

# **SANYASA**

## **JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

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**Being Consecrated:  
Called to Care for Our Common Home**

**SANYASA**  
**Institute of Consecrated Life**  
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## **SANYASA *Journal of Consecrated Life***

A biannual published by Sanyasa: Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore, managed by the Claretian Missionaries, in view of fostering theological reflection on the life and mission of consecrated life in all its aspects, and in its essential relationship with other forms of Christian life in the Church, with specific reference to the Indian and Asian Reality.

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## EDITORIAL

Pope Francis, guided by the Spirit of God, has been the reason for a great resurgence in the Church. With his symbolic gestures, statements, exhortations, encyclicals, and above all, with his unassuming personal presence, he has been sending out strong messages about a new way of being a Church. He has been showing us how we, as a community of the people of God, need to position ourselves in relation to the world around us. It must be admitted that we, as Christians and more so as religious men and women, have not been aware of the close relationship between ecology and spirituality. Though such an integrated vision is quite biblical and ancient in the Christian tradition, and even in the monastic traditions, due to many historical reasons, we were taught of a world denying spirituality. This world, including the cosmos was considered to be a place of temptations which had to be transcended if one had to attain spiritual growth. There have been attempts to rectify such a vision of spirituality, coming from the heart of the Church, from other religious leaders and even from different sectors of the secular world. Looking at the alarming rate at which the earth and its resources were being plundered in the name of development, there emerged from the consciousness of the world, a felt need to reclaim the sacredness of the earth as a common home with which we share our life and destiny. This emerging awareness came because of the ascendancy of the Holy Spirit as the Prime Mover who brings resurgence and new life in the midst of seeming impossibilities.

Thus came Pope Francis, with his encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home*, released on the Day of Pentecost, 24th May, 2015. Ever since the release of this encyclical, there have been various seminars, workshops, publications intended to raise awareness of the need to care for the earth, our common home. As consecrated men and women, we need to approach *Laudato Si* from the perspective of our identity and mission as consecrated men and women. To facilitate a healthy dialogue with the vision that Pope Francis has carved out in *Laudato Si* and its implications within the context of our call to consecrated life, Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life organized its annual Consecrated Life Week (CLW) Seminar on the theme, *Being Consecrated: Called to Care for our Common Home* from February 04-06, 2016.

As usual, the present issue of this Journal carries the papers presented at the Seminar by eminent resource persons from various fields. I am glad to bring to you all the eight papers that cover different aspects of the major theme.

The first paper by *Leo F. Saldanha*, with his vast experience of working in environmental support groups, brings out the multiple forms of the present ecological crisis and its impact at various levels. With sharp insights in to the underlying factors that gives rise to such a crisis, he details the various expressions this crisis. The concern of the author is not just to describe but provoke us to think in radically different way so that we collaboratively care for our common home. With the exposition of this crisis in its multiple faces, Leo brings us face to face with a choice and the price we must pay so that we are able to make a positive difference. His passion is to nurture a caring world, full of caring people, caring for the mother earth, our common home.

Then, we have *Joy Philip Kakkannattu*, giving us the biblical vision of the creation narrative from the Old Testament perspective. He begins by focusing on the primary purpose of creation, which, according to him, is to establish order dispelling the chaos and draws out the various implications for humanity. Human beings, though the apex of creation, is dependent on all the other creatures. At the same time, the author presents also a comprehensive picture of the human role in creation and explains the two sacred duties entrusted to humanity, namely to “have dominion” and to “subdue,” the meaning of which, according to him, is often misunderstood. He then goes on to explain the harmony of creation, as shown in the prophetic texts and its reciprocity, especially from the Psalm 8.

It must be admitted beyond any doubt that there has been a distortion in the relationship between human beings and the world of nature, which has led to what we call it today, ‘ecological crisis.’ *S. Devadoss*, takes up the challenge of exploring the human roots of this ecological crisis from a theological perspective. He is of the opinion that if we want to do something substantially to restrict our destruction of the environment, we need to go beyond the symptoms and deal with the underlying roots or causes that play vital role in bringing about the ecological degradation. He, therefore, goes on to examine the various causes such as, inappropriate application of science and technology, excessive anthropocentric approach to nature, hallucination of unlimited growth/progress, mania for consumerist and throw-away culture and the utilitarian attitude, which he calls, the ‘ultimate human root.’

Having analysed the human roots of this ecological devastation, we come to listen to the call of the Spirit for a kind of personal conversion that leads also to ecological conversion. Drawing on the guidelines given by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*, *Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya*, explicates the kind of conversion needed for our times. The author proposes an honest dialogue at every level of social, economic and political life that build transparent decision-making processes towards the development of an integral ecology that counters the culture of compulsive consumerism and its technology driven economy and illusion of growth. There cannot be authentic growth unless we open channels for reconciliation with the poor and the earth.

With her long experience of radical social involvement in favour of the poor, *Stella Bathazar*, brings out the strategic responses and lines of action for ecological justice and care. Placing religious life in the context of what is happening to our mother earth, she brings out practical tips for strategic action, the importance of reclaiming important values and principles in this regard and details the various policies and principles in climate action for the wider community of the people of God. The last section focuses on the strategic responses to be undertaken by the religious, some principles that can guide them and the specific action programs at various levels—ecclesial, congregational and community and also some daily simple actions that can go a long way in creating awareness and initiating collective action.

From a wider theological horizon and with profound theological insights, *José Cristo Rey García Paredes*, argues for the ecological conversion needed for consecrated life today. More specifically, his concern is to offer an ecological conversion applied to the understanding and practice of the evangelical counsels. According to him, the fundamental religious vow is only one: the vow of covenant of love with the only God, which implies the rejection of other gods—the gods or idols of power, money and sex. They have a luminous side when they become channels of care, love, and solidarity. However, we also run the risk of idolizing them; when it happens, they become sources of violence, poverty and discrimination. Profession is an anti-idolatrous stance and religious belongs to an anti-idolatric community. The author then goes to highlight the ecological dimension of each of the evangelical counsels with their potentials for such an anti-idolatrous positioning.

Spirituality provides the ultimate perspective that radically color the way we look at and relate to reality. *Xavier E. Manavath*, in his article, argues for sound

spirituality that gives rise to a coherent vision of everything around us – God, world, others and ourselves – and, consequently a sound ecological awareness and education. Among the diverse and complex trends in spirituality, unfolding in the contemporary world, Manavath brings out the features of a sound ecological spirituality that promotes a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, relationship with nature and of a future to be shared by this mutual belonging. He emphasizes the need to rediscover the inter-relatedness with everything around us because, in the words of Pope Francis, the “life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us” (LS, 216). This basic awareness, according to him, would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life.

Spiritual living, based on an integral ecology is not foreign to the Church and her traditions. Within the context of the radical and intense living of Christian faith, namely, the varied spiritual traditions of religious life, there have been excellent models. *Josy Fernandes*, presents certain models of ecological living, drawn from the heart of religious life. Genuine seekers of God, according to the author, would always feel incorporating models for a healthy and harmonious relationship between nature and humanity, as well as amongst human beings. He examines closely four renowned saints, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Ignatius of Loyola and Elizabeth Ann Seton, all of whom lived at different times in the history of the Church as models of Ecology. Such models can contribute to the formation of a more advanced environmental ethics, spirituality, education and involvement.

I hope that the readers will find these articles enriching and stimulating so that they will understand and imbibe the true spirit of *Laudato Si*. My prayer is that our awareness, perception, attitude and relationship in relation to our mother Earth as our common home may become truly transformative. Best wishes to all!

**Xavier E. Manavath, CMF**  
(Chief Editor)



## ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: MULTIPLE FACES

Leo F. Saldanha

We live in times when we are constantly challenged to develop ideas for survival, become successful and thus secure a good life for ourselves and our families. Over the past century, the industrial model of development has created a climate of opinion that pitches success in very materialistic terms. It encourages the individual to be highly competitive in working towards a secure and successful status in life. Such valuation of life and its purpose invariably means that not being competitive amounts to not being of value to society. And for those who are successful, it is their constant endeavour to retain that status, which often comes with heavy investment of time, resource and energy, so that there is no erosion of status and eventual degradation in the quality of life secured.

In the world as it now is, we are honed from our childhoods to marshal our strengths and talents, and achieve such material success and security. As we grow into adults, we put pressure on our children and ask them to struggle and succeed: get a good job, achieve status, create assets and wealth, etc. As each family works in this manner on a global scale to meet such aspirations, it all adds up into the paradigm of development that we all end up being a part of. Massive and complex cities are built as a result to sustain which demands a range of energy and material resources along with a complex and constant supply of food and various services. Industrial and infrastructural development becomes the mainstay of generating jobs and wealth, and to sustain all, massive dams, thermal power plants and nuclear

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power plants are built, and huge amounts of non-renewable mineral resources are extracted. Such activities often devastate, irreversibly, forests and farming areas and associated life and livelihoods, displacing thousands of villages. Such extractive processes also leave behind a toxic trail of pollution, the consequence of which has been the despoiling of rivers, lakes and streams and oceans as well.

## **1. THE WORLD AS IT IS**

This is not a dark picture of our world – this is our world as it is now. This is a world which is very different from what it was even 200 years ago. All this activity has contributed immensely to the build-up of carbon in the atmosphere causing climate change. Where the atmosphere should have a healthy 350 ppm of carbonaceous gases, to keep the earth warm with a greenhouse effect, the concentration of carbon in the atmosphere has now crossed 400 ppm and is threatening to reach 450 ppm in just a few decades. Thousands of scientists from around the world have repeatedly warned in recent decades that the lack of serious effort to stop dumping carbon in our atmosphere due to industrial, mining, urbanisation and automobile activities, could result in catastrophic climate change and consequent destruction of the world and its economies as we now know it.

Every year, representatives of governments meet to decide how to cut down carbon emissions to mitigate climate change. Northern countries insist that developing southern countries should clean up their industrial activities and cut down on production to contain carbon emissions; southern countries call the high build-up of carbon in the atmosphere a direct consequence of reckless industrialisation and wealth creation by the North over the past century and demand to fund the cost. In addition, southern countries, justifiably, have claimed the right to continue to develop their industrial and infrastructural base to help their peoples to achieve a reasonably good standard of living. The developed world does not want to slip in the quality of life it has achieved, and the rest of the world wants to achieve similar status. As a result there is increasing industrial and economic activity, most particularly in countries like China, India, Brazil, South Africa, etc., and all this is intensifying the build-up of carbon in the atmosphere. In the intensely political debates that mark climate change conferences, there has been very little agreement and thus really not much action to slow down and reverse carbon emissions, and those of other greenhouse gases. There also has been weak support for stopping forest felling, particularly in South America, Africa and Asia, and thus the capacity of the living planet to absorb the carbon is also diminished.

## **2. CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL**

The impacts of climate change is being felt world over. In India we are constantly battling floods and droughts. There is also the looming threat of sea level rise in the next 20-40 years and there is a high likelihood that life in coastal cities could become very difficult, if not impossible. Should we doubt this possibility, then we only have to recall what happened in Chennai last year, or in Mumbai a decade before. There was no earthquake; quite simply a lot of rain fell over too short a duration. Most streams and lakes, even river systems, had disappeared under an ever-growing metropolis, and the water could go nowhere. Life came to a standstill for days on end, and even massive aeroplanes floated around like boats. The quantum of property destruction and the demands of rebuilding Chennai was pegged at Rs. 25,000 crores. Loss of health, ecology and livelihoods was not factored into this costing. The Chennai floods are a very telling reminder of how precarious our world is today. And this devastation was only because of rain, not yet due to rise in sea levels which is projected to increase in coming decades.

In most coastal areas though, the implications of the rising seas is being felt already. Thousands of wells which provided drinking water along the coast, be they in Pondicherry, or Kochi, or Mangalore or Vishakapatnam, have turned brackish. Farming has become difficult due to increased salinity and water logging. These are not easy to deal with situations, as it is simply not possible to push the sea back, try as we might. It is the new nature of our world.

In cities which are not on the coast, there are other environmental challenges. In Delhi, for instance, the air is so highly polluted so that none can escape its unhealthy consequences. Various technical, technological and infrastructural measures are adopted to clean up the air, but it is not yielding the desired results. Delhi has the largest aggregation of wealth and wealthy people in India; the most influential people reside in Delhi, and yet it is struggling to find resources to clean up the air. The Delhi government is now forced to adopt harsh measures, such as limiting use of vehicles on an odd-even rule, but that demands the very reorganisation of life in the city and it is difficult to do that. In other metros which aren't as heavily invested in for environmental clean-up operations, the consequences of not acting are quite severe. The quality of air in Mumbai, Lucknow, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bangalore, etc. is worsening rapidly, and yet these cities continue to grow both in vehicular and population numbers. The quality of air in smaller cities, like Raichur, Nandhyal Cuttack, Ananthapur, Ranipet, etc., is no better. All these are adding to increase burden, even as the middle classes are living better in material terms today, compared with two or three decades ago.

### 3. CRISIS OF AN URBANISING WORLD

Over half of the world's population now live in cities. Several Indian cities are amongst the largest in the world and India's population is also increasingly becoming urban; half of India's population is projected to live in cities in two decades. Meanwhile, farming and pastoral livelihoods are collapsing world over, and in India as well, and this is the result of a variety of economic policies that fail to support farmers and livestock rearers, who are people most closely linked to nature for their livelihoods. Very little is being done to support farmers in distress and this is most starkly evident in the unprecedented epidemic of farmer suicides in India: about 250,000 farmers have killed themselves in just the past fifteen years due to crop failures and consequent economic distress. Suicides are considered strong indicators of the mental health status of any society, and thus this epidemic of suicides does not bode well at all for India. In the state of Punjab, considered the granary of India, there is now an epidemic of cancers. This is due to decades of intensive use of chemical fertilisers to support high yielding varieties. There are also high rates of depression amongst farmers and this has shockingly increased the numbers of suicides. The Bhakra canal is washing up hundreds of dead bodies of farmers forcing the irrigation department to hire a special divers to retrieve the bodies.

Across Central India, especially in tribal dominated districts, the disenchantment with the State is very high. This is because hundreds of villages have been systematically disrupted due to reckless mining and industrialisation. Local people have gained nothing from all this wealth generation, and the State and its agencies, and the massive corporations that it supports, are seen as destroyers of life. Unable to tolerate such inter-generational abuse, many communities are organised to resist development programmes of the State, some violently too.

Living in cities demand extremely complex and intelligent systems. To sustain millions of lives and livelihoods in this manner, and over time, demands constant extraction of natural resources and supply of massive amounts of energy and services. To keep them operational in an optimal sense would also demand governance systems that are responsive to these challenges. On the face of it, Indian cities are functional despite all the chaos. A predominantly youthful population has made cities alive with life and creativity, and helped dissolve harsh social discriminations based on caste, religion and class. However, the fragmentation of communities and nuclearisation of families are creating a new culture of alone-ness. The pursuit of success is redefining ways of living and the promise of a "good life" in the city is all the more alluring. The rapidly collapsing farming systems has resulted in a massive

influx of young people to the cities in search of livelihoods. Farming distress is also contributing to migration of families. The state has failed in accommodating their needs and this has often created massive disparities and violence in cities.

Another aspect that is becoming increasingly evident is that city living, given the high rates of congestion, pollution, and stress, is contributing to a sharp increase in lifestyle diseases. While remarkable progress has been made to tackle age-old communicable diseases, changes in climatic patterns and the warming of the earth is making vector borne communicable diseases endemic, such as Dengue, more recently Zika. In addition, doctors are reporting a range of viral fevers that are epidemically striking populations more frequently, and resulting in lowering of natural immunity levels. What is disturbing is that high grade antibiotics are increasingly failing to tackle infections. The calamitous fallout of the spread of new communicable diseases and the incapacity of prevailing medical systems and knowledge to tackle them, is becoming a new area of focus to public health authorities.

#### **4. PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT**

All these are narratives on the consequences of a paradigm of development that we have embraced today. These issues and concerns are not often discussed in the mass media or even in schools, colleges and governance agencies. Typically the implications of this extractive, capital intensive and industrial model of development is manifested event by event: one epidemic here, a flood there, and another disaster elsewhere. There is not really much effort invested in seeing them all as inter-related events and as a consequence of an unsustainable developmental paradigm. It is as though we are refusing to acknowledge the world as it is now. Our modern ways of living train us to look specifically at things which please us and avoid those that displease us. This influences how we think and decide. Such decisions are disconnected from the emerging reality of the world and result in a range of compromises, most of them unsustainable. We are failing to acknowledge that we are running to stay where we are.

At the personal level, when we do become conscious of the prevailing condition, we notice we are not spending enough time knowing each other, reaching out to each other, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, appreciating what we have rather than gasping at what we don't. The independence we struggle to achieve from needs and wants has ended up making us materially comfortable, perhaps, but in a rather lonely sort of way. Even when with friends and family, we are distracted with plenty

of gadgets and their apps. We seem to be aspiring for a life that is promised by a cell phone app when we are not engaging with life that is all around us.

## **5. INTER-DEPENDENT LIVING**

There is another way to live, inter-dependently with an inter-generational perspective. It is simple to do. All we need to do is to appreciate what our actions will mean to the next generation. If it is a positive impact, then it would be a just action, vice versa, if negative, and so best avoided. It does require altering our present ways of production based living and the nature of our economics. Such a paradigm of development does not egg us into a competitive framework for private profit; instead it could encourage cooperative engagement for common good. It could help us live life slowly, attentively and teach us to learn from one another with joy, share with each in happiness, give to each other and enjoy the joy of giving. In such a world there is no stress on securing status, material gains, financial assets, or any of that sort of thing that makes us perpetually anxious. The inter-dependent life would make us feel peace within and around about us. We would be peaceful creatures, one with each other and with all living and non-living beings around us. We would be filled with wonder at the amazing beauty and diversity of nature. And all this does not mean we will live in jungles. It is an enlightened state of living without perpetually suffering the demands of needs and wants.

## **6. WHAT IS WEALTH ABOUT?**

One of the most puzzling things about achieving everything in today's world - money, fame and success, etc. - is the question that dogs us after we achieve all that: Now what? Most super rich people end up living their lives in golf clubs, on yachts or fishing, with other super rich folks. It is a life of leisure, of solitude, of class and comfort. It is a life that is heavily promoted through advertisements, through products, through enticements, through active encouragement through school and college and in most modern day jobs. Imagine what it is to be a Vijay Mallya who has that kind of life. And then we should look at what it costs us all for him to have this life. And there are thousands of such Mallyas around the world who care nothing about what their high life costs others. Such life is costing us the Earth, and the super-rich do not seem to care.

It is no small price to pay such goals for success that are so dominant in the public mind. Sparring occasional political revolutions against autocratic rule, there is really very little effort at appreciating the deep implications of sustaining a lopsided model of development where most labour and very few can have the "good

life.” The extractive processes based on which such massive wealth is created and accumulated and controlled by very few, is indicated in an Oxfam report which says that 62 of the wealthiest in the world have as much wealth as half of the world’s population: that’s 3,500,000,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Now, for those who are not part of either of these blocks of people, who have access to wealth (massive or moderate), that is the other half of the world’s population, life is simply miserable. Every day they live not dreaming about playing golf or partying on a yacht, or a cruise boat vacation; they dream for a good meal, with safe water to drink, a home to live in, the joy that comes with eating with one’s family, of no violence at home or in the street. Simple joys they expect, which they simply cannot have. So for most who are caught in this vicious cycle of violent poverty, dreaming about a good life is like a nightmare. It only makes the day so much harsher.

## **7. POPE’S WAKE UP CALL**

This kind of world certainly cannot be described as a happy world. It clearly is a tormented world. Which is the point which Pope Francis makes in His Encyclical: *On Care for our Common Home*.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”<sup>2</sup>

The Pope observes with deep concern the core cause of this situation:

Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

Closely study at what is taught in schools and colleges today. Look at most modern jobs and what people really do. Deeply look into how so many of the products we now have – electronics, automobiles, buildings, infrastructure, even our

food is produced; they are all based on a model of extraction, not nurturing. Most jobs are tied to this system of production based on extraction which has irreversible impacts on our common home, the planet earth.

## 8. MAKING A CHOICE

We have today the choice of living with nurturing and caring as our guiding principles, or acquisitiveness and power as motto of success. But for most of us, we appear to be caught in between these two possibilities. It is a bit like a tight rope walk, like we are walking over an abyss created by these two worlds. And it fills us with stress.

What if we all decided that we will live inter-dependently and inter-generationally and do what is nurturing for this living world – the only living world in this vast expanse of a Universe? Stay with that thought for a bit. What kind of a world would we then be in?

This is the question Pope Francis would want us to deeply introspect on with care, with a lot of seriousness, with love in our hearts and alertness in our minds and without *indifference* to the condition of our fellow humans and to all life on this planet.

Such a world is possible. It only needs a critical mass of people imagining such a world. Then we will all be thinking very actively, very differently, not at all indifferently. We will then *not want* what causes wars, suffering, death, destruction and decay. We will only then choose to make and nurture for our living that which we need without disrupting anyone else's capacity to meet their needs as well. It is a caring world full of caring people, caring for our Common Home. That is the task now before us all.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Richest 62 people as wealthy as half of world's population, says Oxfam", The Guardian, 18 January 2016, accessible at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/18/richest-62-billionaires-wealthy-half-world-population-combined>

<sup>2</sup> Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* Of the holy father Francis: On care for our common home, dated 24th May 2015, accessible at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



## RECOVERING THE BIBLICAL VISION OF A HARMONIOUS CREATION

Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI

When we go through the pages of the Bible, we come across a beautiful picture of a relationship between God, the Creator and the creation in general. One notices also a very special role given to human beings, namely, a hinge or a cardinal role. Human beings are given the role of mediators between the Creator and creation as they participate in the role to be the attorney of the Creator as well as of the created. A dialectic of this hinge role of humans *vis a vis* the Creator and the creatures in the Bible helps one retrace the biblical vision of creation. The harmony and order of creation depends very much on humankind's cooperation with the Creator's purpose. In this paper I will try to elucidate the biblical vision of creation, as I understand it, especially from the Old Testament perspectives.

### 1. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE CREATION: TO ESTABLISH ORDER DISPELLING CHAOS: GEN 1:1-28; 2:4FF

The creation account in Gen 1:1-2:4a is marked by one feature. The whole creative activity is dominated by God's attempt to bring order from the primeval chaotic situation. The situation before creation is presented as *tohu wabohu* "formless and void" (Gen 1:2). God with the power of his creative word, transformed this principle of disorder to order, by separation and setting proper limits to various elements of creation. If we take the very first verse of the Bible as a temporal dependent clause, v.2 becomes the main clause of the opening verse: "When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water (TNK)." If one takes the first verse in the absolute sense that in the beginning God created the cosmos, then as Moltmann observes, it "suggests that what is meant is the sheer, unqualified precondition for all happening in time, rather than the beginning of

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time itself. Created time only begins when light and the rhythm of day and night come into being.”<sup>1</sup> Either way, creation is understood as the process of making “a life-world of order, vitality and fruitfulness that makes life possible and in the end judged by God to be “very good” (v.31).”<sup>2</sup> However, I am not denying the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*.

As many scholars note, the interest of the Bible is not precisely about the situation before creation, rather what God has done in creating this beautiful cosmos. As R. Rendtorff writes: “When the Hebrew Bible considers the question of the beginning of the world and the history of humankind, only one answer is given: God was there before the beginning of everything, and everything had beginning in him.”<sup>3</sup>

As most scholars agree, the Priestly account of creation in Gen 1 is an exilic liturgical text intended to highlight the contrast and superiority of Yahweh, the God of Israel, against the god of Babylon. The God of Israel has the superior power of his word to bring about a well ordered creation, keeping all the powers of disorder under his control. As long as God is there with his sovereign power to sustain this order, no evil power will be able to challenge or disrupt this creative order. However, chaos is still a reality waiting for a chance to reemerge. As the Bible narrates, the chaos returns in the form of flood, languages, sin, slavery, oppression, injustice, etc., when man defies God’s power. At the same time, God is presented as the one who has the power to “create an alternative world of ordered life, made possible by His powerful word and will.”<sup>4</sup> Psalm 65 speaks of this creative power of God as having two aspects: his power to bring order in *creatio prima*, and subsequently in *creatio continua*. He is the one who establishes the mountains, stills the roaring of the seas and their waves, makes the dawn and dusk sing for joy. The Psalm (vs 10-13) continues concerning the care of God in *creatio continua*:

*You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.*

*You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.*

*The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,*

*The meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.*

In other words, God is the creator and guarantor of the world order and also the giver of all the wellness of creation.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on Ps 33:6, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth,” *Laudato Si* says: “This tells us that the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos or chance, and this exalts it all the more. The creating word expresses

a free choice” (#77). Ps 33 extends the sphere of God’s creative power to history, too. The same God who created all in order will have control over human history, too.

### **1.1. Creation is Good**

In Gen 1:1-31, we have a word *tov* ‘good’ used by the creator to appreciate every day’s creative activity and after the creation of human beings, summarizes the whole creation as *tov meod* ‘extremely good.’ This word indicates the purpose of creation as a communication of God’s own goodness. God wants his goodness to be perceptible through creation. What makes this world good is the order that is established through the creative activity of God. The role of human beings in this creation is to make this goodness last by participating in the creative design of God as God’s image and likeness.

### **1.2. Human Being, the Apex of Creation**

In the Priestly Creation account, human beings are created (*bara*) as the apex of creation. It is noteworthy that only to refer to the creation of human beings, the verb used is *bara* (to create), while for others, the verb used is *asah*. Only God can be the subject of *bara*. The threefold use of this verb to refer to the creation of human beings emphasizes the creative attention given to them.

