

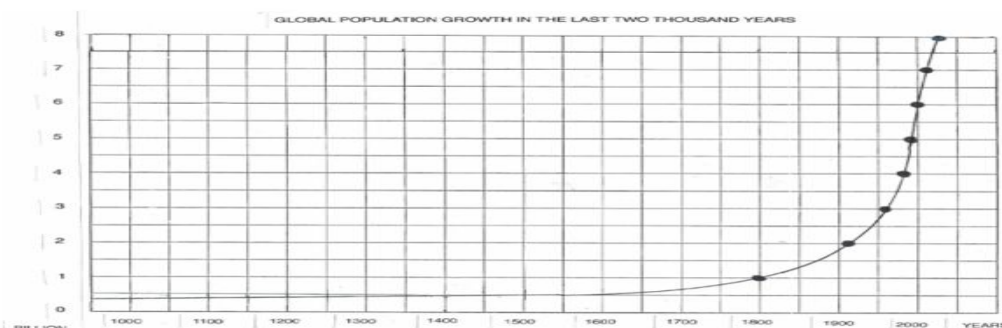
### Ecological Balance

My dear Brothers and Sisters. The parable of the prodigal son has a deep and beautiful meaning for all of us, as it represents the unconditional love and mercy of God toward each one of us. I would like to open the meaning of this parable not just to individual lives but to the life of the global humanity of today, and look at the earth as our home, which we left in so many ways, and squandered its riches and ended up in a dire situation threatening our survival. But then, as we heard in the parable, the son came to his senses and said, I will leave this place and go back home to my father.

I would like to say just a few words about this journey back home. To our home. To our safe home. The one God created for all of us and of which God said, 'It is good'. Today, we see around us a way of life that is destroying our inheritance by not recognizing our limits. We overstep ecological boundaries, and we create unsustainable loss of balance in the use of our God given resources so that some have too much while others die. Yes, it is true that only balance has survival value. It is our effort to reestablish our balance with the earth and with each other that gives true meaning to our journey back home.

My dear Sisters and Brothers, there are two factors in our huge off balance situation of today we are trying to heal: our ways of life, and our numbers. There is a great deal of talk in the Church about the first, the need for social and economic balance, while at the same time, there is silence about the second, our growing numbers. This silence truly threatens the success of all our efforts. That is the reason that I am going to show you a short but very real movie about the enormously off balance problem of our numbers.

You will find this movie at [worldpopulationhistory.org](http://worldpopulationhistory.org) At the site, click on 'Menu,' then on "Watch the Video." As a conclusion, I want to show you the very same story in a simple graph.



[Each dot represents 1 billion people. The space between the dots indicates the time between adding an additional billion to the population.]

As you can see in the graph, the global human population has been in balance with a very slight edge on increase throughout our history up to the nineteenth century. What happened in the nineteenth century? According to a simple equation where birthrate minus death rate equals population growth rate, what happened was that through the new discoveries in the medical sciences, starting with proper hygiene and followed by immunization against virus diseases, and then by the discovery of antibiotics against bacterial diseases, and more recently through much improved medical technology, death rate, especially in terms of child mortality, was much reduced. At the same time, since we were still way under the carrying capacity of the earth, no effort has been made to balance the reduction in death rate by a corresponding reduction in birthrate.

Up to the nineteenth century we had to have as many children as we could to balance high death rate, and we inherited no moral directives to do otherwise. That is why we need to pray for and find today a functional moral theology that responds to present needs with present knowledge in the true spirit of aggiornamento of the second Vatican Council. And while doing so we must do our best and we should also place our trust in God's love and mercy. Amen.