

Pope Benedict announced today that he is stepping down. As Pope, he was a strong supporter of the environment. For example, he has said this to [say](#) about sustainable development:

The protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate, oblige all leaders to act jointly, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the world (cf. no. 50). Together we can build an integral human development beneficial for all peoples, present and future, a development inspired by the values of charity in truth. For this to happen it is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater, and shared, acceptance of responsibility for creation: this is demanded not only by environmental factors, but also by the scandal of hunger and human miser.

He repeated urged delegates to international climate meetings to reach agreement. In [2009](#), he drew urgent attention to environmental issues:

In 1990 John Paul II had spoken of an “ecological crisis” and, in highlighting its primarily ethical character, pointed to the “urgent moral need for a new solidarity”. His appeal is all the more pressing today, in the face of signs of a growing crisis which it would be irresponsible not to take seriously. Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of “environmental refugees”, people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it - and often their possessions as well - in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development.

In the same message, he observes that “it is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of

the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment.”

Many conservative Catholics seem to have closed their ears to these teachings. Let’s hope that his successors continues with this vital message and has better luck in reaching his flock.