At the same time, the human being is created together with other living species on the sixth day. Adam cannot claim a separate day for humankind’s creation. This is important. “As part of creation, humankind differs from the rest of creation through only godlikeness (1:26-27) and the commission to exercise dominion (1:28)... The human being is not a copy of God and certainly not a god, but a creature to whom God grants a particular closeness and relationship.”<sup>6</sup> In short, human beings are, first of all, creatures among other creatures. However, in the order of creation, they appear as the last to be created and hence can be considered as the apex of creation. As the last element of creation, they are dependent on all the other creatures. Without the others, human existence would be impossible. While the other beings are a preparation for the creation of human beings, humanity is dependent on and related to them.<sup>7</sup>

In the Yahwistic account, this close relationship between humankind, the Creator and the rest of creation is even more heavily stressed. Before going into the details of this, let us discuss briefly the two duties entrusted to humankind, namely, “to have dominion” and “to subdue”, both often misunderstood.

### 1.3. Gen 1:27-28 and 2:15 - A Comprehensive Picture of Human Role

Humankind is created in God's image and likeness (*zelem wedemut*) with a mission, which is expressed as to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion (*radah*) over other creatures and to subdue (*kabash*) the earth. In the Yahwistic account, humankind is formed from the earth and placed in the God-created garden to till (*abad*) and to keep (*shamar*) it. In both creation accounts, humankind is given a privileged and participatory identity of sharing the imprint of the Creator in view of maintaining a healthy relationship to other created elements.

What does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God? The various scholarly opinions revolve around two interpretative models: "The first model views human beings as God's representative on earth, commissioned with dominion over non-human parts of creation. The second views the human being as God's counterpart such that a dialogical relationship becomes possible between God and human beings."<sup>8</sup> Any interpretation of Gen 1:26-27 needs to take into account these two aspects. It is to be noted that as the human being is the image and likeness of God, so a son is the image and likeness of the father. The divine image becomes also the basic reason for the protection of human life (Gen 9:6). [The danger of misinterpreting humans as the image of God in the sense of replicating the absolute power of God through science to dominate nature is echoed in the present day ecological crisis.]<sup>9</sup> It is worth quoting Moltmann on this point:

*This designation certainly sets him uniquely apart from the rest of creation.... It affects the whole human being, both in his community with other created things and in his difference from them. As God's image, human beings are God's proxy in creation, and represent him. As God's image, human beings are for God himself a counterpart, in whom he desires to see himself as if in a mirror. As God's image, finally human beings are created for the Sabbath, to reflect and praise the glory of God which enters into creation and takes up its dwelling there.<sup>10</sup>*

The verbs "to have dominion" (*radah*) and "subdue" (*kabash*) in Gen 1:28 have given rise to many interpretations. In the past they were wrongly taken to mean an absolute power given to human beings to deal with creation wantonly according to their whims and fancies to suit their benefit without taking into account the Creator's intent. Now most scholars agree that these verbs, semantically parallel, do not imply subjection by force, but rather, putting the earth to creative use.<sup>11</sup> The restricted sense of dominion as stewardship is clear from the mandate given: Human beings are not even given the right to kill those living beings entrusted to their dominion. Instead, by remaining vegetarian (Gen 1:29), they need to take

care of them in cooperation with the Creator. If image and likeness is a kingly role given to humankind, which distinguishes it from the rest of creation, it is expected to live this role by remaining obedient, as male and female, to the divine purposes of creation.<sup>12</sup> As Zoble notes succinctly:

*Human dominion, limited to the earth and animal kingdom, derives from being made in the image of God and is understood as an aspect of God's blessing. It follows necessarily that human dominion is a power bestowed by God and must serve to maintain God's order. Human rule must have positive consequences for the ruled; in ruling humans must preserve their humanity and remain humane. Therefore human dominion can be understood only as an action for which humans are accountable to God... Human dominion over earth should therefore contribute to the preservation and benefit of God's creation.*<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the role of humans as God's image is to be representatives of God the creator in safeguarding and promoting the harmony and order of creation through correct use of the power granted to them. Gen 2:15 explains the dominion as stewardship through the verbs "serve" (*abad*) and "keep" (*shamar*). Both these verbs connote a loving and responsible attitude and have no implication of arrogant supremacy of competition and power display.<sup>14</sup> These verbs together, Gen 1 makes clear, imply that the human being is "both responsible and dependent on earth."<sup>15</sup>

The second creation account, while paying attention to the role of human beings in taking care of creation, through the verb *abad* (serve) as their prime duty towards the earth, focuses more on the failure of humans in responding creatively to the divine assignment. That means:

*Adam is placed in the garden to serve (*abad*) and preserve (*samar*) it. He is, in other words, to exercise his dominion over the garden by managing it so as to preserve it, to enable it continually to achieve those purposes God has for it. Thus his dominion is one of service, serving-cultivating and protecting--the creation and thereby serving the creation's owner.*<sup>16</sup>

#### **1.4. Some Features of the Yahwistic Creation Account**

Though older than the Priestly Account of creation in Gen 1:1-2:4a, in the present order in the Bible, the Yahwistic account tries to answer the question, whence and how evil gained foothold in creation by which the harmonious co-existence between the Creator and creation presented in the first account got blurred. By presenting the creation of human beings as a direct act of God, it stresses the centrality of the humans in creation. It highlights also the dialogical character of the relationship between God, humanity and the earth by presenting the creation of *Adam* as the

indwelling of the divine spirit (*ruah*) into the shape God made from the earth (*adamah*). However, we should not miss the point that both humanity and the rest of the animal world share a commonality: both are formed from *adamah* (Gen 2:19). The uniqueness of humanity indeed lies in the fact that it is gifted with the *ruah* of God.

In the Yahwistic account, the human being is given the noble task of safeguarding this harmony by making proper choices. The responsibility of human beings in either fostering harmony or destroying it through their freedom of choice is highlighted in the story of the fall. The Garden of Eden before the sin portrays the ideal of harmony among God the Creator, humans, the cosmos and the animal world. The harmony that existed prior to human infringement is shown in the freedom of Adam and Eve to walk with God, in the response to His invitation; in the joy of Adam to have a companion; in God's entrusting him with the noble task of giving names to "all livestock and to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field." Of course the task of giving names should be understood as "an act of discernment rather than an act of domination."<sup>17</sup>

With the sin of the first parents, the shalom that prevailed is lost. Shalom is well-being resulting from the harmony of relationships. The wrong choice of eating the forbidden fruit depicts "how God's ordered creation is thrown into chaos by the human couple's disobedience." The signs of lost harmony are: a) the reluctance of Adam and Eve to come to the presence of God as they realized their nakedness; b) the synergy that paved the way for accusing and fault finding; 3) the earth's producing thorns and thistles indicating a rupture between humans and nature; 4) the expulsion from the Garden indicating lost trust between the Creator and humans.

However, that God does not abandon the creation to total collapse because of the influence of evil is depicted in the Story of the Flood, because, as Spieckermann notes, "Creation is God's foundational affirmation of the world and of humankind despite evil; it is the primal history of his freewill for relationship, which originates in his will to love."<sup>18</sup> In the person of Noah, who is a person with righteousness and integrity (*š caDDîq Tämîm*), God finds a reason not to bring about his decision "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them" (Gen 6:7).

Here, too, we notice the pivotal role a human person can play in saving creation. The reason for God to feel sorry for creating humans was their wickedness, which

affected the rest of creation. Their wantonness paved the way for the destruction of other creatures, too. That means, any sinful attitude can affect the well-being of the earth, which is well evidenced in many of the ecological disasters and crises.<sup>19</sup> However, through the righteousness of one person and his integral ways “God gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope” (LS #71). The role of saving creation from total destruction is entrusted to the minority of those humans with the sense of justice and integrity.

The flood story teaches us that renewal of God’s creation is possible only through obedient collaboration with God’s designs which “entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator” (LS #71). Thus, Noah provides us a perfect model of how to become an agent to restore the harmony of God’s creation.

### **1.5. Harmony of Creation in the Genesis Accounts**

From our foregoing analysis of the creation accounts in Genesis, we can identify some important features pertaining to creation:

1. God is the creator and humankind is one among the creatures.
2. Creation can be understood as God’s power to create harmony or order with the power of his word by removing chaos.
3. Every created element manifests the goodness of God and gives witness to God. Everything is created with a purpose (LS #85).
4. The human being is created with uniqueness, but this uniqueness is to be understood in relationship to the Creator and other creatures. He/she is unique, not independent of the rest of creation, but in view of it. “Human beings are fellow creatures and companions with all creation.”<sup>20</sup>
5. The role given to humans is to be correctly interpreted as delegatory in nature, and their primary responsibility is to promote the harmony of the universe, endowed with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance. As Pope John Paul II wrote: “The human race is called to explore this order, to examine it with due care and make use of it while safeguarding its integrity.”
6. Humans are not masters of creation but are stewards of it. As stewards “human beings are profoundly related to non-human creation because, like all things, they are creatures made by God.”<sup>21</sup>

7. The result of human participation in God's creative activity in the form of "dominion," if done properly, is to provide rest (Sabbath). As we all know, rest comes only through harmony.
8. Sin brought the rupture of the harmony of "the three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (LS #66).
9. A person with a sense of justice and integrity can save creation from total destruction.

## **2. PROPHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF HARMONY OF CREATION**

The pivotal role of human beings in maintaining the harmony of creation is well-delineated in many Prophetic texts which present nature as singing to the tune of the human being. Many of these texts speak of the role of human beings either in maintaining or destroying the harmony of creation, or creation is presented as the beneficiary of the justice and as the victim of injustice of humans. Nature's well-being is dependent on human conduct. Of course, the Prophets spoke from the covenant perspective of Israel's fidelity or infidelity to the covenantal values. Prophet Hosea says: "The land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing" (4:3) because of human disobedience to the Decalogue. Prophet Zephaniah spares no words to articulate a strong theme of the biblical tradition that when Yahweh is not obeyed all creation is placed in profound jeopardy when he says: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD. I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the LORD" (Zeph 1:2-3). In anti-creation, the crown of creation will be the first one to be held accountable for the destruction. What these texts communicate is "all life in the cosmos depends ultimately upon knowledge of God, that is, upon living under the manifest will of him who has ordered the life of his people into a helpful community. If it rejects this salutary order, it brings the world with it to its destruction."<sup>22</sup> For the prophets, the sharing of the earth's resources with the poor and marginalized is also part of this created order and any denial of that is injustice.

However, this negativity is not everything. Positive regard for God's values and respect and obedience to God's designs will bring restoration and renewal not only for humans but through them to the whole creation. If injustice and waywardness which jeopardize the covenant can bring havoc for nature as proclaimed by the



prophets, the restoration of the covenant relationship through reconciliation can also restore the brokenness of nature as envisaged by Hosea, 2:21-23:

*On that day I will answer, says the LORD, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God."*

The prophetic linking of the covenant with the well-being of creation helps us to understand the role of human beings in maintaining the harmony of creation. Any act of injustice can have an implication for destroying the God created order of the universe. As we have seen, this is an order intertwined and interrelated among humanity, God and other created elements, which is delineated in the covenant of creation in Genesis and echoed in many other books of the Bible. As St. Paul says, creation groans together with humans for redemption (Rom 8:22-23).

### **3. PSALM 8: A HYMN TO THE RECIPROCITY OF CREATION**

The Psalms, rich in creation motifs, extol the harmony of creation primarily as the expression of the wonderful deeds together with the salvation (*niplaot*) of Yahweh (e.g., Ps 139:14; 145:4-6). For Israel, creation is an extension of salvation. The same God who liberated them from the chaos and disorder of slavery and exile is the God who created the world by the power of his word and thus liberated the universe from the primordial chaos and set in motion a harmony of existential relationships. The same God who created the universe is the one who takes care of humanity and the earth with goodness, steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps 100). Ps 19 speaks of the meta-human language of nature which praises God the creator:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.<sup>3</sup>  
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world (Ps 19:2-4)

It is the voice of the universe created by God present in all the earth using its own mode of communication from day to day and night to night. It is the language of God's universal glory streaming down from heaven to earth. Humans are called to join the *laudato Si* of nature by meditating on the glory of God manifested in all creation. Only through prayerful meditation on the language of nature which sings glory to God the creator, will we be able to reclaim the harmony of creation. As the Book of Wisdom says: "From the greatness and beauty of created things comes

a corresponding perception of their Creator” (13:5). However, to understand any language, one has to develop a love for it, make a commitment to learn it; so, too, with the language of nature. When nature becomes a matter of prayer, we cannot but respect it. Then the universe becomes “a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” rather than an object to be made use of or a problem to be solved (LS #12).

In Psalm 8, we see a beautiful meditation on the reciprocal nature of the relationship among the Creator, human beings and the rest of creation. In many points, it echoes the anthropology of Gen 1. But it tries to identify the reason for the privileged place of humans in creation and the nature of humanity’s role in the created world. The psalmist who meditates on the significance of human beings in comparison with other creatures asks an existential question: What is the human being? On the one hand he/she is insignificant in stature in comparison with the vast universe for God to remember them. On the other hand, the psalmist is well aware that the human being is “the apple of God’s eye” and hence has a unique status in creation. The pivotal question is: Is the uniqueness due to human merit or due to God’s favour? The answer gives the key to the human attitude towards the Creator and other created neighbours on the planet. The psalmist, after a profound meditation on the grandeur of God the Creator and his presence in all the earth through his creation, acknowledges the truth that the dignity and worth of a human being consists in the fact that God cares for him/her. This dignity is a gratuitous gift of God by the sharing of His own qualities of glory and honour (*kābôd w’hādār*) (Ps 29:1). If it is a free gift, it is to be accepted with humility. God’s adorning humans with His own qualities makes them unique. This adorning is in view of a role they have to play in God’s creation. Echoing the theology of the creation accounts, Ps 8 identifies the role as “rule” (*masal*) over the works of God’s hands, to be master within the created universe. It is a kingly role, but according to the manner of God himself.

The dominion entrusted to humans is special. It is based on the power of God, who establishes power through the lowly and the weak. As we learn from the Bible, God exercises His power, not in arrogance, but in mercy, in listening to the cry of the poor and the afflicted. In the NT, Jesus practices this kingly role as *diakonia*, service. Humans must exercise their power by living in reverence of God. Then the human being will be an acceptable image of God who serves the superior purpose of safeguarding and fostering the fundamental divine order governing the universe.<sup>23</sup> This Psalm refers to an integrated harmony of the created world, bringing together the following affirmations: 1) God is the creator, 2) humanity is supremely loved

by God, and 3) the human being is called to exercise the power given with humility and responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

As we come to the conclusion of this paper, I would summarize the biblical vision of creation as a harmonious interrelated existence where human beings are placed in a pivotal role. Having been adorned with God's own qualities of glory, majesty, steadfast love and mercy (Ps 103:4), humans have a crucial role in protecting the God intended inherent harmony and order of creation. But the irresponsible and egoistical choices humans make without respecting the integral vision of creation lead to rupture of the rhythm of the universe. Humankind needs to learn to glorify God through the beauty of the created world, and to advocate for a genuine creation-bound spirituality in adopting more eco-friendly and merciful attitudes that render less harm to Nature. This can be done by avoiding unbridled hedonism and careless attitudes that bring about damage to the God-created order of the universe.

The only way to recover the lost harmony of creation is to understand, and correctly use the God-given role entrusted to humanity as *imago Dei*. Humankind is "to function as God's stewards and as such to continue to keep what God has created in conformity with his purposes and will for that creation. It is not primarily for our own well-being that we rule over creation but for God."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, all of us are invited to acknowledge that we share in making the earth groan and that we are gifted with the graceful power to reclaim its harmony if we repent and convert from our profit-oriented culture to a culture of sharing and solidarity with the earth and the poor.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>3</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2001), 418.

<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 153.

<sup>5</sup> Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Hermeneia, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 140-141.

<sup>6</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 255.

<sup>7</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> F.J. Stendebach, “*selem*,” *TDOT*:12, 392.

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> H.-J. Zobel, “*rada*,” *TDOT*: 13, 335.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Bullmore, “The Four Most Important Biblical Passages for a Christian Environmentalism,” *Trinity Journal* 19 NS (1998), 156: “The rule that men and women are to exercise over creation, then, is one of servanthood, as a brother or sister “rules” over others in the family.”

<sup>13</sup> Zobel, “*rada*,” 335-336.

<sup>14</sup> E. Carpenter, *abad*, *NIDOTTE*: 3, 304-305. See also R.L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 139-162.

<sup>15</sup> Kristin M. Swenson, “Care and Keeping East of Eden: Gen 4:1-16 in Light of Gen 2-3,” *Interpretation* 60.4 (2006): 376.

<sup>16</sup> Bullmore, “The Four Most Important Biblical Passages”, 157.

<sup>17</sup> George W. Ramsey, “Is Name-Giving an Act of Dominion in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere”, *CBQ*50 (1988): 35.

<sup>18</sup> Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *God of the Living*, 259.

<sup>19</sup> See Rober Barry Beal, *Through Ecological Eyes* (Mumbai: St. Paul’s Publications, 2009), 112-114.

<sup>20</sup> Florida Bishops, “Companions in Creation,” *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 20 (1991) 610.

<sup>21</sup> Florida Bishops, “Companions in Creation”, 610.

<sup>22</sup> H.W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>23</sup> H. Gross, “*masal*,” *TDOT*: 9, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Bullmore, “The Four Most Important Biblical Passages,” 155.

## HUMAN ROOTS OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**S. Devadoss**

It is scientifically expressed that the most beautiful Planet Earth is the common home in which the plants, animals and humans are believed to have been living for about 4,600 million years within the three-billion-year story of the universe. But only in the 1960s for the first time we could succeed in looking at it from beyond Earth. The Astronaut Russell Schweickart who had the privilege of seeing it from above, had described that the Earth

is so small and so fragile and such a precious little spot in that universe that you can block it out with your thumb, and you realize on that small spot, that little blue and white thing, is everything that means anything to you - all of history and music and poetry and art and death and birth and love, tears, joy, games, all of it on that little spot out there that you can cover with your thumb. And you realize from that perspective that you've changed, that there's something new there, that the relationship is no longer what it was.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, the distortion in the relationship more specifically between human beings and the world of nature leads to what we call it today as ecological crisis. In short, ecological crisis is perceived as worsening because of the decreasing quality of the environment on local, regional, and global levels due to natural processes and activities of the different living beings particularly humans, occupying the habitat. That is to say, ecological degradation occurs because of the imbalance that is being brought about in the ecosystem by natural factors like earthquakes, volcanoes, forest fire, cyclones, landslides and harmful human centered activities.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we are not going to analyze the natural causes which pave the way for the ecological degradation rather we restrict ourselves to focus our attention only

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to the human roots of the ecological crisis from a theological perspective. We need not have any serious investigation to perceive the ecologically deteriorating situation because the impact of the ecological damage is felt by everyone in our day-today existence in one way or the other. And thus no one is spared from its consequences. While a few like the rich feel it less, many, especially the poor, experience it more. One of the realities of the contemporary world is that the three vital components, namely geosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere of the Earth are getting dangerously damaged. Pope Francis mentions it in clear-cut terms: "The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits" (*LS*. 27).<sup>3</sup> Assessing the gravity of the ecological destruction, R. F. Dasmann writes: "The human race is like an ape with a hand grenade. Nobody can say when he will pull the pin of grenade and the whole world will be destroyed."<sup>4</sup>

Today we come across the seriousness of the environmental situation as people are talking more about the atmospheric pollution, global warming, industrialization and urbanization, stratospheric ozone depletion, vast quantities of toxic waste, scarcity and polluted water, degradation of land, desertification and massive deforestation, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, depletion of key natural resources, etc. The present Pope, while dealing with the contemporary issue of 'What is happening to our Common Home,' rightly indicated in his Encyclical Letter, *LAUDATO SI* that certain factors, such as the atmospheric pollution leading to climate change (20-26), the exhaustion and contamination of water (27-31) and the extinction of biodiversity (32-42) which pave the way for the decline of the quality of life and the breakdown of society (43-47). So to say, these are all considered to be merely the external symptoms or manifestations of today's ecological devastation. If we want to do something substantially to restrict our destruction of the environment before we reach the point of no return, we need to go beyond the symptoms and deal with the underlying roots or causes that play vital role in bringing about the ecological degradation. There is an absolute necessity to go to the bottom of the matter in order to find lasting solution.

I would like to clarify this point with a parable drawn from the reality of life. A person senses that he is losing the sight of one of his eyes. He thinks that this problem is something connected to his eye, so with a cataract operation the eyes sight will be restored. Therefore he goes to an eye specialist to have an eye check up. After a long and serious investigation, the doctor diagnoses that the problem is not connected with eye rather with the nerve that goes to the brain. Hence the patient is requested to consult a neurologist who in turn diagnoses with the help of the report of MRI scan that the loss of eye sight is due to the growth of Brain Tumour. As a

result he recommends the patient to undergo immediately an operation to remove the tumour from the brain. As per the recommendation of the neurologist, the patient is operated and the tumour is removed; he regains the full sight. Both the eye specialist and neurologist luckily and correctly diagnose the root cause of the loss of sight and thus the outcome is successful. In the same way we need to find out the underlying root causes of ecological devastation, and only then we will be able to handle the situation successfully.

In our efforts to identify the human roots of ecological crisis, we need to comprehend the basic fact that the human roots are as complex as the eco-systems and, above all, they are all the more debatable. Scientists, environmentalists, theologians and others, who have ecological concern, speak about different causes for today's ecological crisis. A few of them are "urbanization, growing population, overconsumption, economic growth, affluence, poverty, conflict, and ignorance of the interrelatedness of the global system."<sup>5</sup> Some others also began to analyse the origins of the environmental degradation from different perspectives such as political, social, economic, cultural, spiritual, historical and psychological. For example, Kenneth M. Sayre examines the ecological catastrophe from the economic point of view.<sup>6</sup> According to him, there is a direct connection between degradation of the biosphere and human energy use, which have been increasing exponentially from the time of the industrial revolution. He asserts that the energy use, in turn, is directly linked to the economic production. Sayre also goes to the extent of showing us how these three factors are consistently bound together. As a result he comes to the inevitable conclusion that the only way to overcome our environmental crisis is to reverse the present pattern of growth in the world economy.

However, we shall restrict to some of the most common causes namely inappropriate application of science and technology, hallucination of progress or growth, consumerist and throw-away culture, excessive anthropocentric approach to nature. As we proceed further we will be able to make out that these human roots are linked together. There is a strong conviction that they basically stem from the moral or ethical issues or the breakdown of our relationships with God, our neighbour and the earth. Hence we cannot think of any solution to ecological degradation without seriously paying attention to values, character, lifestyles and actions of individual.

## **1. INAPPROPRIATE APPLICATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

In terms of the relatedness between science and technology, it is said that technology is perceived as applied science. Lynn White came out with more clarity

concerning the significance of science and technology and their sudden fusion:<sup>7</sup> In the traditional understanding, science was known to be aristocratic, speculative, and intellectual in intent; whereas technology was seen as lower class, empirical and action oriented. “The quite sudden fusion of these two, towards the middle of the 19th century, is surely related to the slightly prior and contemporary democratic revolutions which, by reducing social barriers, tended to assert a functional unity of brain and hand.”<sup>8</sup>

Although in earlier times, science and technology were considered to be occidental, today they are understood to be very much western in style and nature. George Grant explains that technology is not to be merely seen as one more area of knowledge just like physics, biology, or chemistry, since it contains the resources which are made use for making things happen. It also takes into account the capability of human beings to make use of the advances in scientific knowledge to develop innovative equipments (tools, devices and processes) in order to work our will on the world around us.<sup>9</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, an international geologist, philosopher, theologian, poet and mystic, whose writings were seen as a christian response towards a right relationship between humans and the created world, was very much fascinated by technology and thus he did not grasp the danger to the environment. Someone else also enlisted the achievements of the “technological revolution” of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the USA, namely the discovery of telephone and phonograph, the establishment of electric power plant, production of automobile, introduction of car, and the inauguration of engine powered airplane.<sup>10</sup>

Assessing the impact of science and technology, the recent Popes pinpointed their optimistic perceptive or their valuable contributions. John Paul II duly acknowledged that they are the magnificent products of a God-given human creativity and Benedict XVI moved on further to tell us that technology expresses the inner tension that impels human gradually to overcome material limitations.<sup>11</sup> The present Pope indicated aptly their contributions in the fields of medicines, engineering and communications and spoke of the improvement in the quality of human life, in domestic appliances, in transportation systems, in the construction of bridges, buildings, art and music, etc., (LS. 102-104). We are indeed privileged to be beneficiaries of the advancement of different technologies namely information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology, energy technology, nuclear technology, reproductive technology and so on. The rapid and massive technological advancement contributed constructively at the social level for the transformation of the functioning of our primary institutions as well as at the personal level by opening up new possibilities for the fulfilment of human requirements and wants.<sup>12</sup> There



are also many others who indeed recognize the valuable contributions of science in terms of the advancement in the living standards of humanity, invention of better treatment for life threatening diseases, improvement of technology, providing us with steam engine, power loom and cotton gin.<sup>13</sup> Hence we are not in a position to ignore or undermine the positive elements of the modern empirical sciences and the contemporary and advanced technologies.

