

Excerpts from Aparacida (2007): of potential interest in light of the upcoming Encyclical

*Aparecida is a small city west of Rio de Janeiro and northeast of São Paulo, home to and named after the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, the patron saint of Brazil, as declared by Pope Pius XI in 1929. Aparecida receives more than 7 million tourists a year making it the most popular religious pilgrimage site in Latin America. Pope Benedict XVI delivered a speech here in May, 2007, in conjunction with the Fifth Latin American Episcopal Conference. At Aparecida, **Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected by his brother bishops to chair the important committee charged with drafting the final document, a token of his leadership in the events.** One detail confirms his popularity: on the day he celebrated Mass in the Sanctuary of Aparecida, the people applauded at the end of his homily, the only time that something like that ever happened.*

Aparecida was not just another event. Fifteen years after the last episcopal conference in Santo Domingo, the Latin American church was called upon to reflect once again about its role in the evangelizing of a significantly changing continent. It was more like a continental synod, like the one that wrote the post-synod article "Ecclesia in America" in 1999. An important member of the conference's drafting committee was the Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga. Both Cardinal Errázuriz (chair, Chile) and Rodríguez Maradiaga now serve on the eight-member committee advising the Pope in the current reforms. Aparecida repeated a style and highlighted some issues that have been part of the church's identity since the first CELAM meeting in Medellín in 1968: a poor church, for the poor; Christ is the center; and going out to the edges or the periphery. Highlights potentially relevant to the encyclical to be released in June 2015 include the following.

83. Latin America is the continent which has one of the greatest biodiversity on the planet and rich social diversity, represented by its peoples and cultures. They have a wealth of traditional knowledge on sustainable use of natural resources and on the medicinal value of plants and other living organisms, many of which form the basis of this economy. Such knowledge is currently the subject of unlawful intellectual appropriation, being patented by pharmaceutical and biogenetic industries, generating vulnerability farmers and their families who depend on these resources for their survival.

84. Decisions on the wealth of biodiversity and nature and traditional/indigenous populations have been virtually excluded (in decision making). Nature has been and continues to be attacked. The land has been pillaged. The waters are being treated as if they were a negotiable commodity by companies, besides being transformed into a play by large powers.

85. In his speech to young people at Pacaembu Stadium in Sao Paulo, Pope Benedict XVI drew attention to "environmental devastation of the Amazon and the threats to the dignity human of their peoples and urged young people to make "a greater commitment in the most diverse spaces of action" 31 .

86. Increased aggression to the environment can serve as a pretext for proposals of internationalization of the Amazon, which only serve the economic interests of transnational corporations. The Pan-Amazonian society is multiethnic , multicultural and multireligious. It is intensifying , increasingly, the dispute over the occupation of (indigenous) territory. Traditional populations of the region want their territory to be recognized and legalized.

87. Furthermore, we note the retreat of ice in the world: the melting of the Arctic, whose impact is already being seen in the flora and fauna of the ecosystem. Global warming is also felt in the loud crack of Antarctic ice blocks that reduce polar ice coverage and regulation of the world's climate. John Paul II, 20 years ago, from the ends of the Americas, said prophetically from the Southern Cone of the American Continent and in front of the boundless spaces of Antarctica, launched an appeal to all responsible for our planet to protect and conserve the nature created by God: do not let our world become an increasingly degraded land. 32

103. The disciples of Jesus recognized that He is the first and greatest evangelizer sent by God (cf. Lk 4: 44) and at the same time , the Gospel of God (cf. Rom 1: 3). We believe and we declare “the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God” (Mk 1: 1). As obedient children to the Father’s voice, we hear Jesus (Lk 9, 35) because He is the only Master (cf. Mt 23: 8). As his disciples, we know that his words are spirit and life (cf. Jn 6: 63. 68). With the joy of faith, we are missionaries to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, in Him, good news, human dignity, life, family, work, science and solidarity with his degraded creation.³².

104. We bless God for the dignity of the human person created in his image and likeness. He created us free and made us subjects with rights and duties among creation. We thank you for partnering in the improvement of the world, giving us intelligence and ability to love, for dignity, with which we also received the task to protect, nurture and promote. We bless you for the gift of faith that allows us to live in covenant with Him to share eternal life. We bless you for making us sons and daughters in Christ, for having redeemed by the price of his blood and permanent relationship established with us, which is the source of our absolute, non-negotiable and inviolable dignity. If sin has deteriorated the image of God in man and wounded his condition, the good news, which is Christ, has redeemed and restored to grace (cf. Rom 5: 12-21).

113. Given the threatened nature, Jesus knew the Father’s care for the creatures. He nourishes and beautifies (cf. Lk 12: 28), calls us to care for the earth to provide shelter and sustenance to all men (cf. Gen 1, 29, 2, 15).

122. We praise God for the talents, the study and the decision of men and women to promote initiatives and projects that generate work and production, elevating the human condition and the being of society. Business is good and necessary when it respects the dignity worker, care for the environment and is directed to the common good. It is perverted when, seeking only profit, violates the rights of workers and justice.

123. We praise God for those who cultivate the sciences and technology, offering a vast amount of goods and cultural values that have contributed, among other things, to extending life expectancy and quality. Science and technology have answers to the great questions of human life; (however), the ultimate answer to the fundamental questions of Man can only come from a comprehensive ethics and reason enlightened by God’s revelation. When the truth, goodness and beauty are separated; when human beings and their needs not constitute the fundamental ethical criterion, science and technology turn against man who created them.

