

THE LORD GOD MADE THEM ALL

Pastoral Moral Guidance

On the

Poaching, Trafficking and Decimation of Endangered Species

All of creation reflects the glory of God, for it is true of "all creatures great and small" that "The Lord God made them all." The human person is called to share in the awesome work of creation, not to deface it.

In his acclaimed encyclical on the environment, Pope Francis points to the relation between the defense of biodiversity and Christian spirituality:

"The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships.

This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfillment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity." (Laudato Si n. 240).

Our Local Context

The Church in the Philippines is very concerned that not enough dimension is given this very important aspect of spirituality: **respect for the will of the Creator manifest in the diversity of life and in the crucial role each plays in the wisely balanced scheme of nature.**

In the Philippines alone endemic species are hardly cared for. Poaching is rampant. Our seas and waters are overfished. Wildlife is surreptitiously traded -- because there are both buyers and sellers.

The Global Context

On a global scale, the problem is nothing less than alarming. More and more species pass into extinction, while we go on with our reckless ways, failing to see that we diminish ourselves tremendously and probably imperil our own future in the measure that we lead other species to their doom.

Our Ethical Pastoral Response

The Catholic Church must do its part.

I appeal to my brother bishops of the Philippines to prohibit the clerics from blessing any **new** statue, image or object of devotion made or crafted from such material as ivory or similar body parts of endangered or protected, nor shall such **new** statues or images be

used as objects of veneration in any of our churches.

Those statues and images of ivory and other analogous materials from protected and endangered species already in use probably for centuries before the issuance of this pastoral guidance, should be safeguarded, and may remain in use for purposes of devotion and in recognition of their historical value.

I propose to my brother bishops to enforce the directive that no donation of any **new** statue or religious object made from ivory or materials extracted, taken or derived from protected and endangered species shall be accepted and blessed.

No matter the beauty of a work of art, it cannot justify the slaughter of wildlife, the use of endangered organic forms and lending a seal of approval to the threat posed to biodiversity by poachers and traffickers.

Every instance of beauty is a reflection of the infinite beauty of the Creator. We cannot, without offending the Creator, deface his creation.

All creatures great and small, the Lord God made them all!

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, November 4, 2015

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