



Appeal

by Auxiliary Bishop Rolf Lohmann (Münster),

Chairman of the Working Group for Ecological Issues of the Commission
for Social and Societal Issues of the German Bishops' Conference,
for greater responsibility for creation as a matter of justice

“It is on us to preserve and restore Creation.”

1. Introductory Remarks: Preserving and Restoring Creation

Throughout the summer months, we become particularly aware of how bad a state God's creation is in: Around the world, changes in the climate and the environment are evident through heat waves and droughts, heavy rain and storm surges, earthquakes and other natural disasters. The decline in biodiversity is alarming. In late May, an international team of climate researchers led by Johan Rockström warned that by all metrics the planet is at breaking point, and that a safe and just life for all people would hardly be possible in the future. We humans are most to blame for this because of the way we manage our economies, the way we travel, the way we use energy and the way we consume.

We need to reflect not only on how we can preserve Creation, but also how we can restore nature already damaged and destroyed. 20 years ago, the German Bishops' Conference and the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) in their co-authored text *Neuorientierung für eine nachhaltige Landwirtschaft* (Refocusing towards Sustainable Agriculture) urged “that soil fertility and biodiversity must be preserved or improved, and that damage that has already occurred must be addressed and, if possible, reversed. This lays bare conflicting objectives, which require a preparedness on all sides to compromise as well as to genuinely address the requirements of sustainability and its application”¹. We might not be able to turn back time. But we must seize this opportunity now, at the latest, lest it be too late.

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¹ Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference) (ed.): *Der Klimawandel: Brennpunkt globaler, intergenerationeller und ökologischer Gerechtigkeit. Ein Expertentext zur Herausforderung des globalen Klimawandels (Climate change: at the heart of global, intergenerational and environmental justice. An expert text on the challenge of global climate change)*. Die deutschen Bischöfe – Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen, Kommission Weltkirche 29 (2nd, updated ed., Bonn 2007). (in German)

2. Preserving our livelihoods is social and just.

These days, I keep thinking of UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ turn of phrase at the 2022 World Climate Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh that we are “on the highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator”. We have to – to carry the metaphor further – hit the emergency brakes and urgently change course if we still want to prevent this scenario. This has been common knowledge for a long time. Yet far too little is being done far too slowly. Throughout the past couple of years, Germany has repeatedly failed to meet its climate targets. The European Court of Auditors has criticised the EU for investing far too little to achieve the target of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990.

Protection of the climate, the environment and biodiversity are central matters of justice. In line with the title of a 2006 publication by the German Bishops, I understand climate change, in conjunction with environmental change and the decline of biodiversity, a “focal point of global, intergenerational and ecological justice”². Above all, it is the rich and developed industrialised countries that have a duty in this regard. We must not forget that climate change affects the poorest most severely and that strong shoulders can carry more than weak ones. That is why we must not lose sight of social equity globally and within our own societies. Ultimately, the protection of our livelihoods is indispensable for a social and fair world. No economic profit and no social measures are of any use to us if the world’s climate turns extreme, the air bad and the soil dry.

3. A holistic approach to conserving and restoring Creation

The challenges we are facing are tremendous. The German Federal Environment Ministry’s 2020 report on the *State of Nature in Germany* provides insight into the disastrous state of protected natural habitats, wild flora and fauna and populations of protected species in Germany. These habitats of humans, animals and plants are, simply put, everywhere. Therefore, the protection of climate, environment and biodiversity demands a holistic approach.

One important step is the protection of soils. In the 2016 publication *Der bedrohte Boden*³ (“The Threatened Soil”), experts from the German Bishops’ Conference emphasised their central importance, not only for global food supplies and overcoming hunger, but also for the climate, biodiversity and water bodies. Above all, we need to align use of soils with the

² Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference) (ed.): *Der Klimawandel: Brennpunkt globaler, intergenerationeller und ökologischer Gerechtigkeit. Ein Expertentext zur Herausforderung des globalen Klimawandels (Climate change: at the heart of global, intergenerational and environmental justice. An expert text on the challenge of global climate change)*. Die deutschen Bischöfe – Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen, Kommission Weltkirche 29 (2nd, updated ed., Bonn 2007). (in German)

³ Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference) (ed.): *Der bedrohte Boden. Ein Expertentext aus sozioethischer Perspektive zum Schutz des Bodens (The Threatened Soil. An expert text on soil protection from a socio-ethical perspective)*. Die deutschen Bischöfe – Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen 44 (Bonn 2016). (in German)

requirements for their protection and the preservation of their functions, from sealing and compaction to deforestation and agriculture.

In addition, biodiversity must be preserved, which was addressed in a guide published by the German Bishops' Conference in 2021.⁴ The booklet foregrounded the nourishing, regulating and cultural functions of ecosystems, in which human well-being and existence are grounded. Responsible land use, for example through ecologically sustainable soil management, contributes significantly to the preservation of species.

4. Appeal for greater responsibility for creation as a matter of justice

It is high time all of us realised that that is in our interest for Creation to be healthy. We need to trust science and ensure that we steer clear from planetary breaking points. Wherever we have moved past breaking point, we must reverse it as far as possible. We must not “gamble” with Creation. The longer we wait, the more tasks we will have to shoulder in ever less time. Our future is built on sand globally if the foundations of life are being gradually destroyed and more and more species become extinct. Global safeguarding of common goods must not become the point of reference for blanket political obstructionism or instrumentalised for electioneering. Instead, we must all be prepared to find the best solution democratically through honest, constructive dialogue. This requires transparency and the participation of all societal groups. For this, we need to change course in politics, in society and in the Church – now!

⁴ Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference) (ed.): *Vom Wert der Vielfalt – Biodiversität als Bewährungsprobe der Schöpfungsverantwortung*. Ein Expertentext der Arbeitsgruppe für ökologische Fragen der Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (*On the Value of Diversity - Biodiversity as a Test of Responsibility for Creation*. An expert text by the Working Group on Ecological Issues of the Commission for Social and Societal Issues of the German Bishops' Conference). Arbeitshilfen 323 (Bonn 2021). (in German)