However, we should be aware of the fact that all is not well with modern and western technological culture. It is because technology is primitive, destructive and all the more polluting since it has become the source of the exploitation of natural resources, soil poisoning, destruction of the forests, atmospheric pollution, chemicals in food and so on.<sup>14</sup> Classical technology is valued as ‘energy hungry, dirty and ecologically destabilising’ which is used less and less within the boundaries of rich and developed nations and more and more in the so-called poor, underdeveloped and developing countries. It is true that there emerged advanced and less destructive technologies, which are mostly available and made use of in the wealthy nations.<sup>15</sup>

The different technologies, which we are handling in different spheres of life, through their in-put (consumption) and out-put (emission), bring about ecological destruction. In terms of their in-put, they make use of non-renewable resources. They consume non-renewable substances such as fossil fuels like coal, petroleum products (petrol, diesel) and natural gas instead of solar energy, food energy or water, wind and muscle power.<sup>16</sup> Pope John Paul II in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1990, mentions of the ecological imbalance brought by the “uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources’ (LS. 7).

Without any scrupulosity, we use them with the false notion, that an unlimited quantity of energy and resources are readily available, that we can renew them quickly.<sup>17</sup> Today we know that the resources of the earth are “being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production” (LS. 32). Here emerges a vital question: how long can we keep on using the non-renewable materials? Gone are the days to presume that the resources that we make use of are infinite and thus we can go on squandering or extracting them without any end. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have come to the crystal clear realisation that they are absolutely limited and we have already started to feel it is becoming a reality. That is the reason why they are not that much freely available and their cost is shooting up day by day.

The technologies, which are applied especially in the industrial sector, nuclear power plants and automobiles, emit certain chemical substances like carbon

monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, particulates, fly ash and so on. They affect not only human beings but also hurt animals, trees, plants, crops, damage papers, textiles, leathers, stones, marbles, paintings and metals buildings and make clothes and other materials dirty. They also play a vital role in bringing about imbalance in the composition of ecosystem. They are considered to be main causes for global warming or green house effect, acid rain and ozone hole.

There are some persons in our society, who support directly or indirectly the idea that science and technologies are so to say all-powerful and have the capacity to give solution to any type of problems which are political, social, economic, ethical and ecological in nature. They hold on to the conviction that the application of technology which induces any kind of ecological imbalances, is equally capable of overcoming such discrepancies with new technologies namely genetic technology, lasers, computers, etc. Lately, Pope Francis in his encyclical on the common home informs us in categorical terms about this issue: "Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems," (LS. 109). But from our day-today experiences, we are well aware that this kind of conviction is certainly not realistic because, how can the germ, which causes malaria, become the factor by which we can recover from our sickness? F. Capra is of the opinion that the consequences of the so-called scientific and technological solutions are more dangerous than the original problem. He writes:

Wasteful energy consumption is countered by nuclear power, lack of political insight is compensated for by building more missiles and bombs, and the poisoning of the natural environment is remedied by developing special technologies that in turn, affect the environment in still unknown ways. By looking for technological solutions to all problems we usually just shift these around in the global ecosystem, and very often the side effects of the 'solution' are more harmful than the original problem"<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, it is all the more appropriate to remember the idea of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler who indicates that science and technology cannot be our sources of happiness. So he notes, there are human beings, who believe, due to their arrogance, that if they are enthusiastic to go forward in developing the world based on an ever-expanding science and technology, they will ultimately accomplish an environment that will be capable of offering everyone unlimited satisfaction or fulfillment of the senses and a life of untrammled ease and pleasure. There can be no greater error than this.<sup>19</sup>

Socially speaking, the technological advancements cause disparity among the people. Many may be under the impression that the more we opt for technological

advancement, the more we will be able to overcome the problem of poverty in the world. But today the economic situation of the people enables us to come to the realization that there is inequality between the rich and the poor even in the technologically advanced countries. There is no hesitation to say that the gap between them increases day by day. It is also perceived that the technological advancements favor and benefit only those who handle scientific and technological production and disregard others.

It is also equally true to say that our dependence on technology has substantially changed our perception of our relationship to creation. This idea is made clear by Albert Gore who states that the more we depend on technology in view of mediating our relationship to nature, the more we come across the same trade-off: it is beyond doubt that we have power to process what we would like to get from nature more conveniently for more people, but it is something unfortunate that the sense of awe and reverence that we experience in our relationship to nature is often left behind.<sup>20</sup>

Technology, which causes the environmental degradation, is basically associated with the idea of denial, namely, the denial of the pessimistic impacts, the denial of limits of technology, and the denial of our drifting apart from the rest of creation.<sup>21</sup> When we employ technology, there is the possibility of encountering certain unexpected impacts due to our ignorance with regard to the inner mechanism that exists within the eco-system. This idea is expressed through the concept “technological drift.” Here comes Langdon Winner to help us to grasp this phenomenon in a better way. He states that when a variety of technologies are developed and applied under a very constricted range of considerations, they begin to act and interact in countable ways beyond the expectations of any person or institution. When the speed and the extent of technological innovation happen to increase, there arises a situation where the societies encounter the distinct possibility of going adrift in a vast sea of unexpected consequences.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, science and technology can be made use of for both constructive and destructive purposes. In this sense, as such they are seen fine. That is the reason why we encourage the people especially scientists to come out with new discoveries and innovative technologies. But the problem comes with human beings who make use of the technologies. They can either use them for the developmental purposes or for the destruction of anything. But by observing the realities of life, the Pope Francis shares the concern with Romano Guardini: “Contemporary man has not been trained to use power well,” and the Pope rightly sees the reason for it in the fact that we have not developed human responsibility, values and conscience as we focused our attention for the advancement of technology (LS. 105). Jurgen Moltmann goes

a step further and underlines that the reason for the crisis of the modern world is neither due merely to the technologies for the exploitation of nature, nor to the sciences which crowned the human beings as the lords of nature. But, it is profoundly because of the striving of human beings for power and domination.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. EXCESSIVE ANTHROPOCENTRIC APPROACH TO NATURE

In our modern, advanced, scientific, technological and civilized world, it is not very surprising to get the impression about the human beings that they live and act as if they are the center of the earth and everything is moving according to their direction. Above all, they think that everything is in their control and they have the upper hand. It is mainly because of the central and self-centered role played by them in day-to-day existence. Pope Francis warns us if the human beings happen to place themselves at the centre, they begin to give absolute importance to immediate convenience and everything else becomes relative (LS. 122).

In the context of humans' urge for domination, Nietzsche says that as far as our modern society is concerned, the will to power-domination is that, which characterizes human beings.<sup>24</sup> This inclination of humans expresses itself in the concept of "Anthropocentrism," especially in the western philosophical and theological circles. This expression denotes that everything, which exists in the universe, is exclusively for humanity. Therefore, human beings stand as the culminating point for everything that we come across in the world. We cannot think of the intrinsic value, otherness and meaning of anything apart from the human beings. All beings are supposed to be at the disposal of human beings to serve them and, as such, they are expected to be under their control so that the human beings can obtain their desires and projects.<sup>25</sup>

The classical formulation of such anthropocentrism takes us back to Protagoras of Abdera (c. 485-10 B.C.E) who articulated: "Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not."<sup>26</sup> It brings to our awareness that the humans are the ones who determine about everything that we find in this cosmos, which ultimately signifies human's superior power over the rest of creation. Jungan Moltmann helps us understand better the implication of this masterly power of humanity. He tells us that within the circle of science and epistemology, there exists some kind of *divide et impera* logic that is "the world of nature is to be broken down into component parts and mastered for human use."<sup>27</sup> This kind of anthropocentric attitude got strengthened by the thinking pattern of persons, like Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon, who relied very much on the strengths of science. As science enlarged the capability or

power to objectify and change all as objects to be analyzed, exploited, dominated, controlled, the spirit of mastery over nature was born.<sup>28</sup>

The French philosopher Rene Descartes, who is considered to be the father of modern philosophy, insists on the ontological difference between human beings and animals\all of nature. His argues that human being is the only living creature who has a soul and he or she is capable of thought. But in the case of animal\all of nature he understands it as mere machine and is not capable of thought or free will. Bacon goes in the same direction and holds on the view that nature is lifeless, mechanical and without soul. Hence it can be dominated and used by human beings. As something radically different from human being, nature is that which exists in order to be used in the accomplishment of human purpose.<sup>29</sup>

The perception that humans are to dominate and control nature, led us to the situation of the inability of the earth to support life. So to say our modern technologies, industrialization, globalization, and the capitalist economy are nothing but manifestations of our domination over nature. In the last century, Lynn White<sup>30</sup> was one of the few who showed that the anthropocentrism in general and the view of domination over nature in particular had influenced Greek philosophy, which in turn influenced Judeo-Christian thinking. And others also joined him to accuse Christianity to be ultimately responsible for today's ecological deterioration and for the enslavement of the rest of creation by human beings. Here we observe that the issue of the historical root of ecological crisis led to the discussion with regard to the connection between ecology and religion.

White was having the idea that the concept of 'dominion' that we come across in the book of Genesis made the westerners to interpret dominion as domination. As a result, they started to plunder the nature. The industrial revolution further enabled them to dominate the rest of creation and to control the earth. Therefore, he concluded that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt," and noted that we are likely to encounter a worsening ecological crisis until we are in a position to discover a new religion or rethink our old one. By way of responding to the accusation of White against Christianity, Pope John Paul II, in his message, shows that Adam and Eve, who were made in the image and likeness of God, should have exercised their dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28) with wisdom and love. On the contrary, they went about destroying the existing harmony by deliberately going against the Creator's plan.<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis goes further by drawing inspiration from the Declaration of the Colloquium of FABC to make things clear to us by acknowledging that an insufficient perception of Christian anthropology led to the misunderstanding of the relationship between human beings and the rest of

creation. “Often what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. Instead, our “dominion” over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship” (LS. 116).

Concerning the issue of the desire for domination, Pope Francis stresses another element, namely, the necessity of having right relationships among the human beings. He makes it clear to us that we cannot think of any renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself (LS. 118). Here he underlines that there exists the ‘connection between our Promethean relationship to the natural world, and similar relationships of power and control of one human being over another.’<sup>32</sup> When we talk about human beings’ attitude of having power and control not only over nature but also over other human beings, it is indeed awakening to see the higher beings dominating the lower ones in socio-political, cultural, religious spheres of life. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we come across all the more the fascists, Nazis, and other fundamentalist and extremists of any sort, going about “justifying racism and the extermination of those who were deemed unfit to love, ranging from the genocide of the Jews to the mass killing of mentally handicapped, homosexuals and gypsies. Others, including liberal and socio-democratic governments, have indulged in sterilizing non-desirable characters.”<sup>33</sup>

In today’s context, we also come across the situation where the rich people are dominating the poor, having control over them, making use of their riches for domination and exploiting them for their selfish motives. All these realities make us understand the existence of the domination of the strong members over weaker ones. Still in this regard, it is very much fitting to deal with the concern of the Eco-feminists who speak of “*andro*”-centrism, that is, showing of power and control of male over female. The eco-feminists “analyze the dominant role of males in destroying the eco-friendly knowledge systems and practices of women and in replacing them by a dualistic conquest-based regime over women, colonies and nature.”<sup>34</sup> When we deal with the issue of the exploitation of nature by humans, one of the concerns that need our attention is nothing but genetic manipulation. Pope Francis, in his latest encyclical, shares the insights of John Paul II as well as his own concerning genetic manipulation (LS. 131-134). It is made clear that the Church, while encouraging people to make use of their creative power for constructive purposes, appreciates any good results which come from any discipline of science and technology especially from genetics and its technological application in any area. But she does not accept any indiscriminate genetic manipulation. She invites

us continuously to rethink the goals, effects, overall context and ethical limits of this human activity, which is seen as a form of power linking significant risks (LS. 131).

As we conclude with the issue of anthropocentric approach to nature, it is essential to keep in our minds that the human beings are endowed with certain capacities, namely knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility. Hence they are considered to be unique in God's creations and they are said to possess a special dignity above others. Human is not to be considered as merely one among many other species. On the one hand, they are part of the natural world and on the other hand they are seen as cultivators, co-creators, artisans, which distinguish them from other species. After creating the earth, God entrusted it to the humans to use it, not according to their whims and fancies but in accordance with the good original objective with which it was entrusted to them. We are expected to recognize the intrinsic value even in the lesser beings, no matter how small they may be. Therefore, the humans have the grave obligation to respect the natural world and its integrity and act according to the inner dynamism with which the entire complex ecosystems exist. When the situation arises for the human beings to make use of nature for other purposes, there comes the necessity of involving the conscience, social customs, cultural values and ecological wisdom in view of guiding them. This is considered to be the unique ability of the human species.<sup>35</sup>

### **3. HALLUCINATION OF UNLIMITED GROWTH/PROGRESS**

When we speak about growth, progress or development, it is often understood in terms of socio-political, cultural or spiritual growth, basically referring to the economic growth. Those who support the idea of progress claim that growth in different areas of life or holistic progress becomes possible basically through economic growth. Hence, growth is essentially seen as material or one-dimensional. The modern society is based on the core of economics, which is perceived as the art and technique of unlimited production of wealth by means of the exploitation of nature's resources and the technological ingenuity of the human species.<sup>36</sup> In this context, economics is viewed as the science of unlimited growth in today's societies. From the ecological point of view, the desire for unlimited growth is the reason for the destructive forces, bringing various kinds of illnesses and death of earth's species and of everything the earth consists.<sup>37</sup>

As a matter of fact, for the last couple of centuries, we had been living under the cloud of this infinite and unlimited economic progress. It is the usual tendency

of human beings to categorize a country or nation as developed, developing and underdeveloped, depending upon its production of goods and services. Therefore every party, which forms the government in a state or nation, is very much competitive in demonstrating to others that it is all the more capable of making more profits than others through their efficient ways of production of goods and services. In order to increase the profit ever year, we are not felling scruples in opting for any number of even destructive scientific technologies, which in turn deplete the resources of the earth. In our enthusiasm to get more profit we do not bother and thus ignore the negative effects of technologies as well as the depletion of natural resources, depriving the coming generation of a better future.

With this understanding concerning the unlimited growth, let us deal with a vital question, that is; why is that all do not prefer the infinite economic progress? It is because the concept of growth is very much promoted by the powerful elite or developed nations as this kind of growth really benefits them. Their focus is on the objective of maximum profit rather than meetings the genuine needs of all without plundering the earth. Pope Francis brings asserts that the maximization of profits, often secluded from other considerations, leads us to a misapprehension of the very concept of the economy (LS. 195).

Just as the technological advancements in our society, the modern approach to growth also focuses its attention on the elite; it is not in a position or capable of supporting the welfare of the poor. They are the ones who are the most affected in the society. Although it is presented that the infinite growth is mainly for the benefit of the poor, the reality of life shows something different. Only when our perspective of growth is concerned about the environmental factor as well as the principle of equal distribution of wealth, it can contribute to the well being of the poor. It is possible that some of us may interpret, when we do not opt for the unlimited growth, we do not show interest to work for the poor. As our current perception of progress ultimately aims at the utmost profit, it is not at all sensitive or concerned about the various ways and means through which harm is done to the environment such as land degradation, soil erosion, atmospheric pollution, water contamination, extinction of species, depletion of natural resources and the like.

Our present experiences of growth also clearly manifest how much damage we have done to the environment by exploiting it and thus disturbing the very integrity of creation. Under the pretext of meeting the needs of humanity, we keep on sucking the natural resources. We presume that they are unlimited and infinite. Although we are conscious that some of the resources are non-renewable and are getting depleted, we do not bother about it and take it for granted. Due to our over



consumption of those resources, we begin to steal from what belong to our future generation. In this regard, Pope Francis reminds us that “our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those remain excluded from development” (LS. 162).

By way of responding to these destructive perspectives of economic growth or development, Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* made certain things clear to us; that people have the right to self-development as well as to the means, which are necessary for it. And he rightly indicated that they have also the duty not to follow their own interests to the extent of deterring the welfare of others. They need to extend active solidarity and have consideration for the universal common good.<sup>38</sup> Pope Paul VI, in his *Populorum Progressio*, asserts that development is the new name for peace and we must pay attention to the development of people who are affected by hunger, misery, disease and ignorance.<sup>39</sup>

The U.N. World Commission on Environment and Development brought out a document in 1987 with the title *Our Common Future*. This Document speaks of *sustainable development* as an alternative to the unlimited growth or development. The sustainable development is defined as a process of change in which several elements such as the exploitation of resources, the orientation of investments, the paths of technological development and institutional change are expected to be in accordance with both current and future needs (No. 30). This document is appreciated because it brought out a shift from the understanding of development to that of sustainable development and thus insisted on the necessity of our responsibility in developmental activities. In 1992, the U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development underlined the intimate connection between the promotion of a sound environment and development (No. 4). Pope Francis speaks of the connection between sustainable development and intergenerational solidarity and requests the developed countries to assist the poorer ones by supporting their sustainable developmental programs especially through the reduction of their energy consumption and to improve its efficiency (LS. 52, 159, 193).

There are also some dissenters of sustainable development who are of the view that although this concept of sustainable development includes the ecological factor, still this dominant concept is attached to the economic perspective of growth. So Leonardo Boff expresses that no matter which terms we would like to employ in order to refer to such development, whether *self-sustaining* or *self-generating*, it never gets disassociated from ‘its economic origins, namely, rising productivity, accumulation, and technological innovation.’<sup>40</sup> In this regard what Wendell Berry feels is that the

right concept of sustainability should “fit harmoniously within and...correspond to the ‘Great Economy’ of nature; only then will our vision of a just and sustainable world be truly viable.”<sup>41</sup>

There are also some others who come out with different proposals in view of reaching out a constructive perspective of development.<sup>42</sup> There is a proposal to limit and control the natural resources that we make use of. We need to work towards the integration of environment management and development strategies in order to avoid the degradation of the environment and the depletion of natural resources. Our developmental activities must be above all people-centred which means that they are to be ‘of the people, by the people and for the people.’ The objective of all our development should be to meet the needs of all and to give equal possibilities for a better life. We have also the obligation to stabilize both the population growth as well as the consumerist culture.

On the one hand, we are categorically against any type of development which makes the world ‘ecologically unstable, socially alienated and economically nonviable.’ On the other hand, we strongly support those developments which take into account the welfare of the future generation as well as that of the inanimate species. Above all, our involvements must be guided by ethical values that prohibit the abuse of nature by human beings.

#### **4. MANIA FOR CONSUMERIST AND THROW-AWAY CULTURE**

Consumerism believes that the well-being of the person depends upon two things, namely the abundance of goods and their consumption. Therefore, it argues for producing different goods as much as possible in order to satisfy the innumerable desires of humanity. Consumerist culture also forces us to make consumption a way of life, to convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, and to seek our satisfaction in consumption; it seeks to have things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.<sup>43</sup> By having or possessing things more than what we need, we would like to create an impression that we are economically progressing or we are getting developed.

The economic and unlimited progress which is closely connected to the question of consumption, has created the conviction in the mind of human beings that they are filled with unlimited wants. Besides, the economic powers are aware that they can keep on accumulating only when they are able to create ever more new needs, new desires, and new wants. They are of the view that it would be contrary to the human nature to accept or impose a limit with regard to the human desires and wants.<sup>44</sup> When we go around various cities and towns both inside and outside of our

country, we can notice that people flock the supermarkets, stores or malls in order to buy plenty of goods that are better, different and the latest.

If we look at this reality in a peripheral way, we may conclude that human beings by nature are obsessed to consumerism. But our deeper and profound investigation will reveal the truth that they are not gripped by consumerism. If they have indeed insatiable thirst for consumption, then why should they spend so much of money and energy for advertisement? They advertise so much in order to remove people's inhibitions and convince, press on or seduce them to buy things which only a short while ago they did not feel that they need.<sup>45</sup> If we feel that some things are essentially needed for our life, then we take effort to buy them even when they are not advertised.

Relentless advertising campaigns are designed in view of convincing the people that they cannot think of either peace or joy, salvation or paradise, except through heightened consumption.<sup>46</sup> In this connection, it is fitting to know the idea of compulsive consumerism which Pope Francis mentions. He says: "Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending. Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals" (LS. 203). Here we must be very categorical to tell the truth that media cannot also wash its hands in term of promoting consumerism in the minds of the people. Today we come across so much of advancement to spread consumerism due to the inner dynamism of marketing and the influence of media.

As the main objective of market is to produce goods in abundance and fulfill the desires of the people, it makes us forget the exhaustion of non-renewable natural resources and the destruction of the earth. It presumes and acts that the unlimited desires or wants of the people can be met with unlimited resources available in the world by ignoring our responsibility to preserve the resources that belong to the future generation. Even though we know that the consumerist culture is not in a position to give ultimate fulfillment or satisfaction that the people are looking for in life, still the consumer society keeps on producing consumer goods and gadgets. If we analyze the rationale behind the efforts to produce more on the part of the society, it is the craving of humanity to consume as much as possible. It manifests the fact that human demands are unlimited which are not in accordance with the limitedness of natural resources.

It is equally sad to know that all the people of the world do not equally consume the resources. A few people consume more which we call as overconsumption while many consume very less resources. That is the reason for the Bishops of New

Zealand questioning the meaning of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” when “twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive.”<sup>47</sup> By way of proposing a practical solution to this problem, Pope Francis tells us that we can preserve the resources both for the present and for the future generation by “limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them” (LS. 22).

There is also another element involved in relation to the excessive production of goods and throwaway culture which we often take for granted; that is the deterioration of the environmental situation. While talking about the throwaway culture, Pope Francis shows that the ‘use and throw away’ logic produces a large amount of waste, due to the disordered desire to consume more than what is actually needed or essential (LS. 123). When different industrial wastes, which are created due to the production of various commodities are not handled well, they can harm not only the human beings but also the entire natural world.

The people who are very much influenced by the consumerist and throwaway culture are unable to differentiate between human needs and greed. There is the danger to perceive them as one and the same. Many of us are aware of the famous saying of Mahatma Gandhi who expressed that the earth is providing us sufficiently to satisfy all our needs but not to gratify our greed. He emphatically underlined that there must be a limit to our needs and wants; otherwise it will lead us to a stage where we become more and more selfish and meaningless. He also made it clear that those who have self-realization will only be able to incorporate this sense of discipline in their mind. Under the pretext of human needs, people are over enthusiastic in going after the gratification of human wants. We should also remember the role played by the market in producing and selling the products according to the wants of the people. Therefore, the environmental education “tends now to include a critique of the ‘myths’ of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)” (LS. 210).

## **5. THE ULTIMATE HUMAN ROOT: THE UTILITARIAN ATTITUDE**

We are aware that our world is facing issues like unbridled consumption and development, technology, materialism, and so on. Hence, we have rather elaborately analyzed how certain attitudes of individuals like the desire to exploit, the urge for domination, the craving for profit and power, the obsession for instant material gratification contribute gravely for the ecological crisis. Perhaps we can also say that, at the root of the crisis, there are the greed and the selfishness of human beings

which ultimately lead to their utilitarian attitude towards the world of nature. As human beings we are essentially selfish as well as short-sighted and hindered by ignorance of God and his purposes. We understand that our selfishness is at the heart of sin and injustice which characterize human society.<sup>48</sup>

While dealing with the ecological crisis as a moral problem, Pope John Paul II, in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, points out that in today's context, the remarkable threat of ecological collapse is making us to grasp the context in which greed and selfishness both at the individual and collective levels are destructive of very order of creation. Pope Francis explains it still further. When people are filled with self-centeredness and become self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she desires commodities to buy, own and consume. As a consequence, it becomes almost impossible to acknowledge the limits forced by reality. In this situation, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears (LS. 204).

The Orthodox Church has also more or less the same perception. It expresses in clear-cut terms that too many of us happened to permit greed, selfishness and simple ignorance to modify our world and the way we relate to it.<sup>49</sup> It is indeed surprising to observe that even scientists are helpless in dealing with selfishness and greed. Once, Gus Speth, a US advisor on climate change said that the vital ecological problems are nothing but selfishness, greed and apathy, and in order to deal with these difficulties, we require a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists are not in a position to understand how to do that.<sup>50</sup>

Not only religious heads but also the scientists duly acknowledge that selfishness of human beings play a vital role for the ecological deterioration. Here comes in Eurt Baier to describe the selfish people or egoists in general. According to him, "typical egoists... are self-centered, inconsiderate, unfeeling, unprincipled, ruthless, self-aggrandizers, pursuers of good things in life whatever the cost to others; people who think only about themselves or, if about others merely as means to their own ends."<sup>51</sup> Here it is all the more important to know how a selfish person goes about in dealing with the natural resources and above all his indifference to the bad impact of his anti-ecological activities on others. A self-centered person or egoist gives very little attention to the utilization of earth's resources; he is not concerned about the happiness of others since he is not in a position to understand that consumption of limited resources of the earth is very much related to its sustenance; he is not bothered about the adverse impacts on his next kin since he thinks about himself; he may not be sufferer of his own activities but the future faces the undesirable consequences of his own activities about which he is not bothered.<sup>52</sup>

In this context, interestingly, Pope Francis quotes the idea of Romano Guardini in his encyclical to show how our selfish mind plays a leading role in undermining the intrinsic value of the created things of the earth. He expresses that the “the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given’, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere ‘space’ into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference” (LS. 115).

Finally, we are convinced that it is ultimately our selfishness and greed which paved the way for today’s ecological deterioration. So, as long as there exists in us selfishness and greed, we are incapable of overcoming the so called ecological crisis. Realistically speaking, it is not possible to eradicate fully the self-centeredness of humanity. However, we cannot rest in passive resignation saying that cannot do anything with regard to self-centeredness and greed that result ultimately in ecological devastation. But we need to approach this issue with an optimistic outlook. That is to say, the natural world is designed in such a way that even if our selfish attitude brings about certain amount of damage, it has the mechanism to withstand. Only when we begin to deteriorate the environment beyond its limit, it reacts and sometime its reaction is beyond our imagination. Hence, as the conventional wisdom recommends, let us try to prevent global ecological disaster by convincing or persuading people to change their selfish habits for the common good; a<sup>1</sup> more sensible approach would be to tap a boundless and renewable resource: the human propensity for thinking beyond short term self-interest.<sup>53</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> F. White, *The Overview Effect*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 38.

