

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Message for the 2012 World Tourism Day

(September 27th)

“Tourism and Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development”

The World Tourism Day is celebrated on September 27th, promoted every year by the World Tourism Organization (WTO). The Holy See has adhered to this initiative from its first edition. It considers it an opportunity to dialogue with the civil world and offers its concrete contribution, based on the Gospel, and also sees it as an occasion to sensitize the whole Church about the importance of this sector from the economic and social standpoint and, in particular, in the context of the new evangelization.

As this message is being published, the echoes are still heard from the Seventh World Congress of the Pastoral Care of Tourism which was held last April in Cancún (Mexico) at the initiative of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in collaboration with the Prelature of Cancún-Chetumal and the Mexican Bishops' Conference. The work and the conclusions of that meeting will enlighten our pastoral action in the coming years.

Also in this edition of the World Day we make the theme proposed by the WTO our own: *“Tourism and Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development”*. It is in harmony with the present *“International Year of Sustainable Energy For All”* promulgated by the United Nations with the objective of highlighting *“the need to improve access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services and resources for sustainable development”*.¹

Tourism has grown at a significant rhythm in the past decades. According to the World Tourism Organization statistics, it is foreseen that during the year in progress the quota will reach one billion international tourist arrivals, which will become two billion in the year 2030. To these should be added the

¹ UNITED NATIONS, *Resolution A/RES/65/151*, approved by the General Assembly, December 20, 2010.

even higher numbers involved in local tourism. This growth, which surely has positive effects, can lead to a serious environmental impact owing, among other factors, to the immoderate consumption of energy resources, the increase in polluting agents and the production of waste.

Tourism has an important role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals which include “ensuring environmental sustainability” (goal 7), and it must do everything in its power so that these goals will be reached.² Therefore, it has to adapt to the conditions of climate change by reducing its emissions of hothouse gas, which at present represent 5% of the total. However, tourism not only contributes to global warming: it is also a victim of it.

The concept of “sustainable development” is already engrained in our society and the tourism sector cannot and must not remain on the margin. When we talk about “sustainable tourism”, we are not referring to one means among others, such as cultural, beach or adventure tourism. Every form and expression of tourism must necessarily be sustainable and cannot be otherwise.

Along this way, the energy problems have to be taken into due consideration. It is an erroneous assumption to think that “an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed”.³

It is true, as the WTO Secretary General points out, that “tourism is leading the way in some of the world’s most innovative sustainable energy initiatives.”⁴ However, we are also convinced that there is still much work to be done.

In this area also the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People wishes to offer its contribution based on the conviction that “the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere”.⁵ It is not up to us to propose concrete technical solutions but to show that development cannot be reduced to mere technical, political or economic parameters. We wish to accompany this development with some appropriate ethical guidelines which stress the fact that all growth must always be at the service of the human being and the common good. In fact, in the Message sent to the Cancún Congress mentioned earlier, the Holy Father stresses that it is important “to shed light on this reality using the social teaching of the Church and promote a culture of ethical and responsible tourism, in such a way that it will respect the dignity of persons and of peoples, be open to all, be just, sustainable and ecological”.⁶

We cannot separate the theme of environmental ecology from concern for an appropriate human ecology in the sense of interest in the human being's integral development. In the same way, we cannot separate our view of man and nature from the bond which unites them with the Creator. God has entrusted the good stewardship of creation to the human being.

² Cf. WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION, *Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals: sustainable - competitive - responsible*, UNWTO, Madrid 2010.

³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, April 2, 2004, 462.

⁴ TALEB RIFAI, WTO Secretary General, *Message for the 2012 World Tourism Day*.

⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, 51.

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Message on the occasion of the VII World Congress of the Pastoral Care of Tourism*, Cancún (Mexico), April 23-27, 2012.

In the first place, a great educational effort is important in order to promote *“an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles”*.⁷ This conversion of the mind and heart *“allows us rapidly to become more proficient in the art of living together that respects the alliance between man and nature”*.⁸

It is right to acknowledge that our daily habits are changing and that a greater ecological sensitivity exists. However, it is also true that the risk is easily run of forgetting these motivations during the vacation period in a search for certain comforts to which we believe we are entitled, without always reflecting on their consequences.

It is necessary to cultivate the ethics of responsibility and prudence and to ask ourselves about the impact and consequences of our actions. In this regard, the Holy Father says: *“The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences”*.⁹ On this point, it will be important to encourage both entrepreneurs and tourists to consider the repercussions of their decisions and attitudes. In the same way, it is crucial *“to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency”*.¹⁰

These underlying ideas must necessarily be translated into concrete actions. Therefore, and with the objective of making the tourist destinations sustainable, all initiatives that are energy efficient and have the least environmental impact possible and lead to using renewable energies, should be promoted and supported to promoting the saving of resources and avoiding contamination. In this regard, it is fundamental for the ecclesial tourism structures and vacations proposals promoted by the Church to be characterized, among other things, by their respect for the environment.

All of the sectors involved (businesses, local communities, governments and tourists) must be aware of their respective responsibilities in order to achieve sustainable forms of tourism. Collaboration between all the parts involved is necessary.

The Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us that *“care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good”*.¹¹ A good which human beings do not own but are “stewards” (Cf. *Gn 1:28*), a good which God entrusted to them so that they would administer it properly.

Pope Benedict XVI says that *“the new evangelization, to which all are called, requires us to keep in mind and to make good use of the many occasions that tourism offers us to put forward Christ as the supreme response to modern man’s fundamental questions”*.¹² Therefore, we invite everyone to promote and use tourism in a respectful and responsible way in order to allow it to develop all of its potentialities, with the certainty that in contemplating the beauty of nature and peoples we can arrive at the encounter with God.

⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, 51.

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to 6 new Ambassadors accredited to the Holy See*, June 9, 2011.

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, 51.

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2010, 9.

¹¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, April 2, 2004, 466.

¹² BENEDICT XVI, *Message on the occasion of the VII World Congress of the Pastoral Care of Tourism*, Cancún (Mexico), April 23-27, 2012.

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Antonio Maria Card. Vegliò

President

✠ Joseph Kalathiparambil
Secretary