walking that extra mile, just like the busy family that takes time to separate and recycle its waste and the business CEO who sacrifices profit to implement parts of the company’s eco-policies. Along with such people we can set an example, avoiding excuses typical of decision-making in the Church: “we cannot do anything...because we are poor... because we do not have time for this... because these are worldly concerns... because this is something that only big companies and diligent housewives do” etc.

Public ‘ecological’ commitments done on all levels (universal Society, provinces, institutions) could be more effective than all the suggestions in the current document in provoking our ecological conscience: if, say, a Jesuit NGO or province were to say publicly that within a given timeframe, it will recycle all its paper, reduce its carbon footprint, derive 35% of its energy from renewable resources, offset its air travel miles by planting trees or replace its fleet of cars with energy-efficient ones, then, the journalists and the public will be watching, and we will definitely have to do something, at least to ‘save face’. Furthermore, people will look up to us as ecologically-minded people, just as they see us today as credible defenders of human rights, and we will have a reputation to maintain. Surely, far beyond the minimal level of avoiding public ridicule or preserving a reputation, the Society will proactively allow an environmentally-conscious decision-making pattern to seep into our way of being and change our basic attitudes, shaping our self-image as persons and as a group. When ecology becomes part of our Jesuit identity, then we will think ‘green’ by default, not as an extra chore added to the bullet lists on our desktop.

Annex C: Other materials

C1 - Quotes from “ECOLOGY 1996”

---Our credibility today rests not so much in the systematic consistency of our language...as in the living consistency of our decisions, life style, relationships to people and nature, etc.

---In this sense this question of Ecology and our response or lack of it can very well REVEAL

-- the shallowness of our contemplation

-- the low charismatic density of our lives,

-- that we are much more comfortable in the negativities of our modern culture than in the counter-cultural life of the Gospel; more at home with the world than God.

-- that the religious message of Christianity does not affect the deeper recesses of the heart.

---But no aspect of Jesuit life can be empowered without the initial conversion of the individual Jesuit to attitudes and a lifestyle respectful of the realities that permeate the life of every citizen of this planet, Jesuits included. We must, individually and collectively learn to live lives that are sustainable for all of earth's community to the nth generation.

---For instance, 'poverty': to use as little as possible so that someone else also can have a share which s/he would not have had if I had used up all

--- A capitalistic outlook is not compatible with eco-friendliness.

---It seems to me that it would be wrong continuously to criticize without offering a visible alternative.

---But now possessing the technological means and the economic power to continue destroying the environment, often irreparably, this capacity must be faced responsibly and with deep, indeed religious humility.

---Father General pointed out that most of our Social Centres have yet to become ecologically conscious in their work.

---The challenge for each apostolate is to articulate the environmental concerns as they relate to the work.

---those in charge of such matters (use and disposal of the land that belongs to the Society) tend, understandably, to preoccupy themselves with use and disposal of land for economic support of apostolic works rather than out of consideration of stewardship of the land itself or concern for the poor

---this (ecological) issue affects our lifestyle and the decisions that we make in our institutions.

C2 – What is already being done in the Society

(a) A testimony from Robert Athickal SJ (PAT) of Tarumitra (Friends of Trees):

This past year we have conducted over 100 workshops for teachers and students on ecology. The chief components of these workshops are:

- Short discussion on the ecological crisis (Screen the film *An Inconvenient Truth*: edited version)
- Eco-auditing (We take twenty activities of daily life and see how they affect the earth. Participants rate them on a scale of -5 to +5. This is easy. The final scores are put out and discussed)
- Question: Why did we allow the deterioration of the quality of life? Has our spirituality been on the wrong side?
- Elements of a positive ecospirituality for our times (A lot of elements from the new cosmology of Chardin and Thomas Berry with a significant chunk from the Indian thinkers)
- Action Plans (All the participants make action plans for their personal and community life)

We might have met over 15,000 persons during these workshops. The lingering feeling we have at the moment is that we are on a winning side. The eagerness of people to discuss and make changes in their lives is very encouraging.

(b) An example of Community consultation

Minutes of a meeting at Jesuit Community at Ogilvie Residence (167 Sunnyside, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada), on 23 November 2008, Feast of Christ the King

Submitted by David Shulist SJ & Greg Kennedy SJ

'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. The one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.' (Rev 5:1-5) ?

Introduction: A Focus Group

This is a report coming from an all community meeting of eleven Jesuits. This is a community comprised of seven in studies, ranging from first studies in Philosophy to second phase studies in Theology; along with four Jesuits in active ministry. The community also represents eight different countries, Canada, Cameroon, Guinea, India, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, East India, and Syria; and five different Provinces—*English Speaking Canada, West Africa, Sri Lanka, Madagascar & Middle East*.

We are also a community that is trying intentionally in the past two years to put into practice more ecologically sensitive ways of living, from the goods we buy, the food we purchase and eat, the use of energy and the means of transportation we take; along with making substantial efforts to retrofit our house to be more ecological sound by insulating it, replacing windows, installing solar panels to heat our water, etc. We also formed a Green Committee to focus further our ongoing efforts. Hence, we are an intergenerational, international, and multi-apostolic community that is blessed to have the interest and enough practical experience to build on and learn ever more.

This was the first time we ever had a full community meeting on this topic of ecology and the responsibility of the Society to it. For some it was likely the first time they ever had chance to reflect on what the ecological dimension meant, not only to one's personal life, but also to our collective life as Jesuits. It was obvious from this meeting, that a level of appropriation was not shared uniformly among the members.

