

Man and Nature

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Natural resources make up the wealth of a country, as do forests, livestock and all agricultural goods, although often more income goes into the pockets of investors than into those of the population. However, there is another wealth that is not perceived enough: the beauty of a landscape, a value that above all determines the quality of human life.

Let's look outside, into the Bavarian-Austrian Alps, the wonderful Berchtesgadener Land. Why do so many people come here and not only want to go on holiday, but definitely want to take up residence? In many mountain huts you pay not only for sausage, bacon dumplings and Kaiserschmarren, but also for the view, the wonderful panorama. The mountains are not only climatic, but also from the sight a balm for the soul. The hikes fill our blood with new oxygen, we see the world afterwards again more positively. These are values beyond the big money, and yet they require an infrastructure that makes such a perception possible and costs the infrastructure. It is an investment of a special kind insofar as it does not yield a profit that can be calculated as a percentage.

We humans have different relationships with nature. We can see the earth as a store of material for our survival, for research and technology. She's at our service, so to speak. We exploit them, or have exploited them for a long time, without considering the consequences for earth and man. Our roadsides are sometimes full of garbage as if we live in a garbage society. Our seas are flooded with plastic waste. Even in space, a lot of garbage is flying. The consequences are only now becoming apparent, and we are investing billions in securing a sustainable environment. We're repairing what we thoughtlessly destroyed. Like children, we have treated nature with carelessness instead of considering the sustainability of our actions. But it's not just us Europeans who woke up. In Beijing, a travel companion had to pay a fine for carelessly throwing a cigarette butt on the street.

The Bible says: Subdue the earth, but not: exploit it. In a pictorial way it is depicted how God brings the animals to man to see what he calls them. Man has his intimate relationship with God, he himself was created by him as man and woman, but he has also a close relationship with animals and nature. The destiny of the world in which man is placed by God is actually a paradise that must be preserved. This world is not only nature, it is a creation, granted to man so that he may dwell in it. Nature is more than a store of material; it is a creation that we must respect and nurture. It must not become a dustbin for our society.

In other religious understandings, people are fully embedded in the course of nature, in the wheel of history. Man is born again and again to new life. Therefore, no living being must be harmed. In Zen meditation, if a mosquito likes a shaved head, the monk must not move. But the Far Eastern religions are concerned with much more: the unity of nature, which also formed the image of cosmic unity, one of the basic ideas also of the philosophy of the ancient Greek Stoics (300 B.C. to 200 A.D.): the great harmony of the world. And here we touch on the Chinese world of Daoism and Confucianism.

Man comes from nature. He is the pinnacle of evolution, the crown of creation. However, he is not only part of nature, but also faces it and bears responsibility for creation. But he remains connected to her, not only because of the food he takes from her, but is embedded in the different rhythms of nature. We monks live in these rhythms and enjoy a physical and mental health. It is a rhythm of work and reading, of prayer times, of sleeping and being awake.

But man also has the ability to shape nature. He has a sense for another dimension of nature: beauty. In Europe this feeling came with the poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), who on April 26 in 1336 wrote to a friend of his from his mountain ascent of Mont Ventoux in Provence, France, that he very much enjoyed nature, the beauty of the landscape and had found his own self in it. A new dimension opened up. It was the beginning of the Renaissance era, of humanism.

This attention does not exist in all cultures. I had a guest from another culture and wanted to show him the beauty of the landscape. I drove a particularly beautiful panoramic stretch with the car, but he showed no interest but slept next to me. Just as someone else could not understand why we in Germany give a lady roses when we congratulate her on her birthday. It is not always easy to convey a feeling for beauty to others. The best way is to have intercultural conversations with someone and let them experience the beauty as well. A highlight of artistic design are the Ikebana and the Japanese gardens, as well as the framed mountainstones in Korea and the gardens of our monasteries. Nature is formed into culture. Beauty is a dimension of nature in its own right and it must be emphasized. Who of us does not know the sunrises or sunsets in our Alps or the alpenglow, a unique natural spectacle?

In Germany, we have therefore been introducing landscape protection for some time. When building new roads, we take great care to ensure that they blend harmoniously into the landscape. Also owners of properties cannot simply build on them at will, but we pay attention to the environment. Just look at the skyline of the houses, the townscapes here in Upper Bavaria. Despite all his freedom, man must not arbitrarily intervene in the landscape and exploit it for short-term profit. When I look at the residential silos of large cities in China, in Seoul, in Tokyo, I long for our beautiful Upper Bavaria.

On hikes we can pause, become silent and find ourselves, experience our own value. We're coming to our senses. We sit down and often the word can escape us: "My God, how beautiful your world is. "It's our world too. We suddenly notice the beauty of the meadows, the autumn leaves on the trees when they glow in the sun. We hear the chirping of the crickets and listen to the singing of the birds. Nature is a wonderful home. To look over the mountains at the morning haze, just when we are sitting on a mountain top, pleases the heart of man. There are now fascinating adventure trails for young and old.

This joy expresses itself especially in our cultural moments, in singing, in dancing, in the costume of a Bavarian region. These are not only special performances for the foreigners, as I have experienced with some cultures, for example with the Mariachi in Mexico or with the dances in Thailand. Folk songs, folk dances, brass music are still embedded in our whole culture in Bavaria. Also the processions on holidays like Corpus Christi are an expression of

the faith of the population. An entire village will be on its feet. But precisely because they constitute life, they also attract many foreign guests.

The guests will appreciate another value: the community and the hospitality. They are welcomed with pleasure, not only because of their finances, but because they are human beings and we are urged to share with them the good and beauty that we possess. We humans belong together, even in nature.

Let us therefore return again to nature. We can often no longer leave it in its original state, but must intervene if we want to live in it. We need houses, we need the energy of wind and sun and power lines if we want to get away from fossil fuels and reduce CO2 emissions. We see numerous windmills and solar panels on the roofs, which can affect a landscape or a village image. It is also important to maintain an ecological balance.

Saint Benedict, the founder of my Order who lived in the 6th century, calls in his Rule "the right measure" the "Mother of all virtues". The English would call it „common sense.“ Monks have cleared forests in the Occident, regulated rivers, created fishponds, they have made nature "arable", but always paid attention to the right measure not to destroy nature. The destruction was a consequence of the new technical possibilities. Today you can fish the oceans empty with the echo sounder and modern nets, while in former times the fish had time to reproduce again. In Germany for the hunt of wild animals we have exact prescribed periods. Many love skiing. Pistes have been created, ski lifts can be seen in many places. In the meantime, however, we have become aware of how much damage can be done to nature. That is why mountain slopes are being restored to their natural state. For lifts and ski slopes exact regulations apply today. It is always a matter of balance, so that our nature is preserved for future generations and tourists can continue to be offered beauty and recreational value. God has given man nature. However, we do not need to remain inactive, but are called to become co-creators of nature. We design and form it according to our needs, but taking into account that it remains to us in its beauty and originality. To be co-creators is the dignity of the human being.

Mindfulness, respect for nature and thus also for people, are values that we have become aware of in recent times. They make man into man in nature. He can then feel comfortable in it like in the beautiful Berchtesgadener Land.