124. Today, the borders drawn between science vanish. With this way of understanding dialogue, no knowledge is completely autonomous. This situation opens up a realm of theological opportunities to interact with the social sciences.

125. With the native peoples of America, we praise the Lord who created the universe and space for life and coexistence of all God’s sons and daughters, left as a sign of God’s goodness and beauty. Also creation is a manifestation of the provident love of God, delivered to transform the care for and a source of decent life for all. Today, a greater appreciation of nature is more widespread and we see clearly how man threatens ways and even destroys their ‘habitat’. “Our Sister Mother Earth” is our common home and the place of God’s covenant with human beings and all creation. Neglecting mutual relations and the balance that God himself established between the realities he created is an offense to the Creator, an attack on biodiversity and,

ultimately, against life. The missionary disciple, whom God entrusted creation must contemplate it, care for it and use, always respecting the order the Creator gave.

126. The best way to respect nature is to promote a human ecology open to transcendence that respecting person family, environments and cities, follows the Pauline indication to recapitulate all things in Christ and to praise the Father with Him (Cf. 1 Cor 3: 21-23). The Lord has given the world for everyone for generations, present and future. The universal destination of goods requires solidarity with the generation present and future. Since resources are dwindling, its use must be regulated according to a principle of distributive justice respecting sustainable development.

9.8 CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

470. As disciples of Jesus, we feel invited to give thanks for the gift of creation, reflection of the wisdom and beauty of the creative Logos. In the wonderful plan of God, man and woman are called to live in communion with Him, in communion among themselves and with all creation. The God of life entrusted to man his creative work, to "cultivate and keep" (Gn 2, 15). Jesus knew the Father's concern for the creatures that He feeds (cf. Lk 12, 24) and beautifies (cf. Lk 12, 27). And as he walked in the byways of their land, he not only stopped to contemplate the beauty of nature, but invited his disciples to recognize the message hidden in things observed (cf. Lk 12: 24-27; Jn 4, 35), Father creatures give glory "With its very existence" 258, and therefore, man must use them with care and delicacy." 259

471. In Latin America and the Caribbean, we are becoming aware of nature as a free inheritance that we receive to protect, as precious space of human society and for which man is responsible and must be careful of for the good of all. This heritage is manifested as often fragile and defenseless against economic and technological powers. Therefore, as prophets of life, we insist that interventions on natural resources do not predominate, nor the interests of economic groups that irrationally ravage the sources of life, to the detriment of entire nations and humanity itself. The generations that come after us are entitled to receive a habitable world and not a planet with polluted air. Fortunately, some Catholic schools have begun introducing into their disciplines education to ecological responsibility.

472. The Church is grateful to all who are concerned with the defense of life and the environment. We must give particular attention to the most serious ongoing destruction of human ecology,²⁶⁰ which is close to those who work the land with generous love. They work hard to get the land, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions, and provide sustenance for their families and contribute to all the fruits of the earth. We especially value the indigenous peoples for their respect for nature and love for Mother Earth as a food source, common house and altar of human sharing.

473. The natural wealth of Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing today an irrational exploitation that leaves a trail of dilapidation, and even death, for our entire region. In all that process, the current economic model has a huge responsibility, as it favors the excessive desire for wealth over the lives of individuals and peoples and respect for rational nature. The devastation of our forests and biodiversity through an attitude that is both predatory and selfish involves a moral responsibility, among those who promote (such an economic system), because it endangers the lives of millions of people and especially the habitat of farmers and indigenous people, who are expelled into the hillsides and large cities to live in overcrowded slums. Our region needs to make progress in its development and agribusiness, which currently exploits the

riches of the land and human capacities and needs to better serve the common good. We cannot fail to mention the problems caused by industrialization, wild and uncontrolled in our cities and the countryside, which pollutes the environment with all kinds of organic and chemical wastes. We must similarly be alert regarding extractive industries. If we do not control and counter their harmful effects on the surrounding environment, producing forest clearance, pollution and water are exploited and become areas of vast deserts.

474. In this situation we offer some proposals and guidelines:

- a) Evangelize our peoples to discover the gift of creation, knowing it and contemplating it as our home, care for all living beings and the matrix of life on the planet, to exercise responsible human dominion over the land and resources, so all can bear fruit according to their universal destiny, educating for a lifestyle of solidarity and sobriety and austerity where appropriate.
- b) Deepen pastoral presence in the most fragile populations threatened by predatory development, and support them in their efforts to achieve an equitable distribution of land, water and urban spaces.
1. Find an alternative²⁶¹ development model, integral and based on an ethic that includes responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology, which is based on the Gospel of justice, solidarity and the universal destination of goods, and that overcomes the logic utilitarian and individualistic, which does not submit economic and technological powers to ethical criteria. Therefore encourage our farmers to organize themselves so that they can achieve fair claim.²⁶¹ PP 20, “[The real development] is over, for all and each, (moving from) less human living conditions to more human conditions. “
- c) Commit our efforts in enacting public policies and investments citizens to ensure the protection, conservation and restoration of nature.
- d) Determine monitoring measures and social control on the implementation in the countries of the international environmental standards.

475. Raise awareness in the Americas about the importance of the Amazon for all humankind. Set between the local churches of various South American countries, in the Amazon Basin, a pastoral assembly with different priorities to create a model of development that favors the poor and serves the common good. Provide support, human resources and financial resources, to the Church that lives in the Amazon to continue proclaiming the Gospel of life and develop their pastoral work in the formation of laity and priests through seminars, courses, exchanges, visits to communities and educational material.