<sup>2</sup> Arpana Dhar Das, *Ethical Responsibility towards Environmental Degradation*, <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/ipq/english/IPQ/26-30%20volumes/30-4/30-4-9.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical (24 May, 2015), 27. For easy reading, all references will be placed in the main text as *LS.*, followed by the number.

<sup>4</sup> R. F. Dasmann, *Environmental Conservation*, (New York: Wiley, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth M. Sayre, *The Economic Roots of Our Environmental Crisis*, <http://undpress.nd.edu/books/P01424>

<sup>7</sup> Lynn White, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, <http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/lwhite.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Lynn White, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, <http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/lwhite.htm>

<sup>9</sup> It is mentioned by Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Pushparajan A., *Ecological World-view for a Just Society*, (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1992), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Their ideas are quoted in *Laudato Si*, No. 102.

<sup>12</sup> Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of Charles Cummings in his book *Eco-Spirituality* is mentioned by Thomas Menampampil, *All Creation Groans with Pain*, (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2012), 45.

<sup>14</sup> It is mentioned by Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 64.

<sup>15</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Pushparajan A., *Ecological World-view for a Just Society*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> It is quoted in *Laudato Si*, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Fritj of Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, society, and the Rising Culture*, (London: Flamingo, 1983), 229-230.

<sup>19</sup> It is quoted by Rabbi Yonatan Neril, *The Spiritual Roots of the Environmental Crisis*, <http://aytzim.org/resources/articles/256>. More or less the same idea is also expressed by Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 61 & 62.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance*, (New York: Plume, 1993), 203.

<sup>21</sup> Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> This quotation from Langdon Winner from Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: Anew Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), 21.

<sup>24</sup> This idea of Nietzsche is mentioned by Leonardo Boff in his book, Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 70.

<sup>26</sup> *Great Philosophers: Protagoras*, <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Protagoras/protagoras.html>

<sup>27</sup> It is mentioned in Michael W. Petty, *A Faith That Loves the earth: The Ecological Theology of Karl Rahner*, (New York: University Press of America, 1996), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Peruma, *The Motherly Earth: An Ecological Ethics of Human-nature Relationship*, (Claretian Publications: Bangalore, 2002), 162.

<sup>29</sup> It is mentioned in Michael W. Petty, *A Faith That Loves the earth: The Ecological Theology of Karl Rahner*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Lynn White, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, <http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/lwhite.htm>

<sup>31</sup> It is quoted in *Laudato Si*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> John Roe, *Points for reflection*, file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/Points%20of%20Inflection%20%20Chapter%20Three%20%20The%20Human%20Roots%20

<sup>33</sup> Bas wielenga, *Towards An Eco-Just Society*, 138.

<sup>34</sup> Bas wielenga, *Towards An Eco-Just Society*, 139.

<sup>35</sup> Bas wielenga, *Towards An Eco-Just Society*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> It is the idea of B. McKibben but mentioned in Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris, Encyclical, (April 11, 1963)*, 92, 93, 98, 100, 122..

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-80; Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio, Encyclical, (March 26, 1967)*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Dempsey Carol J. and Butkus Russell A. (Editors), *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, 155.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Peruma, *The Motherly Earth: An Ecological Ethics of Human-nature Relationship*, 181-192.

<sup>43</sup> Victor Lebow in *Journal of relating*, quoted in A. T. Durning, *How Much is enough?: The Consumer Society and the future of the earth* (London: Earthscan, 1992), 21-22. It is also mentioned in Peruma, *The Motherly Earth: An Ecological Ethics of Human-nature Relationship*, 170).

<sup>44</sup> Bas Wielenga, *Towards an Eco-Just Society*, 146-147.

<sup>45</sup> “Professional psychologists are employed to find out how to focus our hidden desires on the products they want to sell. Sexual desires are for example manipulated to seduce us to buy a motor-bike or a car. They appeal to our dreams of freedom and suggest that one or the other motor-vehicle will satisfy them. Or they tickle the desire to be envied by others or be the first. In any case, the human desires are being manipulated, subsumed under the desire to have more and more.” Bas Wielenga, *Towards an Eco-Just Society*, 147.

<sup>46</sup> Berry, T., *The Dream of the Earth*, (San Francisco Sierra Club, 1988), 116.

<sup>47</sup> It is quoted in *Laudato Si*, 95.

<sup>48</sup> Max Terman, *The Environmental Crisis: Thoughts of a Christian Ecologist*, [http://www.directionjournal.org/issues/gen/art\\_1033\\_.html](http://www.directionjournal.org/issues/gen/art_1033_.html)

<sup>49</sup> “Our agricultural land, once clean and productive, has been spoiled by excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By burning out fast-disappearing forests, unscrupulous land grabbers are destroying a fragile resource simply to gain illegal title to land.” *An Orthodox Statement on the Environmental Crisis*, <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=121>

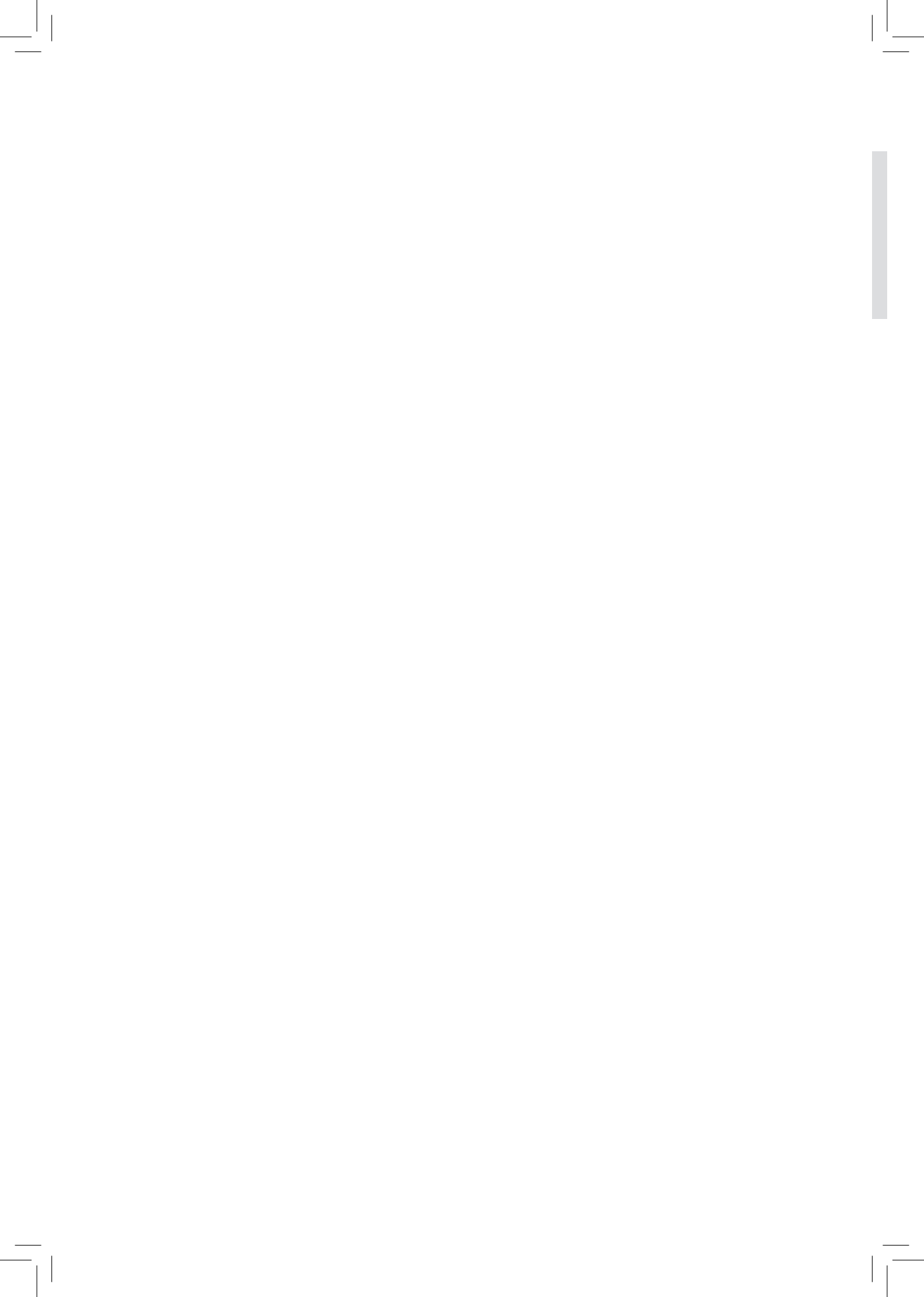
<sup>50</sup> *Selfishness, greed and apathy*, <http://futureactionculture.tumblr.com/post/96154730961/selfishness-greed-and-apaty>).



<sup>51</sup> Kurt Bauer, *Egoism*, in Peter Singh (Editor), *A Companion to Ethics*, (Backwell, 1995), 195.

<sup>52</sup> Arpana Dhar Das, *Ethical Responsibility towards Environmental Degradation*, <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/ipq/english/IPQ/26-30%20volumes/30-4/30-4-9.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> *Can Selfishness Save the Environment?* <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/09/can-selfishness-save-the-environment/305865>



## CALL FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

**Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya**

At the inaugural Mass of his pontificate in March 2013, Pope Francis appealed to persons in responsible positions, whether political, social or economic, to become guardians of the earth.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis was echoing the lack of the relationship we ought to have had with the earth. He reiterates in *Laudato si* that we have become deaf, both to the cry of the earth and to the cry of the poor, which has resulted in the disintegration of our social consciousness and the numbing of our conscience. He emphasises that human life is grounded in three fundamental relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.<sup>2</sup> Our usurping of a right to have absolute dominion has disrupted the harmony in this relationship.

The earth belongs to God; to claim an absolute ownership over the earth, and to do as one pleases, is idolatrous because it is usurping God's dominion. At the very core of the first sin, in the narrative, from the book of Genesis we hear the tempter says: "Your eyes will be opened and you will become like God."<sup>3</sup> When the worship that is due to God is offered to anything or anybody other than God, then it is idolatry. The idolatry *par excellence* is making oneself into a god. For far too many years, the human race has related with all of creation as if it has absolute power over creation. Human beings from time immemorial have intervened to draw from nature their sustenance. However, in the last two hundred years we have taken so much without considering the reality in front of us. Our economic ideology and technological ability manipulate and exploit the natural resources largely rendering the environment unsustainable for future generations.

Pope Francis proposes an honest dialogue at every level of social, economic and political life that builds transparent decision-making processes, and recalls that no

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project can be effective if it is not animated by a formed and responsible conscience. Thus, the encyclical proposes an integral ecology, which clearly respects its human and social dimensions, which in other words is a call to an ecological conversion.

## **1. CULTURE OF COMPULSIVE CONSUMERISM**

At the market place, there are always a pipeline of newer and attractive products which cajole and tempt us to buy consumables, albeit needless, trapping consumers in a culture of compulsive consumerism. Happiness is taken to mean the capacity to buy and own things. Freedom, therefore, is wrongly construed as the capacity to buy; on the contrary, the web of consumerism traps and enslaves the clients, enticing them to indulge repeatedly in unnecessary newer products. This behaviour becomes a social addiction, which has a holiday of its own at every discount sale after a festal season. Such common behaviours are bereft of any trace of freedom because freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, and of self-interest. The innovative advertising campaign for newer products and the insatiable thirst to buy, leads to an obsessive consumerism which cause markets to fluctuate, instability to rise and social unrest to prevail. This is the “seedbed for collective selfishness”.<sup>4</sup> We become self-centred and greedy. We compensate the emptiness of our hearts by buying, consuming and owning merchandise. Such a consumeristic lifestyle blurs our vision of reality and the concern for the others, especially the poor.

### **1.1 Technology Driven Consumerism**

Human reliance on a technological paradigm to exploit the earth for pioneering and domineering coupled in an excessive self-centred indulgence to draw more than what one needs has rendered the earth as ‘an immense pile of filth.’ The crisis itself is knotted in a technocratic mold that dominates the world today. On the one hand, we are grateful to the advances in technology, which has overcome many evils and limitations. Through this providential gift, the human race participates in God’s creative action. The use of modern technology from automobiles to biotechnologies, from jet planes to information technology has improved quality of human life; nonetheless, the over use of such advances have repercussions on the environment. The use of nuclear energy, digital expertise, nanotechnology bestows on the human race tremendous power. This power enables us to dominate the entire world in an unprecedented way. We equip ourselves with nuclear arsenals to wage wars, whereas a billion people go hungry. Although we claim democratic traditions, yet only a few have a say in the exercise of this power over the rest of the human race.

The advent of technology in social media has replaced real relationships in favour of virtual ones. In the families and at the work places, individuals are engaging in relationships that are devoid of commitment, and as with any passing fad, serve but a momentarily pleasure. At the dining tables in homes, members of families are engrossed with their tablets or smart phones rather than engaging with their loved ones. In public spaces such as public transport, jogging paths, and at the shopping malls, youngsters blot out the reality of everyday life. They stifle the voices of those they come across with blank stares and deafening music flowing through their earphones. This caricatures the overall indifference of the post-modern world.

## **1.2. Technology Driven Economy**

The scheme that an ‘increase in power is increased progress’ is a false premise.<sup>5</sup> Truth, goodness and reality do not follow automatically from technological and economic power. Besides, there are no guarantees that such power is accompanied by any training in responsibility, values or conscience. Power and the responsibility of choice do not necessarily go hand in hand, but the two never ought to be separated. However, in reality, our choices are dictated by immediate needs and selfish interests. We have failed miserably in our ethical behavior or spirituality, because contemporary culture has not helped us to either think clearly or exercise self-restraint.

Human beings, from time immemorial, have intervened to draw from nature their sustenance. However, in the last two hundred years we have taken so much without considering the reality in front of us. Our economic ideology and technological ability manipulate and exploit the natural resources largely rendering the environment unsustainable for future generations. There is a fallacy that there exists an infinite supply of the earth’s resources. Those who squeeze the planet try beyond every limit to use such a fallacy to suit their needs. Technological products are not neutral; they transform the environment, condition and shape lifestyles, dictated by a consumeristic mindset and capitalistic industry. Such a model of progress and development demands more from the environment to meet every growing need of the market and the greed for unlimited profit. This technological model dominates every aspect of life, political, cultural and economic. The global economic mantra is profit; this hunger for profit deteriorates the real economic growth of societies and nations.

## **1.3. Technocracy: the Illusion of Growth**

The evidence is overwhelming; poverty and hunger remain major problems

even today. The concern today is not how to alleviate suffering and hunger, or an equitable and just distribution of the earth's goods, or concern of a sustainable project of the environment; rather the sole concern is how to maximize profits. This economic paradigm does not guarantee human development or social inclusiveness. On the one hand, we have a small minority of peoples who have access to all the resources and often waste these resources; on the other hand, there are millions who have no access to basic needs, which is often dehumanizing.

When we see ourselves as deserving absolute priority and central to everything that exists then we see all created reality as irrelevant unless it is useful to us. This leads us to treat other human beings who do not serve our interests as irrelevant. Thus, market forces dictate our interests and we begin to exploit not only the earth, but also the vulnerable, resulting in human trafficking, commerce in organized crime, drug trade, selling the organs of the poor, killing of unborn babies unwanted by the parents etc. In short, considering something as relevant only if it serves short term immediate interests can lead to environmental degradation and social decay, thus, to a throwaway culture.

An economic model that does not protect human labor, productive diversity and business creativity fails to understand the true calling of the human person. Profits should not dictate the economic paradigm; neither should technology be separated from ethics. Both these are unable to contain themselves. The question is whether our economy, ecology and technology are framed on an ethical and sustainable framework.

## 2. ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

In the opening lines of *Laudato si*, Pope Francis tells us that according to St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*, the Earth, "our common home" is not just a resource to be exploited but, "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis points out that we are ourselves made up of the elements of the earth; we breathe the air and receive life from her waters. The encyclical is an invitation to recognize that we need to reshape our habits and behaviour if we are to make any difference to the environment and to the lives of the marginalized peoples. This is a daunting task which, with education and a spirituality in favour of the earth, can bring about conviction and cultural renewal.

Pope Francis, at the end of his introduction to *Laudato si*, highlights the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet. He questions the new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology and calls for alternative

ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, and the human meaning of ecology. The imperative for a forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, and the proposal for a new lifestyle converge to meet the central tenet of *Laudato si* which is a moral one; not scientific, economic or technological. Therefore, the encyclical offers an inclusive approach to the problems that are faced by all, especially the poorest. *Laudato si* seeks to provide the concrete foundation for an ethical and spiritual itinerary.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.1. Justice Demands Reconciliation with the Poor and the Earth**

The earth is God's gift to us, full of beauty and wonder. The fruits of the earth belong to everyone. All are equal in the eyes of God; all people are entitled, simply by virtue of their humanity, to what they need to survive. The heart of the problem, according to Pope Francis, is our rejection of a theocentric view of the world. Pope Francis speaks of a human ecology that implies a relationship between human life and the moral law.<sup>8</sup> This includes respect for our bodies that are in direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. Pope Francis argues that human ecology is inseparably connected with the notion of the common good.<sup>9</sup> Common good is realized when the sum of the conditions of social life allow access to social groups and individuals through a ready access to their own fulfilment.

In contemporary society, the poorest are deprived of their basic human rights, including right to life, to safe drinking water, to food and shelter. The imperative to recognize the universal destination of goods and our solidarity with those who have been deprived of the basic rights impel us to act to restore to these individuals what is due to them in justice. This is primarily possible, by an abdication of an utilitarian, market approach, which promises justice, liberty and freedom at some future date when all outstanding economic issues will be resolved. Justice demands the restoration of basic rights here and now. Whatever certain people have in superabundance is due, by natural law, to the purpose of succouring the poor. For this reason, Pope Francis draws us to consider that every time we throw food into the bin we are stealing from the table of the poor. An integral approach to the ecology includes a preferential option for the poor.<sup>10</sup>

Change cannot happen without motivation. An ecological spirituality is capable of inspiring us giving us an interior impulse and nourishing our will to work for the betterment of all including creation. St. Francis of Assisi has shown by example that personal conversion includes healing our relationship with nature. This, Pope Francis calls, ecological conversion. To this effect Pope Francis quotes the Australian

Episcopal Conference: “To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion or a change of heart.”<sup>11</sup> We cannot face the unethical consumeristic mind-set individually; instead we need a communitarian effort driven by conviction that creation is God’s gift to us. The Christian community, recognizing this loving and gratuitous gift, responds with spirit of conversion that fosters a spirit of generous care and responsibility that contributes significantly to the care of the environment. Pope Francis points out from Scripture that the birds of the air are not forgotten before God and if so, how can we possibly mistreat or harm them.

At the very heart of this call to ecological conversion is the rejection of an interpretation that claims biblical mandate of absolute human dominion over the earth. Pope Francis argues that the Bible has “no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures,”<sup>12</sup> and our obligation is to till and to care, to cultivate and to nurture the earth; not to plunder and exploit. In fact, Pope Francis emphasises the profound link between the human environment and the natural environment, “We cannot adequately combat environment degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, he argues that true ecological conversion, “always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment.”<sup>14</sup>

We are capable of rising above ourselves to seek what is true, beautiful and good. Pope Francis urges us not to forget our dignity as human persons. He invites us to change our lifestyles and our consumer choices so that we may bring pressure on those who manufacture and sell, to become aware of the environmental degradation caused by the production of these eco-unfriendly consumer durables. If we are to bring about any significant change in society, then we need to overcome our individualism, selfishness and develop an alternative lifestyle. An ideology that sees no value in the natural created world tends to see no particular value in the human person. An adequate respect and value for the ecology is interconnected with an adequate respect for the human person. We cannot claim a responsibility for the care of the earth if we are unable to value the uniqueness of our human capabilities to knowledge and freedom to make choices. The Pope reiterates that the ecological crisis is only a small symptom of the underlying ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of the post-modern world. A Christian understanding of respect for the human person also includes a respect for the created world. Our relationship with the environment cannot be seen apart from our relationship with one another and a relationship with God.



## 2.2. Dialogue: the Path for an Integral Economy

Pope Francis embarks on what we can and must do to prevent our self-destruction. The key word in is “dialogue.” The Pope recommends that we must go beyond analysis to dialogue and actions at levels, international, national, local and personal. Dialogue at an international level should help us resolve our differences. He criticises the present model of dialogue in which the rich and powerful nations dictate policy that is beneficial for their economies. Besides, implementation of the consensus reached at such international conferences is abysmal. He says recent international summits have failed to live up to expectations because there is a lack of political will.

Pope Francis recalls that the social teaching of the Church even from the time of Saint John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, called for change of paradigms and systems of global governance. Pope Francis calls on the rich and powerful nations to demonstrate honesty and courage in managing hazardous wastes, protection of biodiversity, reducing green house gases, and reducing the scandalous levels of consumption of the world’s resources. One such instance could be the phasing out of fossil fuels and looking for alternative energy resources. To ensure compliance, there is a need to create global structures and institutions that would impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions. The Pope states that, in taking these ethical decisions, it is imperative to keep in mind the poorer nations by ensuring food security, and access to basic amenities. Such endeavours would not only be sustainable, but also usher in peace and guarantee the protection of the environment.

The question of environmental protection cannot be seen in isolation, but needs to be considered within the context of economic development. Economic development must not lose sight of the undesired side effects of production. Short-term growth driven by a consumeristic mind-set focussed on profit alone needs to give way to long-term benefits and the common good. Political activity at the local level should seek change by creating awareness on consumption habits, evolving an acceptable way of waste disposal, recycling plastics and paper, diversifying agriculture and rotating crops.

The absolute and zero compromise on transparency in business ventures, and their environmental impact should be assessed right from the planning stages. The needs and concerns of the local populations have to be included in the decision making process. In any discussions about a proposed venture, a number of issues have to be taken into account to discern whether or not it will contribute to genuine integral development. Profit cannot be the sole criterion for the assessment

of a project. The Pope acknowledges that reaching consensus is not an easy task, but awareness of the effects of environmental degradation and the responsibility towards the future generations should impel us to take decisions that contribute to an integral development of all sections of society.

Pope Francis asserts: “Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy.”<sup>15</sup> Politics and economies are at the service of human life. The Holy Father regrets that we have lost an opportunity to learn from the financial meltdown of 2007-08. In lieu of adapting and discovering a new model of sustainable and integral economic discipline, based on ethical principles and attentiveness to the poor, we continue to overproduce, speculate and create virtual wealth. The market proposes a formulae as a solution and that is: problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies and individuals.” The crisis we are in today is because of such a formulae. Those who are focussed on profits cannot be trusted to solve problems of the poor or the deterioration of the environment. Politics blames the economy and economy blames politics, instead we need politics that evolves an economy that is capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to reconcile the different aspects of the crisis. It is essential, therefore, to reflect carefully what is the meaning and purpose of the economy. The Holy Father underscores: “A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.”<sup>16</sup>

Popular science claims that it has all the answers to the existential questions on the meaning of life and its destiny; empirical science does not make that claim. Throughout human history, the use of aesthetics, classics, ethics, beauty, poetry, reason, music, mystic and theology have been used to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. Therefore, technical solutions are powerless before the serious problems of the world. Besides, majority of the people on the planet profess a faith. This could lead them to a conviction to search for love justice and peace. Therefore, Pope Francis encourages a multidisciplinary dialogue among all people, in their own language so as to overcome ideological conflicts and arrive at a consensus. The Church only fosters such dialogue and it does not presume to settle scientific questions or replace politics and economics.

Education helps us change our habits and lead us to responsible behaviours such as avoiding the use of plastic, judicious use of paper, reducing the consumption of water or wasting such a precious resource, sorting our garbage, cooking only what can be reasonably consumed, using public transport or car pooling, planting trees and turning of unnecessary lights and fans. Ecological education should take place in

the families, in schools, in the media, and in the Church. Educating the young and sensitising them helps change the future for the better. Christian schools, seminaries and novitiates should provide formation for a simple living, contemplating God's world and manifesting concern for the needs of the poor and the environment. If we are serious to bring about lasting change, then we need to change our mind-sets which influence our behaviour. Our efforts to educate will be unsuccessful if we do not change our mind-sets about who we really are, our role in society and our relationship with nature. The consumeristic paradigm in vogue today is very powerful and so we need firm resolve and determination to overcome it.

## **CONCLUSION**

A Christian spirituality cannot acquiesce with an uninhibited obsession with buying, owning and collecting consumer goods. For instance, the constant bombarding of consumer durables enslave the human desire to own the most recent model – whether these be smart phones, televisions, refrigerators, or washing machines. These prevent us from cherishing what we have; besides the constant desire leave us unsatisfied, obsessive and weary. Rather than focusing on what we do not have, we must be grateful for the things we have. Pope Francis says that sometimes even a blade of grass or a lone flower growing in the wilderness can give great joy and peace to the heart. Such sobriety can cultivate in us a sense of contentment and satisfaction within oneself, which leads to happy fraternal encounters with others and not looking for happiness in consumer durables.<sup>17</sup>

Ecological conversion, according to Pope Francis, is primarily a personal, spiritual change in people, “whereby the effects of the encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.”<sup>18</sup> We ought to recognize that we need one another and that we have a shared responsibility to the world. Simple everyday gestures of kindness and hospitality lead us to a “culture of care” and hospitality that halts environmental degradation. Thus, we can break out of the indifference and dissatisfaction caused by consumerism.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Francis, “Homily of Pope Francis,” La Santa Sede, March 19, 2013, accessed June 1, 2016, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130319\\_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html).