Fruits of the Meeting

This sharing, listening and discussion generated few, if any, novel ideas. Its chief contribution to the topic was less prescriptive than descriptive. What it described, indirectly and unintentionally, was the very same heterogenous mixture of concern, misunderstanding, defensiveness, hope, caution and dismissal found in society at large. The extremes within the range of expressed opinions convinced us that several ways of proceeding are required for an adequate response to our newest decrees and, a fortiori, our current exigencies.

This raises five points of concern:

- 1) When it comes to the Society's approach to ecology we can make no assumptions. The very idea of directing our mission towards ecological action strikes some as wrong-headed at worst and indulgent at best. This results from a misinterpretation of the link between ecology and social justice.
- 2) This misinterpretation pits ecology against social justice and the needs of the poor. Just as Jesuits have wrestled with a false-dichotomy between faith and justice since GC 32, so many of us now perceive ecology as a rival to justice, and therefore, much more so to faith.
- 3) Consequently "ecology" has become a term fraught with misunderstanding. It has been reduced to a label with little significance. Unfortunately, our documents, with their often passing mention of the word can tend to exacerbate its vagueness and vacuity.

4) Wide cultural differences emerge when dealing with ecology. It is apparent that our so-called global village, even in our international order, still to a wide extent, comprises of local tribes. Jesuits of the global south can view ecology as a developed world or global north pre-occupation or pet-issue with little pertinence to their province and country. This attitude does not reflect the concern and work that lay people of these countries carry out for the sake of environmental justice.

5) Finally, even those who recognize the constitutive part of ecology in our Jesuit mission, for the most part lack any real sense as to how to enact this mission. We agree that something must be done but are rather helpless to know, much less, do, what that is.

Points for the Composition of Place:

From this experience, and if it reflects something of a microcosm of the Society, then some further groundwork has to occur, in the same way that disposition days prepare the exercitant for the Spiritual Exercises. Do we need to reexamine our starting point?

Three points come to mind:

1) This Mission Decree and the beliefs underlying it assume a level of unanimity, which currently does not exist. We are not yet at the stage of determining, much less, getting near concrete projects because we still lack a common understanding of the needs such projects would supposedly address.

2) We need to develop a coherent, meaningful, intentional, clearly defined process with explicit goals.

3) This Invitation from IEN, how it was presented, the kinds of questions it offered as starting points, seemed to reflect a general ancillary status of ecology in the Society. Our communal investigations of ecological issues must be systematic and informed. We, as a Society, lack both trustworthy content and workable process, form and dynamic.

Proposed Recommendations/Actions [N.d.E.: some have been included in the report above]:

The following recommendations and actions came from what was either explicitly or implicitly stated:

1) Develop an operative definition of ecology

2) A central commission take up again "We Live In a Broken World." It also could be used in local/communities and focus groups.

3) Develop guidelines for houses/apostolates to be more ecological. We still think living unsustainably is an option, but can we? Develop a healthy attitude of "limits" when it comes to natural resources and energy. First it would be good if we could embrace simplicity in a new and voluntary way.

4) Form Green Committees, at Curia level, at Provincial levels and at community levels, similar to how we have set up Vocation Committees.

5) Interprovincial involvement can be defined by ecological region.

6) Education in ecology or in this new relationship of the three (God, others and creation), starting with the novitiate.

7) Have province retreats on the ecology, a la Jim Profits, S.J. et al in Guelph, ON, Canada

8) Dedicating men to formal study of ecology

9) Ongoing discussion with points of direction from Ignatian Ecology Network.

10) Redefine the role of ministers in the Society who could be instrumental at practically implementing more ecological lifestyle decisions at the level of community.

11) Collaborate with lay people, institutions, family homes, technical experts who are already working in this field of ecology, practicing sustainable and environmentally friendly living.

Conclusion:

In general, there was a great deal of trust in the group and so people spoke quite passionately about this topic. There were evident lines of disagreement and opposing viewpoints. A definite distinction in perception between those who came from the Global South and those from the Global North was revealed. This is a topic that is universal, linked to us all, but the understanding of it is complicated by the various operative definitions which inevitably lead to misunderstandings and further make the implementation difficult. It was concluded that dialogue of this nature is most essential and must continue, if any development of our common understanding is to be reached and strategies and lifestyle choices implemented at all levels. It is evident that in order to reach common agreement more dialogue is needed.

Unanimously we accept that we live in a broken world and must act with Christ, out of love to be reconciled with creation.

(c) Other activities that have been communicated as part of this survey:

Joseph Carver SJ (Berkeley) is currently writing an STL on Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology. Email address: josephcarversj@hotmail.com.

Joseph Carver SJ and John Braverman SJ have recently written an Ecological Examen.

Eco-retreats are held for example at [the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Canada](#), but also in India.

K.T. Chandy SJ (Associate Director, Catholic Health Association of India) has done training programmes on “Sustainable Management of Natural Resource Management”. Over the last forty years he has given about 1500 training programmes to all kinds of clients from government officials to farmers at the grass root level. He has also written course materials in the form of booklets on 635 topics related to sustainable Natural Resources Management. Email address: ktchandysj@yahoo.com

Benoît Mbuyi launched with others the group « Amis de la Nature » at Collège Kubama in Kisantu in Democratic Republic of Congo, during his regency there. Email address: benoitmbuyi@gmail.com

Félix Revilla Grande SJ is director of INEA in Valladolid, a school for Agricultural Engineering. They are offering courses and publications on organic (“ecological”) agriculture, and do experiments and research in on different aspects of this issue.

Scholastics Hervé Nicq SJ and Sebastian Watzek SJ are responsible for the collection and disposal of recyclable rubbish at the Gesù college in Rome.