

4th International Congress on the Care of Creation

Our experience as participants in the IV Congress on the care of Creation before the WYD in Lisbon

On July 31, 2023, the eve of World Youth Day the three of us had the opportunity to attend the 4th Congress on Care of Creation held at the Portuguese Catholic University representing the Teresian Association. We were able to listen to speakers and testimonies from young people on issues that are affecting our world, our environment, and everything around us, including friends, family, and colleagues, but most of all what is affecting us in our everyday lives. The Congress hosted young people and university students from different countries, each with the same goal and ambition: to change the world, hand in hand.

The Congress was entitled “Youth commitment to integral ecology. Lifestyle for a new humanity”. What does this mean?

The crisis affecting our planet is evident, but in reality, as we were told several times by the experts, the crisis is not only environmental and ecological but also anthropological, cultural and spiritual. Young people do not feel connected to the world, to Creation. For example, we prefer to spend hours in front of our phones rather than having conversations with people. In general, young people tend to pray less because they are distracted and have other priorities. Some of the questions raised were: *What can young people do to change humanity? Are we really interested in this topic? Are we paying attention to what God has created for us?*

It was inspiring to be part of this initiative because we realized that we need to talk, discuss, raise awareness, connect with people and with nature, understand what our priorities are, breathe and stop for a moment to understand what we are up to and ask ourselves if what we are doing is right for ourselves and others. As young people, we have to live by what we believe in, act together, and act now. We are the promoters of the new culture, the culture that shares values, grows talents and defines internalized values.

The Congress allowed us to take part in working groups according to our interests. There were five lifestyle-related panel discussions: economics, youth education, natural resources, politics and technology.

In the Youth Education workshop, we talked about our priorities, what are the issues that are affecting us and what are the tools that can lead us to *conversion* concerning our common home. And bring this into our families, our friends, our society and our relationship with God. During the discussion, we realised that existential issues can only be resolved if we learn to trust and have faith. Participating in this Congress made us realize that many desire this conversion and that only with others we will be able to find solutions that we can propose to those who, like Pope Francis, will listen to us.

The existential problems that particularly affect young people are those issues that hammer our thoughts from positive to negative. It seems like we are giving more consideration to distractions rather than what is really important to us, which is family, friends and our relationship with God. To make a change, we have to start with our priorities and our lifestyle. We need to take a moment for ourselves, meditate, listen to what nature and the environment are telling us and respect it so that we can live better, breathe and help others *convert* to this new lifestyle.

The anthropological, cultural and spiritual crisis has worsened over the years with the development of new technologies. Modernity has led our generation to distance ourselves from the Church and from the values that have been taught to us since we were children. We realize that this transformation affects our lifestyle. Some of us drop out of school, take for granted what our family wants for us and think only of ourselves, of what we materially desire and insist on having. Prayer teaches us to change our perspective and vision of the world; it reconnects us to the natural world and to God's love which has never abandoned us in our crisis but has remained beside us despite everything.

In the Panel and workshop on Natural Resources, we learned about the importance of *experiencing a conversion*. We need to change the way we see the environment; if we love nature, then we have to preserve it. The speakers explained that the term 'natural resources' is not ideal. The Pope has used the term 'Earth goods.'

The term 'natural resources' suggests that nature is good only for being consumed; 'Earth's goods' suggests that we are talking about how rich the Earth is.

Although the most beautiful part of our planet has been highlighted, it is also true that it is important to recognise that our world is going through a crisis. The environment is being destroyed; one term used to describe this topic was 'global boiling'. In general, scientists talk about global warming. The speakers talked about global boiling because they wanted to insist that global warming is getting very serious. A few years ago, it was predicted that there would be no more ice in the Arctic Ocean by the year 2100. It is predicted that there will be no more ice in a few years.

Pope Francis talked about climate change describing it as a serious problem. He and some of his predecessors have also spoken against the use of fossil fuels.

During the workshop, we were asked who read *Laudato Si'*. We were surprised to see that the majority had read the encyclical letter.

Another topic that came up was the important role of the governments. Governments have a lot of power but the population also has the power to influence governments. They gave

the example of natural reserves created in the Pacific Ocean close to South America; governments here are creating more reserves in parts of the ocean that are under their control; these reserves are necessary to protect marine life. A further issue highlighted was excessive fishing causing species to become extinct.

The two Panels (Youth Education and Natural Resources) in which we participated introduced us to what is happening to the environment, especially the human impact on the environment. We have to change and take the first step to *conversion* taking care of creation God has given us so we can build society. It is important that among ourselves we help each other.

We are pleased to have contributed to the drafting of the [Manifesto](#) presented to Pope Francis with ideas and proposals for better global sustainability. We believe what was most important in this Congress was precisely listening to young people, letting us speak and likewise listening to what other young people have to say. We are the *present* and the *future*. Discussing and raising awareness is the first step in changing our lifestyle, which can become truly authentic concerning the five-panel discussions.

Indeed, all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents (*Laudato Si'* 14).

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