<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical (24 May, 2015), 66. Here after abbreviates

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3: 5b (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, 1: AAS 82 (1990), 147 (Cited in *Laudato si* at no. 204).

<sup>5</sup> *LS*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> *LS*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *LS*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> *LS*, 155.

<sup>9</sup> *LS*, 156.

<sup>10</sup> *LS*, 156.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, *A New Earth: The Environmental Challenge* (2002) (Cited in *LS*, 218).

<sup>12</sup> *LS*, 68.

<sup>13</sup> *LS*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> *LS*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> *LS*, 189.

<sup>16</sup> *LS*, 194.

<sup>17</sup> *LS*, 222-223.

<sup>18</sup> *LS*, 217.

## STRATEGIC RESPONSES AND LINES OF ACTION FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND CARE

**Stella Baltazar, FMM**

The Eagle, its austerity, foresight and self control is a lesson for eco-conversion. At the end of its life the eagle makes a hard decision to break its old beaks and waits for the new sprout. Then it plucks out the old talons as well as the old feathers. In a period of six months all fresh grown makes the eagle fly back to normal life for another 30 years eager to capture the pray and the wings with fresh sprout of energetic feathers ready to soar high into the unknown.

Who are we and why are we here? And what do we wish to accomplish? As NPOs (Non Profit Organizations), we are committed to the cause of Jesus our master who was totally & fully committed to the mission of building the Kingdom of God. God chose us to be with him and to accomplish his mission of selfless love. Are we heavily laden with unwanted structures? Are we using our precious resources in contextual demands of the Gospel? From where springs our energy to build God's Eco-system and compassionate society?

The world is at the cross roads of high living in the midst of heaps of uncertainties. It is manifested in the magnificence of the discovery of science and human advancement towards perfection and its fall out in the country side. The unfolding of the Divine is perceivable in the multitude of daily events. At the same time, the world is facing the enigma of extinction as a result of the harm done to Nature through man-made hazards that harm nature and the human. This epoch will remember Pope Francis as a historical pathfinder for the Church and the world. He has left a indelible imprint in the hearts of the people through his ingenious way of capturing and captivating the imagination of people around the globe. The strategic intervention he has made in the church has echoed in the farthest corners of the earth, making him the man of the times. His action in the Church is like the eagle

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going through a process of lasting change plucking out the irrelevant and allowing the sprout of the New. He has vibrantly promoted a new understanding of our commitment to those who live in the margins as well as the marginalized ecosystem. His strategies of washing the feet of the prisoners, meeting the poor in the squatters, reaching out to the differently-abled people and now with mercy and compassion reaching out to the restoration of the planet are land mark moments of his papacy. Generations will look back to this emerging historical trend in the Church.

The eye of the Church is turning to Asia. Asia is faced with the reality of a strong lead of the Catholic Church. A potentially vibrant and young church is in Asia. Soon Europe and the rest of the world will turn towards Asia as the sun rises in the east. In spite of the fundamentalist attacks, the faith of the Christian community is growing strong. In the belief of many, India holds greater strength and will take the lead stronger due to our cultural heritage and depth in the traditional spiritual springs. Rooted in the quest of the God-experience of our sages, we are challenged to rekindle the fire in the ashes. The church in the west is yearning for an identity which is being/ will be realized in India. The richness of the spiritual heritage, drawn from the strength of the early Christian community is finding new expressions in the BCC and BHC. Are the religious adequately responding to these realities? The attitude of compassionate understanding and recognition of different religious experiences is indeed incarnational. The concern for ecological integration runs beyond religions. If we systematically enter into an alliance with nature in collaboration with other religions in the care of our common home, it could become a great unifying force in the future.

This is also the hour of women's leadership. In the Asian continent, 30 % of political leaders at the top have been women. Women are emerging to play a major role in the coming years. Eco-feminism will certainly bring about tremendous impact upon people, especially those women who have stood their ground in the midst of struggles in the protection of the environment. Holism, interdependency, equality and process were their key principles. The Chipko movement in India had shown the way. Discovering our interconnectedness and affirming our oneness with nature are fundamental to our existence while upholding the cause of nature as the extension of our mother who continues to nourish, nurture and sustain us. Therefore, caring for creation is a covenantal relationship. We are stewards and unworthy servants of the earth. One plants, another waters and God gave the increase (1 Cor: 2: 7). Yet, it is a cause we are called to defend.

How shall we respond to the crisis of our eco system today? We are called to discern the zones of negotiation in an ability to conceptualize the problem and

identify its solution from within. The root of the identified problem serves as the spring board for action. Finding the fine balance of action between the problem identified and the solution proposed in a realistic manner enables a person to respond to the situation in a time-bound urgency. Thus strategies are the means by which we bridge the gap between the present position and the desired destination. An organization empowers its members for “swimming against the stream”, i.e. both top-down and bottom-up, whereby each individual section develops its own strategy to attain the goal. Strategies are drawn in a common process where the stakeholders pursue the goal through different angles of perception and identify the right action to move towards the goal.

Religious Life is a daring witness to the primacy of God’s love which is hidden in the heart of every created being. Religious are the artisans who respond in a new way making the Gospel of Jesus the epitome of life in their attempt to cull out this hidden treasure. In this process we experience the agony and ecstasy, the pain and the pleasure, the bitterness and the sweetness of life. Undeserved sufferings and hidden challenges are part of our call and the response we offer in faith Jesus takes upon himself and transforms it in multiple dimensions of a hundred fold result. This life is meaningful in the measure in which fidelity is experienced in following the foot prints of the master. He has shown us the way to the Father, the fullness of life in a cosmic communion with the whole human and natural world. This life of dedication finds fulfillment in that togetherness, connectedness, one-ness of eco- human solidarity. Consecrated life finds its fulfillment in the birthing of God’s Kingdom in the hearts of the last person. The primacy of the Presence of God is made manifest in the rise of those in the margins.

We need to realize that the care for our common home, a clarion call to protect nature by Pope Francis, implies our basic experience of the sacredness of creation, the sense of wonder and awe. Nature is the extension of God’s very being to nurture, nourish, energize and strengthen us. Nature is the embodiment of God’s very being and His presence permeates every fiber and cell in it. Humans return to their very core in the silence of nature and realize the oneness, the common ground of both. The word, *Oikose* refers to the household where every being has a sense of belonging and sacred connection. We are part of creation and are bonded together in an inseparable continuity. The web of life holds us human and creation together as one. Care for our common home is an imperative of our very birth. We dwell well when we revere mother earth. This inter-dependence is at the very core of our being. Everything in nature is equal in its value of respectability.

This sense of oneness and bonding awakens us to two key realities which capture our attention. (a) the marginalized who live at the fringe of society; (b) the over-used eco-system languishing for life through global warming. The close connection between these two realities could be seen in the *El Nino* effect creating disasters in unpredictable fashion where the marginalized people are the frontline victims. What we are confronting today is the unimagined failure of the enormous technological progress which was seen as the panacea of humanity. It has shown the path to unbridled consumerism through over exploitation of nature in the name of progress, produced elitism, indifference, heaps of garbage all around, uncontrolled accumulation of wealth and utter loneliness among those who have amassed unneeded wealth through unjust means. Man is rich but he is impoverished. In the midst of his affluence, he is ridden with greed, loneliness and intolerance at the expense of the death of the earth. According to a database, produced by the WHO in 2014, 13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India. Delhi, Patna, Gwalior and Raipur are the top four in the list.

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment brought to force the Schedule Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act. It stipulated 33 different types of atrocities/words/gestures that degrade the dignity of the Schedule Caste & Schedule Tribe members of both women and men.<sup>1</sup> In this age of speeding techno revolution, the barbaric attacks on human beings have not been minimized; on the contrary, an increased violent killing spree is noticed. Care for our common home demands of us a resistance against not only the fall out of the technological impact but still more the traditional prejudices of the caste ridden system. The suicide of Rohit, a Dalit scholar in January 2016 is just an example.

Inspired by the mission manifesto of Jesus (Lk: 4: 16-21), we draw our source of energy to connect with people and nature in that inner fountain where life is throbbing with freshness to proclaim the Good News to the Poor and the Planet. In the Bible, the strategic responses emerged in the form of the Arc of the covenant, Moses, striking the rock and dividing the Red Sea, the breaking of the wall of Jericho by Joshua and team, the use of weeping and pleading for the people as Nehemiah, Esther & Ruth did. Prophets such as Amos, John the Baptist and many others reveal the inner fire that made them courageous to denounce evil and injustice and speak with boldness for the rights of the poor and the marginalized. The conversion of Zacheus, and Saul are taking place today not only among the Christians, but also among the rest of humankind.



*Laudato Si* was a clarion call by Pope Francis for a new world order, for a renewed friendship with creation and for a change of life personally which impacts the whole creation, namely, the interdependence of all created things and the responsible behavior of man to all creatures.

## **1. STRATEGIC RESPONSES: PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ACTION**

The president of Kiribati Mr. Ton had declared that the small island nation would at any time drown in the sea due to climate change. Therefore the president has purchased land at Fiji with the permission of the local government so that the people of Kiribati can migrate to Fiji with dignity. Further he has affirmed a new idea of creating a floating island for his people

### **1.1. The Urgent Appeal to Religious Morality**

Respect for the eco system is a moral concern. Morality-Ethics are born of the collective consciousness of a community to cooperate and derive greater common good and happiness for all its members. It emerges from a social contract affirming and enforcing covenants for pro social behavior and mutual cooperation.

It is based on the natural inclination to “do good” which is found in all beings in nature. Religious morality goes a step further where one voluntarily opts to be and do good alone even at the detriment of one’s own self. As religious we hold a double responsibility to stop unjust treatment to nature since it is the only source which brings life to all. The care for our common home needs to be spearheaded with great urgency since religious are set apart to live the Gospel and live its demands with courage.

Ignacimuthu affirms that our relationship with the environment, our responsibility for the environment, and our care for the environment are key areas of concern which springs from the depth of our spiritual experience.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.2. Confronting an Age of Over Consumerism**

The enticement of the media luring the children and youth into an unknown future of accumulation and consumerism in possessing gadgets, clothing, food which not merely care for the basic needs but stand to bring status and peer acceptance. From the traditional pattern of life, we are stepping into a ‘mall focused’ way of life where an alien and luring culture ready-made for the ‘haves’ is laid out. The ‘have not’ can only peer through the window and wonder when this will be accessible to them. Burglary, murder and atrocious behavior are on the rise in order to access quick money to meet the need. The ancient curse of caste gets reinforced

in new modes of violence when equally educated youth try to break the caste barrier and meet as equal persons. It leaves the young perplexed as to what next. True freedom has left behind a trail of un-freedom. Like the fire flies, we are pushed into a situation of thoughtless behavior to keep up with emerging trends. “Corporate tax avoidance scandals around the world have underlined the extent to which some multinational companies have been able to slash their tax contributions, sometimes close to zero. Developing countries, where most of the world’s poorest people live, are particularly vulnerable to corporate tax dodging; yet they badly need tax revenues to provide public services and are more dependent on corporate taxes than developed countries.”<sup>3</sup> Alliance Sud News says: “For every \$1 developing countries gain, they lose more than \$2 through interest payment. Profits are taken out by foreign investors, lending to rich countries, and illicit financial flow.”<sup>4</sup>

### **1.3. Fixing Responsibility where it Belongs**

The principle of the polluter pays the polluted as spoken by Vandana Shiva about Monsanto on genetically modified seeds is praiseworthy.<sup>5</sup> Monsanto developed super crops which are pest resilient such as BT Cotton. Through cross pollination, though unintended, these crops develop seeds in the neighboring fields. Therefore, Monsanto wanting to claim patent rights over these crops, sued the neighboring owners in court and they are being penalised to pay penalty to Monsanto for producing pest resilient seeds. This is following the principle of the polluter gets paid from the polluted since Monsanto gets paid for polluting their crops. Vandana Shiva’s protest is to reverse the process that “the polluter pays” who contaminates the neighbors’ field. And this has to be made applicable and spread across the globe.

Today, the reality is that the poorest of the South very specially bear the burden of the filth and accumulation of garbage which are the consequence of off shore production for the wealthy North. The ethic of global citizenship requires that the polluter pays. This principle was also reiterated by UN Climate Change Conference, Paris 2015.

This principle underpins most of the regulation of pollution affecting land, water and air. Pollution is defined in UK law as contamination of the land, water or air by harmful or potentially harmful substances.<sup>6</sup> The polluter pays principle has also been applied more specifically to emissions of greenhouse gases which cause climate change. One of the most important tasks of the NPOs (Non Profit Organizations) is their keen observation and critique of the exploitative methods employed by profiteers who forget the consequence of high profit.

The developed countries have enjoyed over 100 years of technological progress which has left its ugly footprints on developing countries. Fatalism no more can rule. Today the demand grows louder that every person has the right to enjoy the fruits of the earth and the benefits of development. Yet in reality, we face the risks while the benefits are transferred to the developed countries. The poor are hit more through floods, droughts, fires and communal conflicts. They are becoming the mute spectators in the race to access the resources of the earth; they are confronted with issues of land grabbing, water control, and polluted air. When the cave man used a feather on his headgear, little did he realize that one day the feathers will be replaced by diamonds and precious stones, which involves the labor of several thousands of unseen workers at the bottom line who are denied a dignified living.

Employing child labor and wages below dignity, thus making the bottom line workers live below poverty line--all of them fall under the principle of the polluted who needs to be paid by the polluter. Mr. Tom has again reiterated that he is planning a floating Island in Kiribati. That involves enormous expense. He plans to get the money from the developed countries since they have already enjoyed the benefits of development and now they can pay compensation for the affected victims of climate disasters.<sup>7</sup>

#### **1.4. Think Globally and Act Locally**

Let our feet be firmly on the ground while planning and placing our initiative in the global concern. Aware of the urgency to act on behalf of nature due to the global threat of excessive burden on the planet beyond the capacity of the earth and the natural resources to renew their sustainability, we are called to take one step at a time in our local area, uphold the integrity of the earth and allow time for the earth to renew itself.

#### **1.5. Collaborate, Innovate and Lead**

Let us build connections with overseas comrades who share similar concern. As per the directives of the "Paris Covenant," reduction in global warming is the most urgent need. The target is set to bring down the temperature to 1.5 degree and the governments are pressurized to keep coal, oil and gas below the ground. Pre Industrial temperature was 2 degrees while we have now arrived at 4 degrees.

Speaking to people-power and the historical significance of civil disobedience, Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director at Greenpeace International said: "We know that civil disobedience actually gets governments to sit up and take notice. We are

talking with a range of organizations to go and push the idea of ‘a billion acts of courage,’ and we are doing this in a strategic way.”<sup>8</sup>

### **1.6. Two Steps Forward One Step Backward**

Action must accompany reflection. The process of arriving at a destination or achieving our goal is equally important as the goal itself. We follow a circular model of collaborative concern allowing the opportunity for ecological conversion among the rest of the members and taking along those who lag behind. Critical analysis and reflection are important components of this process.

## **2. RECLAIMING OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

Values shape public engagement with the issue of climate change both from a personal and social perspective. We are intrinsically part of creation. God’s very image and likeness dwell in us and nature bears the signature of God, the fingerprint of God. Nature is God’s Love song. The Indian ethos are based on this principle of inter connectedness just as we discover the same value in the book of Genesis. The earth receives the breath of God and the clay is transformed into human by God’s breath. The *Anandamayakosha* where God dwells is where the imprint of God’s image and likeness are enshrined.

Thus God-Human-nature are in an interplay of mutually supportive and bonding relationship. It is dynamic, energizing and propelling for action. This perspective calls us to question the unfair relationship created by unjust means. Fairness and equal rights are the most important values that stand the test of climate justice. When the poor suffer, God takes up on himself their agony and begins a course of liberative action. Moses was called from the bush; Jonah was inside the whale. They faced all odds in fulfilling the dream of God for His people.

In the Bible, the strategic responses emerged in the form of the Arc, the breaking of the wall of Jericho, the use of weeping and pleading for the people as Nehemiah, Esther and Ruth did. Zacheus was desperate till he shared his profit with the poor. Prophets, such as Amos, radiate the inner fire that made them courageous to denounce evil and injustice and speak with boldness for the rights of the poor and the marginalized.

Our strategic response in the care of our common home is based on the goal of God’s Kingdom to build a New Heaven and a New Earth (Rev: 21:1-7) where the Spirit of the Lord will stir up all beings enabling the blind see, the deaf hear, and the Good News being preached to all creation ushering in the year of the Lord’s favor (Lk:4:16-21). Teilhard De Chardin, the Chief of Seatil, Tkich Nhat

Hanh and Francis of Assisi—all express the reality of the cosmic inter-wovenness in equivalency, consistency and affinity to the entire creation.<sup>9</sup> “The Canticle of Brother Sun” is an expression of affirmation that God is our Father and we humans and nature, are all his children.

Today the secular as well as the religious Bodies have the realization and in some cases have converged in a common conviction that the ecosystem needs to be protected, treated with dignity and respect and allowed to live for its very sake. This glob is our common home as pope Francis insists upon. Violating the rights of nature is in fact taking the food from the mouth of the unborn children of the next century.

### **3. POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES IN CLIMATE ACTION**

#### **3.1. National Action Plan on Climate Change**

There are several initiatives undertaken by the Government of India at the national level. (a) *National Solar Mission* that aims to promote the development and use of solar energy for power generation and other uses with the ultimate objective of making solar competitive with fossil-based energy options; (b) *Enhanced Energy Efficiency*, based on the Energy Conservation Act 2011; current initiatives are expected to yield savings of 10,000 MW by 2012; (c) *Sustainable Habitat*, to promote energy efficiency as a core component of urban planning; the plan calls for extending the existing energy conservation building code; a greater emphasis on urban waste management and recycling, including power production from waste; strengthening the enforcement of automotive fuel economy standards and using pricing measures to encourage the purchase of efficient vehicles; and incentives for the use of public transportation; (d) *National Water Mission*; with water scarcity projected to worsen as a result of climate change, the plan sets a goal of a 20% improvement in water use efficiency through pricing and other measures; (e) *National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem*; the plan aims to conserve biodiversity, forest cover, and other ecological values in the Himalayan region, where glaciers that are a major source of India’s water supply are projected to recede as a result of global warming; (f) *National Mission for a Green India*; goals include the forestation of 6 million hectares of degraded forest lands and expanding forest cover from 23% to 33% of India’s territory; (g) *National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture*; the plan aims to support climate adaptation in agriculture through the development of climate-resilient crops, expansion of weather insurance mechanisms, and agricultural practices; (h) *National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change*; to gain a better understanding of climate science, impacts and challenges, the plan envisions

a new Climate Science Research Fund, improved climate modeling and increased international collaboration. It also encourages private sector initiatives to develop adaptation and mitigation technologies through venture capital funds.

### **3.2. The Paris “Convention” (Dec. 2015) by 195 Member States**

The Convention declares: “Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.”<sup>10</sup>

### **3.3. Efforts by the United Nations**

The UNDP assistance to countries to formulate and implement green, low-emission and climate-resilient development strategies (Green LECRDS) draws upon the experience and information generated by UNDP’s support for climate change adaptation and mitigation projects. It follows a territorial approach to climate change by: (a) Developing partnerships with UN and specialized agencies, national and sub-national governments, centers of excellence and regional technical institutions, and the private sector; (b) Making available methodologies and tools for long-term climate change and participatory planning to regions and cities, and sharing best practices; (c) Providing regions with information about climate change challenges, opportunities and technical and financial solutions; (d) Providing technical support up to 20 regions for the preparation of regional climate change plans, including identification of priority, mitigation and adaptation measures.

### **3.4. Priority Action, Creating Global Connections**

Awakening the hearts and minds of humanity to the cause of caring for the common home is a matter of urgency. Having a table talk where the producer, the procurer, the owner and the consumer come together on a common platform to intake the goals set by international bodies and national policies and to draw up a coherent, comprehensive and credible strategy for public engagement is the most essential action needed. There has to be discussion on a common platform for strategies where the youth of the country will be fired with enthusiasm to take up the cause.

#### **4. STRATEGIC RESPONSES AS RELIGIOUS**

God created everything good and His delight was in creation. Adam and Eve had the power to name them and be enthralled in what God created. God and the Garden were part of the very life of them. The Supreme Good (Francis of Assisi) was seen in the primacy of communion with human and creation in a continuum of connectedness, interwoven into the very fabric of life. But the alienation and separation of the humans from God due to sin set the earth and humanity in a pursuit of restoring that original experience of integration. Ignacimuthu puts it as follows:

God created in such a way as to allow human beings the ability to shape the future condition of the environment. We are creative beings who constantly change the world from one state into another, bringing His creation to fulfillment. By exercising our free will to choose whether or not to act in line with the will of God, we determine the immediate destiny of the environment. In this way we are co-workers with God in creation. One person plants a seed, another waters it, while God makes it grow. (1 Cor: 2: 7) <sup>11</sup>

Policies, incentives and skills are the back bone of actualizing and validating the efforts of social and political pressure. As consecrated persons, we need to invest our energy, time and effort in understanding development from a progressively ecological perspective. Every institution in our care must be roped in for active engagement: student union federations, street clubs, youth engagement, widows associations, faith-based activists, workers union, residence welfare associations etc. Our goal has to be to minimize adverse environmental and socioeconomic impacts by coordinating all to carry out a timely and effective response.

Pope Francis points to two most important vulnerabilities namely the marginalized and the vulnerable creation. He exhorts us saying:

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and “the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.”<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1. Some Guiding Principles

Our strategic response as religious could be drawn from the vision of the “One World with a Common Plan,” encouraging a more efficient use of energy and striving for global consensus and unilateral action by individual countries.<sup>13</sup> It can include: planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water.

To achieve the above objectives in view of sustainability of our environment, we need to develop strategic responses and its application in the care of our common home. Policy, strategy, tactics, ends, and means are part of the process of arriving at the goal. Providing information to decision-makers at all levels with a focus on maximizing response effectiveness while minimizing resource impacts. The need to strategize our approach to build our common home calls for bridging the gap between policy and its actualization, between ends and means.

Fred Nicolas places emphasis on bridging the gap between aspiration/goal and the means to achieve them.<sup>14</sup> It is the practical adaptation of the aim translated into day to day action. However, this action is not a routine practice, but a process that changes according to the need of the emerging situation. It is also a pattern that emerges over time. Strategy is one element in a four-part structure: (a) state clearly the ends to be obtained; (b) draw the strategies for obtaining them and for the ways in which resources will be deployed.; (c) tactics, the ways in which resources that have been deployed are actually used or employed; (d) place the resources themselves and the means at the disposal of implementation.

Caritas Switzerland had developed the following guidelines in order to implement our guiding principles successfully and to achieve a high quality work performance:

Success of high quality and effectiveness of the performance of the stakeholders depend on trust, innovation, competent and motivated personnel within and volunteers, organizational financial support, transparency, high level of responsiveness and readiness, and national and international networking. According to him, fundamental to success are: trust, innovation and competent and motivated personnel and volunteers.<sup>15</sup>



## **4.2. Strategic Components in Climate Action**

### ***4.2.1. Individual Commitment to Climate Action***

Taking inspiration from the National CRI on “Earth People” (2008), we lay hold of the hidden impetus recommended by the Major Superiors. One important strategy is to harness the energy and momentum of existing community resources and programs that have already established participants. Tapping into existing networks of action, we can develop strategies for engaging communities at the group level, because such groups already have networks of social relationships and shared understanding of what is important to their community. The parish community is a potential group if well guided by the parish priest.

To promote the large-scale, systems-level changes in understanding, it will be essential to acknowledge that the communities, we hope to educate are in fact very knowledgeable about their own lives, needs, and surroundings. Working with and engaging communities, rather than imposing on them, will facilitate appropriate frames for understanding and dialogue that naturally connect to the systems that people already engage with on a regular basis. We can enhance and enlarge the spheres of co-operation at three levels: (a) create friends of the earth teams at social network, lunch groups meet at place of work, in schools and higher Institutions; (b) every team must engage itself in at least one action in a month; (c) identify connections at higher levels with Eco groups, Government officials, Ministry of environment, of forest, etc.

### ***4.2.2. Community Responsibility in Collective Oneness***

An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment”.- Laudato Si 156.

### ***4.2.3. Creating Multiple Forums to Talk about Climate Justice***

A crucial decision has to be made for the health of the earth, for food security, and human health care. The top 20 % of the society which occupies the space of the rest of the 80% , be it carbon space, earth space, resource space, food consumption, professional occupation or entertainment. It is time to share the pie with the rest. And so we need a debate, a colloquium on equalizing and protecting the rights of the deprived. We are capable of managing the entire world by the press of a button. But we have miserably failed in our recognition of the other as my own. The politics

of caste, caste based violence and gender discrimination affect the very heart of our quest for equal justice.

#### **4.3. Action at the Church Level**

The CCBI in its “Pastoral Plan for the Church in India” on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2013, urges us to “care for Ecology ... to promote environmental education highlighting God’s ownership of and human stewardship of creation, working against air and noise pollution, including green attitudes and thoughts. She will encourage concrete action such as conserving the greenery, encouraging plantation programs, fighting against water, light, noise, and marine pollution. She will make Church centres and Christian homes models of eco-friendliness.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.4. Action at the Congregational Level**

At the level of governance, we need to evolve policies that radically support the cause of nature and the eco-system. We need to promote the greening of religious life, through in-depth contemplation of nature and the cosmos. There has to be articulation of convictions to live close to the nature, to revere every created being as created in the image and likeness of God. There has to be commitment to make decisions regarding the greening of mother earth on a war footing through the governance structure, which gives direction on activities in this renewed vision, based on the charism of the congregation. The lived charism of the congregation should remain open to the emerging trends of the newness which opens up alternatives.

