

**MEETING OF EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS WITH  
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS  
MONDAY 5 MAY 2008  
REMARKS FROM CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN,  
SCOTLAND**

**In the Beginning:**

We are one human family whose fortunes are intimately connected. We have become increasingly aware of this on a variety of levels – social, political, and economic. As we consider the destiny of our earthly abode we are confronted by the reality that we inhabit this one world as our shared home and fundamental resource for our material necessities. The wellbeing of the planet is therefore intimately linked with the prosperity of our various communities around the globe.

From the beginning mankind has been aware of its special role as guardians of God's creation whilst at the same time recognising that this creation is for our benefit and use. In the initial passages of scripture we are reminded of God's gift and calling :

**God blessed them, and God said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' Gen 1:28**

**Divine Providence:**

**Implicit in this is not an unfettered right to dispose of the resources of the earth as we please but rather a call to a role of great responsibility in exercising wise stewardship of those resources.**

God in his providence has provided for humanity as it has developed and grown. At times we face concerns that this stewardship has not been exercised with due probity. In the past we have faced up to concerns, making use of human reason to comprehend and speculate on the impact of our actions and discern the appropriate paths of response.

In the past the world has faced natural challenges of famine, disease and disaster (It has previously known climate change also). It has also faced times where the prospect of the world's resources failing has seemed inevitable. Malthus famously predicted that resources could not possibly match expanding demand. Thankfully, the Malthusian premise was wrong and he had not duly accounted for God's providence nor of the ingenuity of mankind. As challenges have confronted the world it has not resulted in us being overwhelmed but rather it has inspired generations of innovators and problem solvers; scientists, engineers and economists rank among those who have worked to solve problems facing various communities, nations and even the whole globe.

### **Today's Challenge:**

**Today we face another challenge of global proportions. Climate is changing once more and now we have the capacity for understanding to some extent the factors which contribute to that change.**

**The assessment of the impact of human activity and the emission of greenhouse gases is one which remains properly in the field of science and the church encourages scientists in continued pursuit of understanding and knowledge that they can be of service to the wellbeing of all. We know that the world has benefited enormously from their work in generations gone by.**

Inventions and developments have made life more human and have expanded the horizons of mankind such that the world has truly become a global village. The ability to travel at home and abroad through modern means of transportation has been a boon unimaginable to generations gone by and has helped millions of people. We have however come to see that even such goods have consequences and science now has made possible alternative sources of energy which we can hopefully develop fully that mankind can continue to benefit from technological and scientific service and that these can also benefit the developing world which often has not shared as it should have in times past and still today.

**But crucially we cannot be blind to the implications and consequences of our use of world resources.**

### **The Resource for all:**

**Man's dominion over the resources of the world is not absolute and must be limited by concern for the quality of life of our neighbours and future generations. The resources of the world must serve the common good of our fellow human beings around the world today but also the generations yet unborn. Our responsibility of wise stewardship must particularly be emphasized in relation to non-renewable sources of energy.**

### **Lifestyles:**

In making an assessment of our integrity in meeting this responsibility how can we fail to be struck by the disparity in access to energy and resources in general. Does this not highlight for us the continuing importance of the Church's emphasis on solidarity between nations? Does it not confront us also with the fact of our lifestyles which are often far from simple? Some parts of the world live amidst super-abundance whilst others live in dire need for the most basic of life's resources.

**This demands of us an examination which must take account of the ethical and spiritual dimensions of our use of the earth's resources. The frenetic activity of lives of inordinate consumption tend to leave little space for these more important considerations. Life becomes more about having rather than about being; yet material consumption cannot satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human soul.**

**For this reason Pope John Paul II warned that “a great deal of educational and cultural work is urgently needed, including the education of consumers in the responsible use of their power of choice, the formation of a strong sense of responsibility among producers and among people in the mass media in particular, as well as the necessary intervention by public authorities.” Economic considerations cannot be the only criterion in assessing energy production and consumption.**

### **Leadership:**

**Just as the Church has approved and promoted the advances of science which have so radically allowed hunger and disease to be combated (and still must) so does the Church look to the proper application of science in assessing and responding appropriately to issues affecting the environment.**

**States around the world now face making decisions which may potentially affect millions of lives. People have adapted to climate change throughout history but we recognise that action which can be taken to ameliorate detrimental changes may be available.**

Often this calls for governments to make decisions based on scientific evidence which is open to change and clarification. It is appropriate, as we are reminded in the Compendium of Social teaching to base such decisions on the precautionary principle “*which does not mean applying rules but certain guidelines aimed at managing the situation of uncertainty.*” Compendium 469

This inevitably requires a balanced consideration of the risks of various levels of action or inaction and makes necessary continued pursuit of knowledge to make decision making prudent and responsive and to the dangers faced.

Solar, nuclear, tidal and wind power create new possibilities for us and should also benefit those who do not fully benefit from the standards of living common in developing countries.

Advances in technology also make possible a proportionate response to our concerns about climate change. By taking adequate measures and investing in responsible exploitation of new and more efficient forms of energy production we can become less dependent on carbon fuels whilst still permitting the world to benefit from the advances of our modern age. We can be sure that God’s providence has raised up for us the people who can ensure the success of our endeavours. In our united efforts and mindful of our responsibilities as custodians of our planet we can and must come to a deeper appreciation and respect for the creation within which we play our roles in the unfolding drama of God’s plan.

### **Inter-Faith Action:**

**When dealing with this vitally important matter, it is important that leaders of different faiths work together wherever possible. Just a few weeks ago, on Friday 28 March 2008, the Catholic, Protestant and Islamic Leaders in Scotland protested outside the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh, urging the Scottish National Party not to abandon its manifesto commitment to reduce climate pollution by 3% a year.**

**The Right Reverend Sheilagh Kesting, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Sheikh Muhammad Ruzwan, the leading Scottish Imam, and myself, as Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh and President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, all signed a letter to Mr John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, outlining our common views and saying that we must not “turn a blind eye to the suffering of the most vulnerable people who will continue to be those most acutely affected by climate change”.**

**We went on to state: “Our faiths tell us that human beings have a responsibility of stewardship over the earth, and a duty to look after the world’s poorest citizens. We are gravely concerned by climate change and see an important role for the Scottish Government and Members of the Scottish Parliament in tackling this urgent problem”.**

**Since that protest and letter, Mr Swinney has replied to us, thanking us for our letter and indicating in his letter that: “It is encouraging to see Scotland’s major faith groups taking an active role in climate change and ensuring that governments take the urgent action necessary to avoid its most dangerous effects”. The Cabinet Secretary, Mr Swinney, went on to add that he welcomed our suggestions on what the Scottish Government could do to ensure that any such issues are addressed in a Scottish Bill and welcomed the opportunity of meeting with us in person.**

**Conclusion:**

**I do suggest that this is something which faith leaders throughout Europe and indeed throughout the world can do. They must get together to share their common concerns – and then present these concerns together to the Parliaments of the countries in which they live, so that a consensus may be reached throughout the world, often instigated by leaders of the great faith communities as to how best we can continue to preserve the ‘fruits of the earth’ for generations to come.**