At the level of legislation, we need to work out legally binding principles towards goals and objectives with SMART Indicators. In this regard all the levels of governance, General, Provincial and Local, must be geared to act together on legally binding decisions with regard to climate action. Such decisions can be of alternative energy, afforestation, organic farming, no plastic policy etc. Alternative energy can be of solar power, wind power, bio-fuel and other forms of energy that enable the retention of fossil fuels beneath the surface of the earth which is the key factor in the reduction of global warming. There could also be decisions regarding the non-use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides in cultivation and the non use of plastics in all its forms; this may go a long way in ushering in the survival of the mother earth. Afforestation can promote the biodiversity very specially promoting the planting of endemic and native trees to promote healthy eco-system, thus replenishing the eco system for the survival of all other organisms.

At the executive level, we need to follow up with actions drawn for implementation with collaboration from different actors who join in the actual realization of the plan

of action. We can elicit volunteers from the students, from friends and benefactors, from other NGOs who share similar vision, from pious associations, from youth groups, from prayer groups and concerned people from all walks of life. Let them be fired with enthusiasm, motivated to give their time and energy to live for a cause, a cause beyond their existence.

#### **4.5. An Action Program**

##### ***4.5.1. At the Socio Cultural Level***

We need to celebrate life in nature; the traditional celebrations of harvest festivals like, Pongal, Mulai Pari (sprouted seedlings) etc., can be moments of such celebrations that bear witness to the closeness that our people feel with nature. Every tree is a gospel story. Every leaf is a sermon preached by nature. Our celebrations must be focused on acclaiming the wonder of God in creation. We shall create new celebrations in protecting birds, butterflies etc., and convert the hunting of them into caring and compassionate relationship. Let us promote the understanding that the earth is the mother of all. She contains the seeds of growth. We shall educate the children to go for nature prone biologically produced clothing and reduce glamour; awaken them to avoid wearing clothes in which chemical dyes are used. We shall encourage the use of cotton though it might be expensive; cultivate the value that dignity comes not in appearance but from the integrity deep within.

##### ***4.5.2. At the Parish Level***

The celebration of light and water at Easter, the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ are tremendous powerful symbols which can be enriched with the new understanding of creation in partnership with humanity. The Eucharistic celebration needs to bring to the fore the destruction caused to nature and the need to protect life in all its forms. Sermons could focus on the problems of the eco system as well as their impact on the marginalized and the poor. Praising God should not camouflage the connected problems. The sacred and the secular must merge in our interiority. The sacrament of reconciliation could acknowledge the harm done to nature and the need to live a simple life in view of allowing nature to be free from commercial exploitation for profit. The Christian community can be motivated to get involved in afforestation programs, clean and green surrounding, avoidance of plastics in church decorations etc. With one voice the people must acclaim the urgency to protect the environment making the wall of Jericho tumble down in view of bringing down global warming to 1.5 degree.

#### ***4.5.3. At the Pastoral Level***

While visiting families the people could be educated in the care of creation with appropriate passages from the Bible and the Psalms and praying together for it. Pastors can promote the value of sustainability of the natural resources among parishioners.

#### ***4.5.4. At the School Level***

Among the students, the practice of bio-diversity can be promoted through organizing regular camps. Eco-walk with school children, nature meditation, planting trees and caring for eco-garden, herbal garden, planting rare varieties of trees, allotting a tree or part of the garden to a class of students to care for, are some ways to increase green cover while celebrating life. Children can also collect seeds and develop a seed bank in their school and could distribute to the villagers when going for exposure to rural areas. At school functions, offer ordinary cloth bags as presents to children which could be used for shopping at home, reducing the usage of plastics.

#### ***4.5.5. At the Social Service Level***

On special days such as Women's Day, Human Rights Day, Widows Day etc., let the SHGs integrate the use of organic products and create sales. While focusing on the rights of humans, the rights of earth, water, air and space must also be integrated since they are intrinsically interconnected.

#### ***4.5.6. Clean and Green Streets***

In the living areas, create teams of women and youth who could monitor the cleanliness and hygiene of the streets. Waste management is a tremendous problem which could be addressed by each street through creation of awareness. Let the families pay for waste disposal and share in the responsibility of creating a clean surrounding. Solid waste management has to be advocated and organized by the government. Residence welfare associations have to evolve a model functioning in some areas. Only through intense awareness creation, it could be achieved. Earth tax can be levied for those who litter waste in the street.

#### ***4.5.7. Introducing Eco-related Courses in Formation***

Eco-theology, eco-spirituality and eco-feminism need to become the subjects of serious concern among the theologians. Writings, seminars, debates and competitions must be organized in the seminaries and formation houses. It is the task of the

young to carry forward this flame of creation spirituality. Awareness through street theatre, songs and dramas on the theme of sustainability and ecological integration can be promoted during formation.

#### ***4.5.8. Other Means of Action***

There could be use of CFL bulbs which could save energy. Vehicular pollution can be checked by encouraging people to share and travel in teams and to use public transport whenever and where ever possible. We can net work with NPOs in protesting against ecological devastation and promoting with them the cause of conservation of soil and water, needed for the conservation of trees.

#### ***4.5.9. Daily Simple Actions***

There could also be daily simple actions at personal, community and institutional levels, such as, living close to nature; stressing eco-balanced food habits; conscious reduction in the use of water, electricity, fuel, as well as in the accumulation of cloths and other things; enjoying nature walks and meditation; use of bicycles for local travels; promotion of environmental education in all our institutions; having a herbal garden in the campus; ensuring a green cover of at least 40% in our land area; use of CFL lamps or LED lights as much as possible; avoiding the use of plastic bags, cups, wrappers or reusing them to reduce the waste; recycling solid wastes and promoting waste management; use of solar energy for cooking, heating, lights, computers etc.; display of posters and illustrations for awareness building; creating “Franciscan Forests” (natural growth without human interference) in a corner of the campuses; developing organic vegetable garden; promoting nature friendly decoration (avoiding thermacol, plastic etc.); avoiding “use and throw” materials; effective rain water harvesting; organizing eco tours; and encouraging and supporting frontline scientists of energy and economic transformation.

#### ***4.5.10. Learning a Lesson from the Tree***

Trees are our parents; they help us realize our inter connectedness and its abounding richness. They give us food, fruits, fodder greens, flowers, medicine, cool drinks, fuel, furniture, cradle, a home to live and a box to be buried. Trees are our perennial suppliers of resources. Trees are life support systems of every family. Let the lesson be lived by us humans. Let all people dream a great and green future where humans and nature will live in a harmonious relationship of mutual respect and recognition as intended by the creator. As a conclusion, I just want to offer a quote from a UN Document.

In the middle of the 20th century, we saw our planet from space for the first time. Historians may eventually find that this vision had a greater impact on thought than did the Copernican revolution of the 16th century, which upset the human self-image by revealing that the Earth is not the centre of the universe. From space, we see a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activity and edifice but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. Humanity's inability to fit its activities into that pattern is changing planetary systems, fundamentally. Many such changes are accompanied by life-threatening hazards. This new reality, from which there is no escape, must be recognized and managed.<sup>17</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> cf: 'Dinamani' Tamil Daily; <http://www.dinamani.com>, 26. 01. 2016, 14

<sup>2</sup> Ignacimuthu, *Environmental Spirituality* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 210), 96-100.

<sup>3</sup> www.Eurodad.org : "Levelling up: Ensuring a fairer share of corporate tax for developing countries" (Internet).

<sup>4</sup> Dominik Gross, "The Latest Hagwash about Tax Dodging" *Alliance Sud News*, 24, November, 64, (2015), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Vandana Shiva; Youtube "The future of food , Part I.

<sup>6</sup> 1992 Rio Declaration, n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Robinson quotes Mr. Tom: Youtube on Climate Justice.

<sup>8</sup> Kumi Naidoo, 'Break Free From Fossil Fuels' Launch of escalated mobilization plan for 2016. On Dec. 10. 2015(Internet : [breakfree2016.org](http://breakfree2016.org)) One can join the movement by contacting at [partner@breakfree2016.org](mailto:partner@breakfree2016.org)

<sup>9</sup> We have also excellent examples in modern times; Vangari Maathi in Kenya, the Nobel laureate and Founder of the Green Belt Movement has planted 30 million trees and empowered 30,000 women with development skills. Through her efforts, she was able to transform the desert into flowing rivers. She said once: "We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations of all species to rise up and walk." Another environment activist, Vandana Shiva has called to task the government for mishandling the recent pulses crisis and has advocated support to farmers, responding to questions on the spiraling prices of pulses. She has developed Seed Bank in 16 states of India, advocating the rights of the earth and the wisdom of the indigenous farmers. Her book *Staying Alive* defines the links between ecological crises, colonialism, and the oppression of women and is a fiercely relevant book that positions women not as mere survivors of the crisis, but as the source of crucial insights and vision to guide their struggle.

<sup>10</sup> Please refer to *The Paris Agreement*, December, 2015 in continuity with New York Convention 1992 and the one in Stockholm, Sweden, 1972.

<sup>11</sup> Ignacimuthu, *Environmental Spirituality*, 98

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical (24 May, 2015), 93

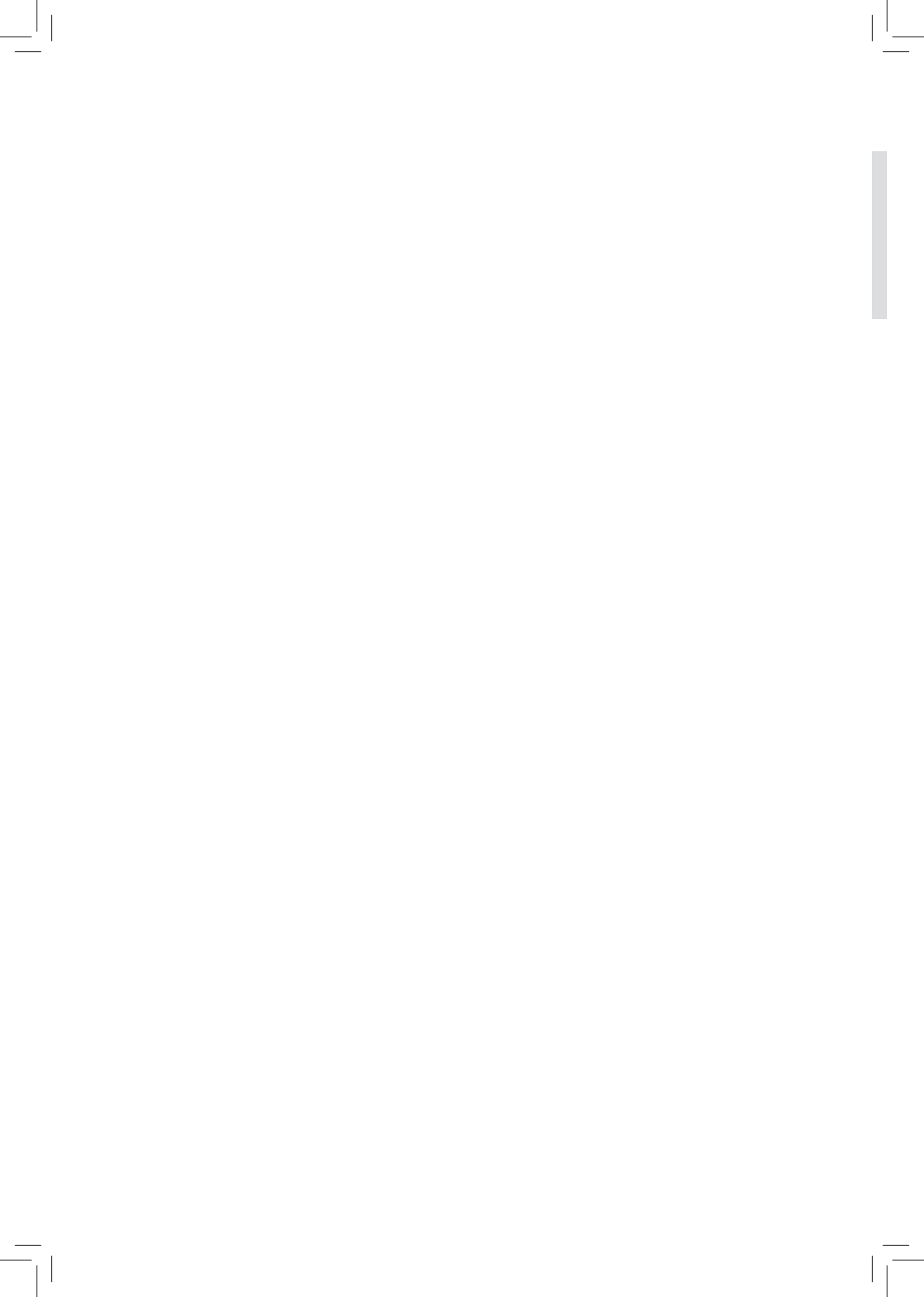
<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 164)

<sup>14</sup> Fred Nicolas “ Strategy: Definitions & Meaning” (internet)

<sup>15</sup> Caritas Switzerland , *Fighting Poverty through Strong Partnership* ( Luzerne: n.p., 2015), 4.

<sup>16</sup> CCBI General Assembly (2013), “The Pastoral Plan for the Church in India,” (Bangalore: CCBI Centre, 2013), 16. Please see [www.ccbi.in](http://www.ccbi.in)

<sup>17</sup> UN Document, *Our Common Future, From One Earth to One World*, From A/42/427. *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* 1987, 1.





## TOWARDS THE 'ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION' OF CONSECRATED LIFE: THE ECO-DIMENSION OF THE VOWS

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

It is not usual to speak about our vocation as a calling to care for our Common Home, even though this is what Pope Francis does in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. Isn't such a version of consecrated life more political and social than religious? However, surprisingly our Pope Francis has addressed all Christians, calling us to an 'ecological conversion.'

My purpose is to reflect with you about this ecological conversion, applied to the understanding and practice of the evangelical counsels; that is to say, to highlight the ecological dimension of each of the evangelical counsels, with which we pledge to follow Jesus along the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Fifteen years ago, when I was in Manila as professor of the Theology of Religious Life at the Institute of Consecrated Life for Asia (ICLA), Fr. Domingo Moraleda, the former director of ICLA, asked me to prepare a text on religious vows with an Asian flavour. The Asian vision of reality is holistic and sacred. In contrast, the European or western vision of reality is analytical and secularized; consequently, the three vows are contemplated as different units. Then I wondered: how to reflect on the three religious vows in a more holistic and unified way?

The first answer I found was this: the vows are like the Holy Trinity of God – one and three at the same time: Tri-unity. The three vows are three aspects, dimensions or manifestations of only one: the vow of the Covenant!

Then I found another holistic principle: the Gospel of Creation. By the will of our Creator, the Covenant is four-fold: covenant with God, covenant with humanity, covenant with brothers and sisters in community and covenant with nature, our

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planet and cosmos. In accordance with this second holistic principle, in each of the religious vows, we need to highlight the four dimensions of the covenant, which are the following: *mystical* (covenant with God), *missionary and political* (covenant with humanity), *communitarian* (covenant with sisters and brothers in community) and *ecological* (covenant with nature, creation, our planet, and cosmos).

Guided by these two holistic principles, I came to the following conclusion: the fundamental religious vow is only one: the vow of Covenant of Love with the only God; this implies the rejection of other gods (the gods or idols of power, money and sex). This rejection is expressed in our profession's formula by the three anti-idolatrous vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. At the same time, each of the vows expresses the covenant in its fourfold orientation: mystic, missionary-political, communitarian and ecological.

At that time I was interested in the ecological issues, but from the perspective of the 'ecology of the spirit', or the 'ecology of mind' (Edgar Morin, Gregory Bateson etc.). And I felt a special attraction for the ecology of the spirit; the result of that was my webpage entitled 'Ecology of the Spirit.'<sup>1</sup> Gradually I realized that the ecological dimension of the vows was totally absent in the majority of the Constitutions of our Congregations. Therefore, I wrote an article about the religious vows from the perspective of the Covenant and of the four dimensions (mystical, political-missionary, communitarian and ecological). That article became the seed for some books I wrote after that.<sup>2</sup>

The right time has come for us to reflect on the ecological dimension of the Covenant, expressed in each of our religious vows. Herein lies the ecological conversion that Pope Francis asks us in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*.

## **1. THE ONLY VOW OF COVENANT – TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION**

*Laudato Si* invites us to situate our understanding of the identity of religious life in another level, in a broader context. Normally we tend to understand our identity in comparison with other forms of human life, situating ourselves in a particular sacred space of society, of humanity; our particular way of life is coined by us with terms like *consecrated*, *liminal*, *prophetic*... When we try to explain the charismatic identity of our Congregations and Institutes, we assume one historical perspective: within the history of the Church and the different forms of Christian Life, our Institutes manifest a certain newness of life and of ministry. It is not common to understand and explain our identity from a cosmologic and geological perspective; within the context of the genetic process of our planet earth and of cosmos.

### **1.1. Where are We in the Process of the Universe?**

We, religious, must be aware of the historical and geological moment in which we are - as human beings and as inhabitants of planet Earth. The scientific tradition divides the Phanerozoic *eon*<sup>3</sup> into three *eras* of life: Paleozoic<sup>4</sup>, Mesozoic, and Cenozoic<sup>5</sup>. We are in the Cenozoic era, spanning the last 65 million years,<sup>6</sup> and it is ending. It is terminated by the western-style industrialized human community in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The earth is entering now into *a new geological era*.

### **1.2. Cenozoic Era is Ending! Ecozoic Era is Coming!**

Thomas Berry coined the phrase 'Ecozoic era' to denote the new geological era.<sup>7</sup> Teilhard de Chardin has coined another term, 'psychozoic.' But Thomas Berry found that term too anthropocentric. So he preferred 'Ecozoic era.' Etymologically, Ecozoic is a combination of 'eco' and 'zoic': 'eco' derives from the Greek word *oikos* meaning house, household, or home, and 'zoic' from the Greek word *zoikos* meaning pertaining to living beings. Thus Ecozoic era is defined as *the era of the house of living beings*, the era of its mutually enhancing human-earth relations.<sup>8</sup>

*Ecozoic* is a term that suggests a vision of how the human-earth community could be, not necessarily how it has been in the past. Geology, however, does not describe how the earth should be in the future. *Ecozoic* is a prescriptive (or normative) term, describing a geological era that is yet-to-be, or has barely-begun, that will mature and fruit in the future. Are we directing or prescribing geology when we use the term *Ecozoic* Era? Yes, because in the former era, we have not intended to change the course of evolution or the chemistry or large scale cycles of the planet; but now we have indeed done so. We have been, as a civilization, simply paying attention to our own human needs. We have not historically been paying attention to how our activities have impacted the larger community of life and those structures and systems that support life.

*Ecozoic* means that we are also being invited to have a personal relationship with the new geological era that is beginning to rise in our lifetimes. How shall we live? And how shall we live, so that others may live? It is a perennial idea deeply embedded in what it means to be human, expressed in the cultures, customs, religions, myths and facts of the developmental story of the human family. It has roots that reach deep into the mysterious development of our human body and our human psyche.

### **1.3. Ecological Conversion from a Geological Perspective: Our Role as Humans**

When we look at our family tree as a totality we begin to see a pattern, groping toward greater geological consciousness. We know humans have permanently altered organic geology. We have done this with our quarries, pit-mines, strip-mines and mountain-top mines, oil wells, water wells, dikes, drainage systems, canals, dams, tunnels, roads, excavations, bombs, nuclear waste, etc. Humans are a destructive geological force. We deform geology, extinguish species, desolate the biosphere, poison the atmosphere, desiccate the hydrosphere – all of which change the starting point for future generations of life and of all earth systems. As witnesses to the rapid industrialization of the 19th century, geologists noticed that humankind commanded as much power to affect geology as oceans, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, forest fires, landslides, volcanoes and asteroids. The fact that we have worked together to make Earth worse off proves that we are capable of great things.

The main human task of the immediate future is to assist in activating the inter-communion of all the living and non-living components of the earth community, in what can be considered the emerging ecological period. We, religious, must be aware of the historical moment in which we, as human beings, are: the ecozoic era or the era of interconnections and era of the great reconciliation of all reality, living and non-living, natural and cultural, physical and psychic, conscious and unconscious. The three principles of reality are: differentiation, internalization and communion. Of course, these three principles explain our way of life – of the consecrated people as well. Now we ask ourselves not only the question, “How shall we live?” but also “How shall we shape Earth so that we may live as we choose?” With the complete hominisation<sup>9</sup> of Earth, having implicated ourselves deeply into Earth systems, we find that we are now compelled to ask: “What type of macro-phase anthropogenic geology shall we engage in?”

## **2. ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION: THE GOSPEL OF CREATION**

If the ecozoic era is coming, it is the time of eco-conversion, of welcoming the shift of paradigm. Let us look at this conversion from the perspective of the Gospel of Creation.<sup>10</sup>

The word ‘conversion’ is translated from the Greek word *meta-noia*, which means literally ‘to go beyond what you think, what is reasonable’. The meaning is to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness: ‘to repent or to change one’s way’.<sup>11</sup> “They

went out and preached that the people should repent” (Mk 6:12). “Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). St. Paul talks also about the *renewal of our minds* in order to discern better the will of God (Rom 12:2).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, we could translate the Greek word *metanoia* as *paradigm shift*. I will try to present the Covenant we profess and the three religious vows from the ecological paradigm.<sup>13</sup>

## **2.1. The God of Pacts**

Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations. I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind (Gen 9:12-15).

The bow (Rainbow) is the ‘ring of God’ that evokes his ‘Covenant for ever’ with humanity and our planet Earth. It is the sign that reminds God of his Covenant<sup>14</sup>. In the Bible, the word ‘Covenant relationship’ is of utmost importance; it is the key, the password that explains, both the Old and the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> ‘Covenant’ is the term that explains the kind of relationship that God maintains with his people (first Israel, later the Church), with humanity, with our Earth. Covenant is also the term that indicates the attitude, the configuration of our existence, and of what God expects of us.

The Covenant of God with cosmos, nature and humanity started from the very beginning of creation. The book of Genesis testifies that God created the world through his Word. His creation was, therefore, the beginning of a great dialogue, culminating in the creation of the human beings: “God created humankind<sup>16</sup> in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Both of them were created as the main partners, as the principal allies. The creation of the Earth is part of this dialogue, of this alliance<sup>17</sup>. Also the book of Genesis speaks of the ratification of that Covenant of creation with Noah in the symbol of the Rainbow after the flood.

With the Patriarch Abraham, God establishes a Covenant that will result in a blessing for all peoples of the Earth. God gets them out of their land and promises them another land and innumerable offsprings. The promise will be present at the historical plot of the ‘sons and daughters of Abraham’. When Abraham’s descendants were reduced to a group of slaves in Egypt, through the mediation of Moses God liberated them and with them re-established his Covenant in the Sinai:

“I will adopt you as my people and I will be your God” (Ex 6:7); the ‘blood of the Covenant’ poured out upon the people, ratified the Covenant (Ex 24:7-8)<sup>18</sup>; the main commandment condensed its content: “Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one Yahweh. You should love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. You will not go after other gods” (Deut 6:4-5).

God’s Covenant with Noah, Abraham and Moses and with his people was like a seed planted, which grew deep roots, produced trunk and branches, leaves and fruits. New generations were integrated into it. We belong to the latest generation of the Covenant. As consecrated people, we try to be faithful to the covenant, to become a prophetic symbol of fidelity to it and to act as true missionaries of the Covenant for all peoples of the earth. Many people are not aware of the Covenant established by God. And many others live as if God did not exist. Often people violate the Covenant. The messages of the prophets Isaiah<sup>19</sup>, Jeremiah<sup>20</sup>, Ezekiel<sup>21</sup> and Hosea<sup>22</sup> are still very valid for our society. They envisaged a new and definitive covenant in which God was proposed to give human beings a new heart, a new spirit and cleanse it of all idolatry. With his words and deeds Jesus announced the arrival of this new and definitive Covenant and invited everyone to enter it.<sup>23</sup> He did it by talking about the Kingdom of God: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Mt 6:33). He requested the conversion of the heart – the change of mentality that the Spirit would make possible.<sup>24</sup> He presented himself as an example of the fulfilment of the great commandment: “Love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34); He offered the cup of the new and definitive Covenant in his blood, to be shed for all (Lk 22:20). The letter to the Hebrews offers a gorgeous meditation on the scope of this Covenant.<sup>25</sup>

When the rich young man approached Jesus and asked him what to do “to possess eternal life” (Mt 19:16), Jesus reminded him of the main commandments of the Covenant: “You must not kill. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not bring false witness. Honour your father and mother, and you must love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 19:18). Jesus offered him the opportunity to further strengthen the covenant with ‘the only Good’: to follow him and give everything to the poor.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to recognize that the monastic life interpreted this Gospel scene as its great inspiration. Jesus offers us all the unimaginable gifts so that we may leave the idols to love only God, good and beautiful, in a close relationship of love. And Jesus makes us see that the road to reach the culmination of that experience is to follow him (“as I have loved you”) and love passionately those most in need. This is the dynamism of the new Covenant.

The Covenant shows us that our God is not an anchorite God, hidden, locked up in himself, air-tight, inaccessible. He is a God who, from the start has come out of himself to create new spaces, new beings, with whom to interact and establish Covenant.<sup>27</sup> An anchorite God is the contrary of a *perichoretic* God (allow me the barbarism); this word comes from a Greek term '*perichoresis*', used by Christian theology to define intra-trinitarian relations. '*Perichoresis*' is the opposite of '*anachoresis*'!

The *perichoretic* God in his Tri-unity also expresses himself in the reality that he has created. The divine Tri-unity has expanded its relations with humanity and creation. The most particular partnerships between God and individuals (e.g. Abraham, David) or between God and the human communities (the people of Israel, the Church) are inscribed in this great 'divine - human - cosmic' Covenant.

God continues to offer his Covenant to all mankind. The Church of the followers of Jesus receives it explicitly and publicly. Inside the church there are groups, communities, who feel like it is their own mission to be living signs of the Covenant for all. The same tradition of the Church has also emphasized in the consecrated life the aspect of a particular covenant with God, indeed of a spousal covenant with Christ, of which Saint Paul was a master by his example (cf. 1 Cor 7:7) and by his teaching, proposed under the Spirit's guidance (cf. 1 Cor 7:40).<sup>28</sup>

'Covenant' is also a central category for the religious or consecrated people.<sup>29</sup> The constituent elements of the consecrated life - mission, evangelical counsels, community life - are ways in which the Covenant is embodied.

God's Covenant with Israel exclude the worship of any other God ('prostitution with any other spouse' - Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), "because I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God" (Dt 5, 7-8). Likewise, religious profession is, first and foremost, a life-witnessing of the great commandment and a search for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; on the other hand, it is anti-idolatry and renounces all bondages.

## **2.2. The DNA of Religious Life**

In the DNA of religious life, in its genetic code, from its origins until today, there is a non-negotiable and unique motivation: 'seek God' (Latin - *quaerere Deum*). It is not enough to enter therein a philanthropic desire, a desire to surrender to others. Consecrated life is not an NGO. What has always characterized it has been the incessant search for God and desire to identify with his will. Those who so passionately seek God have been previously 'touched' by his presence. The search of the candidate to religious life is already the answer to another invisible and

mysterious search. The invitation and the beginning of a divine-human alliance, in which God has the initiative, is in this mutual search.

In its classical formula, the religious profession is one and triple: a delivery without limitation, through a triad of areas (obedience, chastity, poverty). It is a promise of faithfulness and an absolute rejection of any idol that tradition reduces to three: idols of power, sex and money. And because these idols have no expiry date, the vows comprise of all the future.

If consecrated life is, like all forms of Christian life, a way of life 'according to the new Covenant' and the great commandment (as it has been interpreted by Jesus), it is a 'life according to the commandment of love.' This is the crucial vow that characterizes consecrated life: the 'vow of love' of God and neighbour, with all his/her heart, soul and strength.<sup>30</sup>

The so-called 'three vows' are not three different vows, but only one in three perspectives, in *perichoresis*; as a result, they can be explained together, at the same time, with the same scheme and complementarity. Therefore, I intend to show that they are expressions of a life according to the new Covenant in love and that each one of them emphasizes a dimension of the great commandment: whether it is love of God or neighbour, it is to love with all the heart (chastity), with all the soul (obedience) and with all the strength (poverty).

The consecrated life is more than a state of life; it is a 'process', a road, a following of Jesus that always takes us into the mystery of the Covenant with God. Their goal is mutual identification, the 'mystic marriage', the unification of wills. Consecrated life does not have a mission; it is mission. It is identifying more and more with the '*missio Dei*', with the missionary will of God and collaborates with it to the extent of the gift that has been awarded.<sup>31</sup>

### **2. 3. Prophetic and Anti-idolatrous Consecrated Life**

Through our founders and foundresses and at the most lucid moments of renewal, the Holy Spirit has been setting up consecrated life as an anti-idolatrous group that does not prostrate before other gods, that confesses to the thrice Holy (cf. Isa 6:1-7), that publicly professes the Covenant and displays it in actions of love and compassion toward the disadvantaged and in new forms of communion.<sup>32</sup>

The Spirit 'who spoke through the prophets' and anti-idolatrously acted through them, continues to do so dramatically through the prophetic groups of the new Covenant. The great commandment to love God 'with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength', also translates into a love for the brothers and sisters who



have 'one heart, one soul and everything in common' (Acts 4:32). Consecrated life projects one aspect or another of the Covenant according to the various charisms that configure it: the loving and adoring relationship with God in the monastic and contemplative life, the evangelizing and charitable service to human beings in the Apostolic Institutes. The Holy Spirit uses the charisma of consecrated life - with all its inner charismatic biodiversity - to signify clearly to others the Great Covenant project. How well the Second Vatican Council explained it in the Constitution 'Lumen Gentium'!

The profession of the evangelical counsels appears as a sign (*tamquam signum apparet*) which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of the duties of their Christian vocation... It shows all men both the unsurpassed breadth of the strength of Christ the King and the infinite power of the Holy Spirit, marvellously working in His Church' (LG, 44)

The consecrated life, ever since the basic platform of the baptism, makes public the call of the Covenant; it maximizes and makes it present everywhere in the Church and the society. But it does so in contemporary idolatrous contexts, in which it is not easy to be loyal to the Covenant.

Religious life has been especially inspired by the anti-idolatrous Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17-19). This prophet, who was passionate about the Covenant and fidelity to the law of the Lord, was considered as a model of the monastic life and it remains so of the consecrated life.<sup>33</sup>

Another model of fidelity to the Covenant in the middle of a town that delivers itself to the idolatrous fertility cults (cf. Hos 1-3; 4:6-14), was the author of Psalm 16, an anonymous Israelite at the time of the Prophet Hosea, in the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This man confesses that he also let himself be carried away by idolatry, but after he met the Good, the Good above all good, he rested on Him.<sup>34</sup> He is the God who advises him and instructs him, as a father to his son, who guides him and will never leave him and will show him the road of life. Between God and the psalmist, unbreakable bonds of Covenant have tightened up. There is no room for any other God. Can we see in this anonymous Israelite the anticipation of those who feel seduced by God and live in fidelity to the Covenant according to his counsel?

The present situation of humanity needs the presence of witnesses and ministers of the new Covenant. The Covenant of God with humanity and even of Jesus with His Church, are threatened by new deviations or idolatrous versions: money, power, sex and their terrible consequences, such as poverty, violence and marginalization.

Although money, sex and power are in themselves positive and beneficial, these realities easily become seductive idols that progressively separate people from the Covenant with the true God. Perverse economic systems, pornography, violent, sophisticated and invasive power, including religious power, favour such idolatries and leave the human being in a bad state of emptiness and lack of meaning.

We must acknowledge, however, that we live the Covenant in tension; that it is not possible to live only in the Spirit, without living in the flesh, or live in the flesh without living in the Spirit. Inside of us, there is a coexistence of the flesh and the Spirit. We are a living scene of a struggle between fidelity and infidelity to the Covenant. None of them manages to defeat completely the other, because they implicate each other dialectically. In this condition, it is not given to us to be entirely spiritual or enjoy our carnality; we feel divided and our body craves to be released.<sup>35</sup>

Consecrated persons make a public commitment to the Covenant through vows or other links, which re-attach or obligate; the vows are a charismatic re-reading of the clauses of the Covenant.

The charism of each Institute of consecrated life is a gift of the Spirit to the Church. For this reason, the consecrated people understand today that they have to insert themselves in local churches and attend to the spiritual and material needs of the Universal Church. Hence was born the required life of fraternity and sorority.

### **3. ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE THREE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS**

#### **3.1. Obedience to the Covenant: ‘Sense of Cosmic Belonging’, Listening and Caring**

Obedience is, above all, the response to the invitation by the God of the Covenant. It is a “Yes, I want” to the Word that God speaks to us. To obey is an art that teaches firstly, how to overcome the idolatrous temptations of power and secondly, to follow Jesus freely, in obedience to the Father and docility to the Spirit. Starting from there, we will discover the four dimensions of the unique obedience to the Covenant.

Evangelical obedience is not a question of submission, but of love that puts our own gifts and powers at the service of others. There is evangelical obedience when one listens and pays attention to discover the needs of others, to contribute to solve them. It is listening to and putting into practice. Consecrated life has taken this into account and has wanted itself to be an important area of verification of obedience

to the will of God. It verifies the obedience to God in three dimensions: missionary, communitarian and ecological, and as a background of them all, the religious or mystical dimension.

Obedience must also be considered in ecological perspective. It speaks of relationship not only with God and humans; but also with nature. The God's Covenant reaches all of creation and all creatures. For this reason, fidelity to the Covenant entails entering into communion and interrelation with nature.

Humanity is increasingly aware of the importance of caring for nature and planet Earth. We even speak increasingly of the philosophy and ethics of care.<sup>36</sup> This is a great challenge to expand our understanding of the vow of obedience in consecrated life.

The biblical notion of 'spirit' (Hebrew – *ruah*, Greek – *pneuma*) expresses it well. 'Ruah' is the wind, the blow, the breathing, the beginning and source of life. "It ensures the significant connection of created reality, and guarantees the harmony of the cosmos."<sup>37</sup> What we call the Covenant with the creation, astrophysicist Trinh Xuan Thuan calls in secular terms, a 'sense of cosmic belonging'.<sup>38</sup> It is a desire for a hospitable openness to the pressure that the nature exerts on us in various forms, not only for practical reasons and for survival, but for reasons also spiritual. "Showing an attitude of religion to the land is, above all, feeling it, living it, listening to it, including us in it."<sup>39</sup> These words speak to us of a real attitude of obedience, as an extension of the Covenant.

It is not true, as some have accused, that the Bible justifies the despotism of man against nature. Lynn White says that Christianity has inherited from Judaism the rejection of the cyclical notion of time and replaced it with a linear conception of history and of confidence in an indefinite progress, along with a position of supremacy of man over nature. This is, according to him, 'Christian arrogance' that has infected science and technology and is responsible for the ecological tragedy.<sup>40</sup> But this is not true. Before He created the human being, the Creator, according to Genesis, saw that all His creatures that came out of His Word, were good, beautiful, and valuable (Gen 1:25); later He created the human being and confided the earth to him so that he could cultivate it and preserve it (Gen 2:5); the verb 'to cultivate' (*abad*) refers not only to 'work' but also to 'serve', 'care', and to 'guard'. In any way, he is asked not to abuse it on a whim: "See, I establish my Covenant with you and with your descendents after you; also with all living creatures to be found with you; birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on earth" (Gen 9: 9-10).

The Creator God the Father gave the following blessing and mandate to the original couple:

God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on earth'. God said, 'See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven, and all living reptiles on the earth I give you the foliage of plants for food'. And so it was. (Gen 1:28-30).

Therefore 'to destroy a species is to silence a divine voice forever'.<sup>41</sup> However, it is true that from the original fall, nature has suffered the tyranny of the human being. The creation has been subjected to emptiness and destructive arbitrariness, not infrequently (Rom 8:20-21).

We need a new technological praxis that completely suits the eco-natural complexity. For this reason, we must renounce the project of conquering and subjugating nature, or letting us be guided by it. Both perspectives are insufficient, though necessary. We follow the nature that guides us and we have to lead the nature that we follow; at the same time, we must follow and we are followed and guided.<sup>42</sup> The more we control nature, the more it controls us.

In many organizational respects, nature is much ahead of us. But man can contribute to the eco-evolution with a retrospective and anticipating thought, an overall strategy, a reflexive awareness and a new wealth:

It is about deciphering a symbiotic co-evolution through reciprocal transformations between a biosphere a-centric, unconscious, spontaneous, and a humanity that is increasingly more aware of its future and the future of the world. This marriage between nature and humanity will have a need of overcoming the current technique, which in turn requires an overcoming of the current way of thinking and also the current way of thinking science.<sup>43</sup>

The human being must consider the pattern of nature; he cannot be only the pilot; he must be a co-pilot of nature, and nature has to be a co-pilot of the human being. More still, he is said to be the 'keeper of nature.'

To care for creation requires an ethic of frugality, austerity and asceticism. The destruction of the creation is due to the presence of the demonic forces in the world (Rev 8:7-12). Redemption has also affected nature (Rom 8:19-22; Col 1:15-20). As Teilhard de Chardin said: "The only true human unity is the spirit of the land;" when man is aware of this unity he will realize that "when he destroys, he destroys

himself, and when he creates something, he develops himself.”<sup>44</sup> The interaction between mankind and the Earth frequently generates an ecosystem more interesting and creative than that which occurs in nature, in the wild.<sup>45</sup>

To save a part of twenty millions of species that are dying, we need to have the awareness that we are of the Earth; it would be necessary that we speak about our planet at the table, in bars, on the benches at the squares, beaches. The Earth needs much attention; it must be taken care of. Imagine having a tumour. How are we going to leave alone someone with a tumour? On the official buildings we should have a picture of our planet Earth rather than the picture of the President of the Republic.<sup>46</sup>

To live we must break bread and shed the blood of the creation daily. When we do this with recognition, love, skill and reverence, it becomes a sacrament. But when we do it with ignorance, greed, negligence and destruction, it is a desecration; and so we condemn ourselves to a moral and spiritual emptiness.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, the fourth dimension of obedience to the Covenant is located. Consecrated life wants to participate in the grand pact in defence of the Earth, of nature; it wants to ennoble the creation of God and wants to participate in the resolution of the ecological crisis, which is also a spiritual crisis; it wants to embark on a path of frugality and of respect, so that the Earth is not desecrated or emptied; consecrated life also discovers its vocation as ‘caretaker’ for the sake of the creatures, as Saint Francis of Assisi did prophetically.

Most of the constitutional texts do not make reference to this dimension of obedience, as is true of the other vows too. We understand now the necessity to include this dimension. The Magisterium of the Popes Benedict XVI (*Caritas in veritate*) and Francis (*Laudato Si*), also invites us to do it.

### **3.2. Ecological Dimension of Prophetic Celibacy: We Are Species, We Are Nature**

The second Evangelical Counsel is not to be confused with a vow of sexual abstinence. It is a call to live in passionate love, in Covenant with God, without living as a couple and a family. In authentic celibacy, the soul wraps the body and its sexuality. The virtue that regulates this way of living is celibate chastity. Franco-Algerian philosopher Pierre Rabhi, writes: “The crisis we are experiencing is not only crisis of means and methods to save the Earth. Who is in crisis is the human being... Ecology cannot be done without the spiritual dimension... Humanistic ecology should involve us all, regardless of our political and religious opinions.”<sup>48</sup>

That is why, we ask ourselves now: Does it also imply that celibacy and love for the nature would establish Covenant with the creation? Attention to the Earth makes us return to our true selves. Is not our body a part of nature? Is it not nature? And, if so, we will have to act and explicate in this dimension, the celibacy for the Kingdom.

Sexuality is much older than the first stone tools. The process through which sexuality became a strategy for adaptation started more than two million years ago. There was a sexual selection that made us humans emerge as a completely unique species within the animal Kingdom. Sexuality is practical for species. Without sex we would not be here. Mankind discovers stunning transformation and organizational factors in sex. When we have awareness not only as individuals, not only as members of a community, but as species,<sup>49</sup> we discover that in the ambit of sexuality not everything depends on our personal decisions, our mastery of our individual body and its drives: we are stuck in the stream of life that our human species increases every day. Last year, on 12 January 2015, at 8.15 in the morning, the number of humans supposed to inhabit planet Earth was 7,217,350,800. On 27 January 2016 at 19.40 the world population is: 7,397,781,200. That is, in just over a year the human population has grown by 180,530,400 inhabitants.

Nature is not foreign to us, because our body is part of nature; we are human species and we are nature in one of its leading possibilities. We are the surprise of the power of the evolution that has been travelling as a fluid through millions of beings for millions of years. We are its masterpiece, the result of a cosmic intermittent training. Nature is ours and we are it: We get nourishment from nature; from it we receive the vital fluid; it makes us grow; makes us ill and healthy; in it, our body dissolves when it dies; Earth is sown with millions and millions of men and women who already died; it is Mother Earth, it is Grave Earth. Feeling oneself part of nature is to experience the greatness of life and the mystery of death. It is there asking us for communion, because only in harmony with it will we be ourselves.

Our human body progresses in the sensitive universe. There is no discontinuity between the flesh of the world and our flesh. The world is the body of humanity. Each of us women and men are a *microcosm*, a little world that sums up, condenses and summarizes the degrees of the created being. In the human body, the world's matter becomes conscious and free. There is a wonderful marriage between the flesh of human beings and the world. To establish a hiatus between our own body and the world, to be unaware of the mysterious communion, which exists between them, provokes a serious balance problem for humans and impoverishment for nature.

The transformation of the world must begin with our own body. But, given that the body is a segment of the 'social construction of reality', body, society and nature are influencing each other, forming an eco-anthropo-system.

The body is not a reality that we have. We live in first person: Sartre would say, "J'existe mon corps."<sup>50</sup> Our body is the only 'place of adventure' for our celibate-virginity. The body is not fully a given reality (*natura*); it is also a task (*culture*). The body must be educated. We have to integrate into our physicality the spiritual experiences, and vice versa. The experience of celibacy marks our body; it is fixed in our brains, it is emitted as a permanent message; our body is a 'celibacy styled' body, a symbolic and prophetic body. A virgin body modestly avoids appearing as a sexual attraction: "To assert oneself as a personal presence is manifested as a face and not as sex."<sup>51</sup>

Virginal modesty is like the sacrament of spiritual virginity; it is expressed in the nobility of the body, in the dress, even in relations with the subhuman world. Chastity, valid for both the married and the celibate person, means unification, pacification, integrity and comprehensiveness of the entire being. There is chastity when the person actually integrates the *eros* and the dynamism of its nature. Surrendering to the blind movement of *eros* is disintegrating oneself. Killing *eros* without reviving it and revitalizing it in the spirit is to wither oneself.<sup>52</sup>

Merleau-Ponty said that 'the thickness of the body is the only means I have to get to the heart of things'. Only through his body can humans reach the heart of the world to convey the great gift of the Father, the Kingdom. Through his/her body the celibate, the virgin, enter in relation to other bodies of creation; humans and the sub-human. So, Jesus also enters in contact with us: "This is my body", "Who has touched me?" There is a virgin style that defines this relationship with the universe. It is what we would call the 'ecological dimension' of virginity.

Eastern monasticism has joined the practice of the permanent virginity to the regular discipline of fasting "which interrupts the relationship of violence and murder, between us and the world". Virginity takes us to a relationship with nature full of compassion, respect and veneration. There is a 'Christian ecology' that has to be re-discovered as an indispensable component of virginity. We must not forget that the experience of virginity is closely linked to evangelical poverty and obedience; and therefore, the establishment of a relationship with nature, marked by the renunciation of the efforts at dominance, oppression and violence. The type of relationship with nature that Francis of Assisi lived serves as an orientation of virginity proposed in the code for ecology.<sup>53</sup>

The evangelical celibate-virginity is also characterized by the cult of prophetic life. It is something like an ‘adoring’ ‘quivering’ before the mystery of life. We are more passive about life, than we are active. It does not coincide with the virginity or violence that kills, nor the generation that evokes life. For us it is proper to honour, revere and protect life; first and foremost, the human life and also the life in nature. The restraint was understood by the ancient monks as an expression of their virgin relationship with nature. The Eastern monk never eats meat; i.e., does not take part in the killing of animals, so that as they are at peace with him; they will follow him.<sup>54</sup>

We are being called to a new consciousness: planetary consciousness. Pavel A. Florenskij put it very well when he wrote: “How many believe that nature is nothing more than land, forests, fields and rivers without any reciprocal connection? Too many! How many get to see the forest beyond the trees? Too few!”<sup>55</sup>

### **3.3. Ecological Dimension of Evangelical Poverty: Planetary Consciousness and Praxis of The Species**

Being poor is not, in principle, a virtue, nor a charisma, but a deficiency and limitation. What is virtuous is the *generosity* that gives preference to the needs of others rather than our own: the *extreme generosity* that, even at the expense of our own impoverishment, takes enjoyment from the enrichment of those in need; the *compassion* that makes us love with all our resources and leads us to use them as instruments of love and defence of the poor. The ability to *transcend the power and attraction of material goods*, in favour of a more united and more transcendent lifestyle is, likewise, a virtue. Attitudes like these do not spring spontaneously from us, or if they sprout, are hindered ‘fatally’ by the selfishness and the state of sin we may be in. To live with the right attitude of evangelical poverty is a gift from God. This gift should be accepted with responsibility and freedom.

Poverty must also be considered in an ecological perspective. It speaks not only of the relationship with humans, but also from the relationship with nature. The Covenant is also with nature, with our planet. Therefore, evangelical poverty includes the love for it (*with everything we have?*). If we acknowledge Jesus as the cosmic and universal redeemer, we must proclaim as Paul does, that the creation “still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God...it has been groaning in one great act of giving birth...we must be content to hope that we shall be saved” (Rom 8:21-23).



### **3.3.1. Toward a Planetary Consciousness**

We are now more aware than in the past that nature is bound to be our home, the enclosure in which we can build our world-hearth and re-create ourselves; it is also the home of the biotic community, of all living beings. Nature is that immense and mysterious organism, that scenario where life germinates, reproduces and dies; that surprising gigantic magnitude and unbelievable miniaturization. For believers, nature is that immense stage that God has created as a framework for our history; that articulated set of 'divine words' made reality, of the Spirit's sighs converted into matter and in life.<sup>56</sup> We want to expand our understanding of the vow of poverty in the consecrated life, on this horizon.

Mechanisms, technology and materialism have enslaved nature: they have degraded it; they have abused its resources and have not respected its balance; they have subjected the flora and fauna to a terrible devastation and have threatened its biodiversity. The water from our rivers and seas has been contaminated and it, being the mother's womb of life, has become the poison of death for thousands of fish and other living beings in water; the air, the atmosphere, are being violated, drugged and converted into a vehicle of pollution. They are losing their symbolic ability; neither water nor air can be symbols of the Spirit and Life, in many places. Animals are afraid of humans. The flora is threatened by the foolish interests of the exploiters. The soil is becoming desert-like. The creation is subject to emptiness. In fact, ecological degradation is cutting the blood-flow to our future; it is mutilating mankind and is leaving us alone, in a horrible desert. That is not home, but a terrible prison that we are preparing for the millions and millions of human beings who will follow us. Nature is enslaved by corruption. Gandhi put it very well when he said: "Our planet offers everything man needs, but not everything that man greeds."

At the same time the lack of respect for nature leads scientists to excess and very dangerous tampering:

For aspiring to a super-humanity, we are about to put an end to mankind. Flying man is already venturing into the cosmos; he aims to determine the sex of their children and to cure them of prenatal diseases; infertile women choose to be mothers and the fertile, not; we erase the cold of winter and the heat of summer; we demand any food at any time, indifferent to crops and cycles; we are approaching the speed of light and invent weapons which threaten our continuity and that of the world. But, despite everything, we have not abolished fear, hunger, death; have not known peace, the cities that we build to make us safe are oppressive and we don't feel happier than before.<sup>57</sup>

Mankind is considering, for the first time on a global basis, the need to take care of nature in which it lives. We know that we have to take care of the garden that God has created for us (Gen 2:15). Eco-challenge asks us to find a way of life, to get collectively organized in such a way that we work without plunder; we consume without preying. We must take care of biodiversity:

It seems that man depends on a very small number of species. Three-quarters of the food consumed by humanity comes from seven species, only: wheat, rice, corn, potatoes, oatmeal, sweet potatoes and tapioca. Despite this, increasingly one speaks more and more about the advantages of biodiversity for human beings. Biodiversity, from a certain perspective, is a large live warehouse of genetic information, of which mankind can take advantage. Indeed, a large amount of drugs that are currently used, obtain their active ingredients from plant and animal species. Man is still far from knowing the potential utility of the life that surrounds him.<sup>58</sup>

The human being is not the idol of nature, but a 'manager' of a land that is not his: He is not an absolute lord, but the Earth's guardian. The human being is an 'older brother or sister' of nature and, as such, responsible for its care and called to communion with it, with 'sister mother Earth', as Francis of Assisi said. What we have called ecological dimension of evangelical poverty has its place here.

### ***3.3.2. A New Type of Relationship with Nature in Religious Life***

Although the consecrated life was defined as *fuga mundi*, it was never defined as *fuga naturae*. Moreover, the monks and nuns left the world of coexistence among men to take advantage of nature. It is certainly striking that some of them fled precisely to the deserts, to the places of the natural infertility of dead nature or nearly devoid of life. Others, however, went to fertile spots, solitary forests, where they could establish relations with the flora and fauna.

Saint Benedict of Nursia urged his monks to live in common, in a stable place, dedicated to prayer, study and manual labour; he insisted that each monastery should stock up on everything they needed: the monks cultivated the soil, drained the swamps and stabilized the forests. Their techniques improved the fertility of the Earth, instead of impoverishing it. The Benedictine model of relationship with the land was characterized by gratitude and respect to get its permanent fertility in favour of men, especially at the beginning.

The Benedictine rule seems to draw inspiration from the second chapter of Genesis, where it is said that the Lord put man in the Garden of Eden not as master, but rather as an administrator. Throughout the history of the order, Benedictine monks

have taken active part in natural processes and the configuration of nature... in such an intelligent manner that this process has proven to be compatible with the preservation of environmental quality. In this regard, the figure of Saint Benedict is more consistent with life in the modern world and the human condition in general, than Saint Francis.<sup>59</sup>

However, with the course of time, the monasteries accumulated so much wealth that they became very powerful from the economic and political point of view, giving the appearance of a true feudalism.

Francis of Assisi and his friars did not understand nature under a utilitarian perspective; for them it was rather the subject of joy, prayer, admiration and gratitude; they contemplated the presence of God in the creatures they saw. There is a fraternal and friendly approach to nature. They don't want to dominate it, or transform it, but only fraternize with her.

These traditions have been kept in one way or other among the religious (let us also think about our mystical and contemplative individuals); but we have also fallen frequently into the ecological blunders and the insensibility of the industrial age.

### ***3.3.3. Poverty that Admires and Venerates the Sacredness of Things***

Through evangelical poverty we disclaim a destructive relationship of possession about things. The Evangelical poor nears a reality devoid of any desire to possess; he/she does not intend to own things, but place himself/herself next to them to establish a relationship of mutual belonging. His prophetic attitude returns spontaneity to creation. It certainly exaggerates his attitude; but it does so to counteract the morbid and somewhat diabolical style of possession that sin has established. The Evangelical poor feels the 'sacredness' of things; he admires and celebrates it.

The poor man of Assisi created ties of fraternity with admirable things: Sister water, sister mother Earth, brother Sun, sister Moon... The Evangelical poor feels the ethical rebellion that produces the impoverishment of his brothers, when he discovers that nature is being plundered and impoverished.

The consecrated person who lives his poverty in ecological dimension learns, with the community of the living, to respect nature, interact with creatures not as 'things,' but as 'mysteries.'<sup>60</sup> He leaves possessive and ambitious attitudes, to enter into the great communion and cosmic harmony that risen Jesus established and feels in his heart a wound that won't heal, when he contemplates the waste and despoliation of nature that involves the frantic consumerism of our society:

Everywhere and throughout the world, there are individuals who suffer and look at us with supplicant eyes, asking us for help. If we dare to look through those eyes, we will feel their suffering in our hearts. Increasingly more people have seen this appeal and have felt it: there is an awakening of understanding and compassion, which makes us want to help animals, suffering from increasingly scarce territories. This includes also starving, sick and desperate human beings; people who are starving to death, while some lucky ones have much more of what they need. If we help them together, one by one, from suffering animals to desperate humans, we can alleviate much of the hunger, fear and pain that exist in the world..., replacing fear and hatred with compassion and affection and love to all living beings.<sup>61</sup>

Frugality and austerity (even exaggerated) of religious life, become a sign of communion with nature and a gesture of harmony. They also make it possible to listen to the eco-narration of the Earth. It seems like the Earth speaks to us, warns us, reassures us and worries us. They are the words that the laws of our planet convey to us, which sometimes are very clear and other times are indecipherable. Nature speaks to us in many ways. Every place on Earth contains printed in their geological and geographical backgrounds countless stories. It is obvious that objects, landscapes do not possess our linguistic codes to communicate; but at the moment, they become part of our experience; they arouse attention. For this reason, nature inspires and helps us transcend. There is no sacred history that does not have to do with nature. From here originates the importance of worrying, not only about the animal world, but also about forest and plant species at the risk of extinction. Poverty, in ecological terms, makes us narrative environmentalists, eco-narrators. And when the Earth becomes mysterious, the eco-narrator becomes poet, philosopher or theologian and, above all, mystic. Franco Arminio said: "The trees flower, because they cannot speak."<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, the option for the poor, when it is lucid, brings a fighting spirit to defend nature and its resources. Since it is the house of all, it should be the home of all, and not to be drained out and left barren for the coming generations.

## CONCLUSION

We, religious women and men, are people who, like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mary and Paul, live in a mysterious relationship with God. We belong to an anti-idolatric community. The idolatry often tempts humans of our time with the lure of power, money, sex. We do not demonize the good use of power, money and sex; they have a luminous side, as vehicles and instruments of care, love, solidarity and defence of the weakest and poorest. But, at the same time, we do not idolize them; they have a dark side. When they become idols, they are sources of violence, poverty

and discrimination. Our covenant with our God, the Creator, is at the same time a covenant with Humanity and Creation. We are welcoming the 'ecozoic' era. It asks from us the responsibility for the future of our planet and of humanity, a positive and intelligent interaction. And we try to configure our life in accordance with our responsibility.

We know that we are different and we try to make a *difference* through our alternative and prophetic way of life. From this difference we pass to a state of *interiorisation*; inside of us and of the whole reality, we find and touch the Mystery. This Mystery sends us to a mission of universal and holistic *communion*. We recognize that our Covenant with God implies also a loving and caring relationship with this planet. The three principles of reality (differentiation, interiorisation and communion) configure our covenant and our engagement with it in its four dimensions: mystical, political-missionary, communitarian and ecological.

Consecrated life has a special charm, a 'magic'. To experience the magic, it is necessary to contemplate reality from the whole, and not in parts. Only when we experience the God of biodiversity, who has put his image and likeness in a humanity, so contrasting and complex, this charm can be seen and experienced.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. [www.xtorey.es](http://www.xtorey.es)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and mission*, vol. 5: *The evangelical counsels: the vows*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City (Philippines), 2004; Id., *The 'enchantment' of Consecrated Life: One covenant – three evangelical Counsels*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore (India), 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Eon – a unit of time, spanning hundreds of millions of years; the Phanerozoic era – a unit of time, spanning dozens of millions of years.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873), a founder of modern geology, teacher of Charles Darwin, and professor at Cambridge University, coined the term *Paleozoic* era (Greek for 'ancient life') in 1838.

<sup>5</sup> In 1840, inspired by Sedgwick, John Phillips (1800–1874), a savant and professor of geology at Kings College London and Oxford University, coined the terms Mesozoic era (Greek for 'middle life') and Cenozoic era (Greek for 'recent life').

<sup>6</sup> The *Cenozoic* era is from the end of the Cretaceous Period and the extinction of non-avian dinosaurs to the present. *The Cenozoic* era (65.5 million years ago to the present) is divided into *three periods*: 1) the *Paleogene* (65.5 to 23.03 million years ago), which is subdivided into three epochs: a) the Paleocene (65.5 to 55.8 million years ago), b) the Eocene (55.8 to 33.9 million years ago), and c) the Oligocene (33.9 to 23.03 million years ago); 2) *Neogene* (23.03 to 2.6 million years ago), which is subdivided into two epochs: a) the Miocene (23.03 to 5.332 million years ago) and b) Pliocene (5.332 to 2.588 million years ago); and 3) the *Quaternary* (2.6 million years ago to the present).

<sup>7</sup> It was coined by Thomas Berry in conversation with Brian Swimme for their book *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, Harper One, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> The Cenozoic period – a unit of time spanning millions of years; for example, the Jurassic (named in 1795); now, with standardization of nomenclature, indicated by the suffix –geneepoch – a unit of time spanning many thousands of years; for example, the Pleistocene; now, with standardization of nomenclature, indicated by the suffix –cene age – a smaller unit of time spanning thousands of years; for example, the BorealTime units of the same title need not span the same number of years. For example, the Paleozoic era was about 291 million years in duration, while the Mesozoic spanned about 180 million years, and the Cenozoic about 65 million years.

<sup>9</sup> According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, *hominisation* means ‘the evolutionary development of human characteristics that differentiate *hominids* from their primate ancestors.’

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> Though in English a focal component of repentance is the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, the emphasis in  $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$  and  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$  seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behaviour, with respect to how one should both think and act. Whether the focus is upon attitude or behaviour varies somewhat in different contexts. Compare, for example, Lk 3:8, Heb 6:1, and Acts 26:20.

<sup>12</sup>  $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$ ,  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$ ,  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$   $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\sigma$ .

<sup>13</sup> That is what I have tried in my book, *One Covenant, three Evangelical Counsels*, recently published in India by the Claretian Publications.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. William J. Dumbrell, *The Covenant with Noah*, in ‘Reformed Theological Review’ 38 (1979), pp. 1-9.

<sup>15</sup> The nearly 300 texts of the Old Testament, which uses the word ‘Covenant’, are reduced to 33 in the New Testament. This drastic reduction of quotations can be explained: ‘Covenant’ has been replaced by the ‘Kingdom of God’, as it can be seen in Lk 22:29. The formula ‘to have a Kingdom’ is equivalent to ‘having a ‘partnership’. New Covenant and Kingdom of God are correlative concepts. J. Guhrt, *Alianza*, in L. Coenen et al., ‘Diccionario Terminológico del Nuevo Testamento’, vol. I, Salamanca 1980, 84; cf. also P. Beauchamp, *Propositions sur l’alliance de l’AT comme structure centrale*, in ‘Revue de Sciences Religieuses’. 58 (1976), pp. 161-194; A. Bonora, *Alianza*, in ‘Nuevo Diccionario de Teología Bíblica’, Madrid 1990, 44-60; U. Luz, *El evangelio según san Mateo. Mt 26-28* (Vol IV), Sígueme, Salamanca 2005, pp.152-185; C.W. Christian, *Covenant and Commandment: A study of the Commandment in the Context of Grace*, Maso, Georgia, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> In Hebrew,  $\text{הָאָדָם}$  (*ha’adam*), meaning ‘the man’.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Alonso Schökel, *Motivos sapienciales y de alianza en Gen 2-3*, in ‘Biblica’ (1962), pp. 295-316; B. Ognibeni, *Il racconto biblico del primo uomo e della prima donna. Sugerimenti interpretativi*, in ‘Anthropotes’ 22 (2006), pp. 361-382;

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Amy L.B. Peeler, *Desiring God: the Blood of the Covenant in Exodus 24*, in ‘Bulletin for Biblical Research’ 23 (2013), pp. 187-205: la sangre consagra al pueblo y lo acerca a Dios.

<sup>19</sup> I am Yahweh your God... You are my people... “My people will therefore know my name; that day they will understand that it is I who says: I am here” (Isa 52:6; 51, 15:16). “Yahweh takes delight in

you and your land will have its wedding. As the bridegroom rejoices in his bride so will your God rejoice in you" (Isa 62:4-5).

<sup>20</sup> "See, the days are coming – it is Yahweh who speaks – when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their Gods and they shall be my people" (Jer 31, 31-33).

<sup>21</sup> "Then I am going to take you from among the nations and gather you together from all the foreign countries, and bring you home to your own land. I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances... You shall be my people and I will be your God" (Ezek 36:24-28).

<sup>22</sup> The Prophet Hosea spoke of this Covenant in these terms: "That is why I am going to lure her and lead her into the wilderness and speak to her heart... and she will respond to me as she did when she was young, as she did when she came out of the land of Egypt. When that day comes she will call me 'My husband', no longer will she call me 'My Baal'... When that day comes I will make a treaty on herself... I will betroth you to myself for ever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness, and you will come to know Yahweh" (Hos 2:16-22)

<sup>23</sup> The offer had all Israel as the recipients; also the tax collectors, prostitutes, the sick, children and the poor and all those who bear the unbearable 'yoke' of slavery (Mk 2:15; 10, 15-16). The offer was also extended to the other peoples: "And I tell you that many will come from the east and the west to take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8:11).

<sup>24</sup> "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." (Mk 1:15). Cf. for the whole paragraph: Peter Hünemann, *Cristologia*, Herder, Barcelona, 2009, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jeffrey Fisher, *The Covenant-Idea as the heart of Hebrews and Biblical Theology*, in 'Calvin Theological Journal' 48 (2013), pp. 270-289; Andrew E. Steinman, *What did David understand about the Promises in the Davidic Covenant?*, in 'Bibliotheca sacra' 171 (2014), pp. 19-29; George R. Law, *The form of the New Covenant in Matthew*, in 'American Theological Inquiry' 15 (2012), pp. 1-32. This author concludes that over the millennia the shape of the old covenants was gradually changing. Jesus chose the three basic elements of the Covenant and two other elements that express the nature of the new Covenant. Jesus changed the foreword presenting the believers the future of the Kingdom; utilized announcements (warnings) instead of curses to instruct his people about the dangers of ignoring his mandates. At the conclusion of the new Covenant Jesus urges his people to be wise so that they choose between obedience and disobedience, between serving God and pleasing themselves. The first discourse of Jesus on the Mount of Galilee (Matthew's Gospel) can be recognized as the expression of the new partnership; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: a Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, Crossway, Wheaton (2012), pp 848.; William D. Barrick, *New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants*, in 'The Master's Seminary Journal' 18 (2007), pp.165-180; It defines the New Covenant as 'the link between God and the human being, established through the blood (sacrificial death) of Christ, under which the Church of Jesus Christ has begun to exist'; Timothy M. Willis, *I will remember their sins no more' Jeremiah 31, the New Covenant and the Forgiveness of sins*, in 'Restoration Quarterly' 53 (2011) pp. 1-15

<sup>26</sup> Jesus makes the rich to see that the Covenant and the great commandment are fulfilled and observed when the following is undertaken. Follow Jesus to live fully the Covenant. Jesus teaches that to love your neighbour is as important as to love God; both loves are a unique love; and neighbour is every human being that needs help, as can be seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29ff). And that was his main command to his disciples: “Love each other as I have loved you.” No one has loved God like Jesus; no one loved his neighbour as Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> “The divine God cares about men, not in any way, but in an infinite and divine way. God reveals himself as the one who leans toward man with all the love; God has invested his own being (sameness) in that inclination”: Peter Hünemann, *Cristologia*, Herder, Barcelona, 2009, p. 91.

<sup>28</sup> The exhortation speaks of the ‘Covenant’ only in two texts: VC 93 and 70: in the latter, it is said that in the moments of difficulty the consecrated person must rediscover ‘the meaning of the Covenant which God has been the first to establish and which will not fail to accomplish’.

<sup>29</sup> That has been the focal point of my theological vision about Religious Life; it is reflected in my work: José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and Mission*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> The Covenant was not (for Israel) an ‘idea’, even a ‘main idea’ collecting all aspects of thinking, but a vivid reality (enacted reality). Israel lived constantly in relation with God and felt God in all aspects of life. That is the reality of the Covenant! For this reason, he uses this metaphor to explain its central importance: cf. Baltzer, K. *Das Bundesformular*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Cómplices del Espíritu. El nuevo paradigma de la Misión*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> The author of Psalm 16 calls these gods as *Baalim*. Baal was considered ‘powerful’ by the people, because they vainly believed that he ensured fertility, and life – both claims are refuted by Prophet Hosea.

<sup>33</sup> “The patristic tradition has taken the religious monasticism of Elijah as a model of the bold Prophet and friend of God. He lived in his presence and silently contemplated his passage, interceded for the people and courageously proclaimed his will, defended the rights of God and stood in defence of the poor against the powerful of the world (cf. 1 Kings 18-19). In the history of the Church, along with other Christians, there have been men and women consecrated to God who, by a singular gift of the Spirit, have exercised a real Prophetic Ministry, speaking to everyone in the name of God, even to the Pastors of the Church. True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with Him, from attentive listening to His word in the different circumstances of history. The Prophet felt the passion for the holiness of God burning in his heart and after having accepted the word in the dialogue of prayer, he proclaims it with his life, with his lips and with the facts, becoming the spokesperson of God against evil and sin’ (VC, 84). Cf. CICLSAL, *Scrutate: ai consecrati e alle consecrate in cammino sui segni di Dio*, n.6 (English translation, *Wake up!*, n. 6).

<sup>34</sup> “Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te”: St. Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, PL 32, 661.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Leonardo Boff, *La crisis como oportunidad de crecimiento. Vida según el Espíritu*, Sal Terrae, 2002, pp. 73-86.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Irene Comins Mingol, *Filosofía del cuidar: una propuesta coeducativa para la paz*, Icaria, 2009; Leonardo Boff, *El cuidado esencial. Ética de lo humano, compasión por la tierra*, Editorial Trotta,



Madrid, 2002; Virginia H. Child, *To believe is to care, to care is to do*, in 'Prism' (2011), pp. 84-98; Given Crawley, *A covenant theology of caring: we are called to care because God cares for us*, in 'Church and society' (2002), pp. 26-28; Lew Daly, *God's Economy: faith-based initiatives and the caring state*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009; Charles P., Arand, *Caring for God's groaning earth*, in 'Concordia Journal' 36 (2010), pp. 220-233; David J. Feddes, *Caring for God's household: a leadership paradigm among New Testament Christians and its relevance for church and mission today*, in 'Calvin Theological Journal' 43 (2008), pp. 274-299.

<sup>37</sup> M. Pagano (ed.), *Lo spirito. Percorsi nella filosofia e nelle culture*, Mimesis, Milano, 2011, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. René Coste, *Dieu et l'écologie. Environnement, théologie, spiritualité*, Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Duccio Demetrio, *La religiosità della terra. Una fede civile per la cura del mondo*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2013, p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Lynn White, *Historical Roots of our ecological crisis*, in 'Sciences' 15 (1967), pp. 1203-1207.

<sup>41</sup> Th. Berry, *Riverside Papers*, quoted by Ortolani, *Ecological Personality*, Puebla 1986, p. 79.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gaston Richard, *L'idée de l'évolution dans la nature et dans l'histoire*, Reprint, University of Michigan, 1903.

<sup>43</sup> E. Morin, *Il pensiero ecologico*, Hopeful Monster, Firenze 1988, pp. 134-135.

<sup>44</sup> A. S. Álvarez, *Respuesta ética al desafío ecológico*, in 'Naturaleza y Gracia' 37 (1990), p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> R. Dubos, *Wooing the Earth*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1980.

<sup>46</sup> F. Arminio, *Geografia commosa dell'Italia interna*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2013, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> W. Berry, *The gift of good land*, North Point Press, San Francisco, p. 281.

<sup>48</sup> R. et J.P. Cartier, *Pierre Rabhi. Le chant de la Terre*, éditions de la Table Ronde, Paris, 2012, pp. 66-67.

<sup>49</sup> All humans who live in any latitude or longitude of the planet currently belong to a single species, Homo-Sapiens. It was only 25.0000 years ago that Europe had two species of Homo: Homo-Neanderthalensis and Homo-Sapiens: cf. Eudald Carbonell, *El sexo social*, Group Cultura, Badalona, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. J.P. Sartre, *L'êtré et le néant*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. O. Clément, *Sobre el hombre*, ed. Encuentro, Madrid 1983, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*, *o. c.*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. C. R. García Paredes, *Ecologia e Vita Consacrata*, in *Dizionario Teologica della Vita Consacrata*, ed. Ancora, Milano 1994, pp. 665-666.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Jane Goodall & Marc Bekoff, *Los diez mandamientos para compartir el planeta con los animales que amamos*, Paidós, Barcelona 2003, pp. 127-136; cf. Duccio Demetrio, *La religiosità della terra. Una fede civile per la cura del mondo*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2013, pp.173-193, 220-230.

<sup>55</sup> Quotation by Duccio Demetrio, *o.c.*, p. 220.

<sup>56</sup> Environmental awareness grows in the humanity in a surprising way. We can get a glimpse in the following works written recently: cf. Jane Goodall & Marc Bekoff, *Los diez mandamientos*:

*para compartir el planeta con los animales que amamos*, Paidós Contextos, Barcelona, 2013; Duccio Demetrio, *La religiosità della terra. Una fede civile per la cura del mondo*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2013; C. Petrini, *Terra madre. Come non farci mangiare dal cibo*, Giunti, Firenze, 2009; A. Masullo, *Il pianeta di tutti. Vivere nei limiti perché la terra abbia un futuro*, EMI, Bologna 1998; Id., *Dal mito della crescita al nnuovo umanesimo. Verso un nuovo modelo di sviluppo sostenibile*, Delta, 3, Grottaminarda, 2004; M. Andreozzi (ed), *Etiche e ambiente*, Led, Milano, 2012; Leonardo Boff, *El cuidado esencial. Ética de lo humano, compasión por la tierra*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio Gala, *De Pobreza, desarrollo y medio ambiente*, col. Intermón 1, Deriva, Barcelona 1992; p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> J. Menacho, *El reto de la tierra. Ecología y justicia en el siglo XXI*, Cuadernos Cristianismo y Justicia, Barcelona, 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Salvador Navarro Zamorana, *La realidad oculta*, in 'Alcorac' 15 (2009): cf: <http://www.revistaalcorac.es/tsfc2008/JULIO2009.htm>

<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to mention the Ten Commandments to share the planet with the animals we love: 1) Celebrate that we are part of the animal Kingdom; (2) Respect all forms of life; (3) Have the open-mindedness towards animals and learn from them with humility. (4) Teach others to respect and to love nature; (5) Manage wisely the life on Earth; (6) Value and help to preserve the sounds of nature; (7) Avoid damage to any form of life to learn from it; (8) Keep with courage our convictions; (9) Praise and help those who work on behalf of animals and nature; (10) Act knowing that we are not alone and live with hope: Jane Goodall & Marc Bekoff, *Los diez mandamientos: para compartir el planeta con los animales que amamos*, Paidós Contextos,, Barcelona, 2013, pp. 13-196.

<sup>61</sup> Jane Goodall & Marc Bekoff, *o.c.*, p. 183.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Duccio Demetrio, *La religiosità della terra. Una ede civile per la cura del mondo*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2013, pp. 197-215.

## A SOUND ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

Frankly and quite humbly, we, as Christians and more so as religious men and women, must admit we have not been aware of the close relationship between ecology and spirituality. Though this awareness is quite biblical and quite ancient in the Christian tradition, and even in the monastic traditions, over the years, we were taught of a world denying spirituality. This world was considered to be a place of temptations. Transcending earthly preoccupations (temptations) was the primary means to attain spiritual growth; this was to be done through prayer and penance, and was normally considered to be either impossible or inappropriate for lay people.

Such an approach to spiritual life has enjoyed such unquestioned hegemony over several millennia. It was so embedded in Christian consciousness that it is so difficult to critique it. O'Murchu writes:

Christianity has long emphasized that humans are not meant to be too attached to the material world, and to the organic web of life. Frequently, it is portrayed as a vale of tears, the realm of sin and temptation, a human abode in which we are not meant to feel at home, a base from which we are meant to escape to true happiness and fulfillment in another world. Elements of this otherworld escapist spirituality can be detected in most of the major religions known to humanity today.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer, Chris Clarke describes this contextual background as “the shadow side of the triumphant rationality of the West, a rationality which has cut itself off from mystical knowing.”<sup>2</sup> Consequently, we were simply stripped out from this awareness of the inter-woven web of life; the awareness of our “common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone” (LS, 202).<sup>3</sup> In a sermon on *Laudato Si*, a friend-priest shared that during his long years of hearing

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confession, no one ever confessed to him of a sin against creation. It is simply that we were never taught that there could be something like the sin against creation.

Paradoxically, while we as religious were taught of a world-denying spirituality, the modern sciences (human and technological sciences) exalted the power of the human creativity, paving the way for an aggressive engagement with the world. Secularization, along with its disassociation of religion from public life accelerated this process. It looked as though we, the religious, left the world and gave it to the rest of humanity to plunder it. Humans, thus, began imposing their own projects and desires heedlessly and mindlessly on subhuman forms of existence in the name of development. The assumption is that the earth is there simply for our use and manipulation; the meaning of “rule over” was understood literally as dominance over nature.

## **1. NEED OF AN ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY**

Since Vatican Council II, there have been attempts to rectify such a vision of spirituality. Many lay people, movements, including some leaders in the secular governments have been talking about the need to reclaim the sacredness of nature itself, and live in convivial rapport with the natural world. But we often neglected them as pagan voices. In recent times, there has also been a new ascendancy of God as Holy Spirit, the Prime Mover who brings surprise, creativity, and unpredictability in its operations in every generation. The Spirit broods where the Spirit wills. Thus comes Pope Francis to raise this awareness, officially from the leadership of the Church and that is the reason why we are here discussing this topic; we must thank him for it, and above all, the Holy Spirit.

Spirituality, first and foremost, is all about the way we look at the reality of ourselves and everything around us. It provides the ultimate perspective that radically color the way we look at and relate to reality. Authentic spirituality is the one that gives rise to a coherent vision of everything around us (God, world, others and ourselves) and, consequently a sound ecological awareness and education. There are emerging trends in spirituality within and beyond the parameters of formal religion; some of these trends seem to break away from formal religion.<sup>4</sup> This is because religion tends to be defined in terms of creed, ritual and moral code that are often unilaterally imposed. Among these diverse and complex trends unfolding, we see an emphasis on a more authentic quality of relating among diverse peoples, cultures and aspects of the created universe. Authentic spirituality is not averse to doctrines and rituals, but seeks to keep them more open, flexible and responsive to immediate needs, and adopts relational networking. Such a spirituality will expand the notion

of the sacred far beyond formal religion. It abhors the dualistic splitting between the sacred v. the secular, earth v. heaven, body v. soul, and matter v. spirit.

We need to promote such a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, our relationship with nature and of a future to be shared by this mutual belonging. It is time to rediscover the inter-relationality with everything around us. It is time to recover what has been lost; the awareness that, in the words of Pope Francis, “life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us” (LS, 216). It calls for a new vision of spirituality to see that “disobedience, possessiveness, and disrespect are forces of isolation, fragmentation and closure.”<sup>5</sup> This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.

## **2. FEATURES OF SUCH A HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY**

This emerging Spirituality is an evolutionary development of our time with great potentials for the future. How do we discern this complex unfolding, while noticing deviations that may be dangerous and destructive, and, at the same time, identifying positive features that will enhance our lives culturally and spiritually?

In this emerging spirituality, the ecological dimension is a central feature and often exhibiting strong ethical values, while underrating individual morality. Care for the environment, strong awareness of environmental threat (on several fronts), and collaboration through networking to address urgent issues, belong integrally to the emerging spirituality. There is a longing to embrace the whole person (and not just the soul); so also the embodied dignity of all other organic creatures in the universe. The ecological awareness leads some to embrace larger cosmological and scientific horizons as articulated through the seminal works of different authors, leading to a more creation-centered spirituality.<sup>6</sup> Following could be some of the evolutionary significant features that will require our skilled discernment as we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **2.1. The Primacy of the Cosmic Epiphany of God and our Cosmic Belonging**

As per the Scriptures, we know that the whole universe came out of the creative power of God’s word. God spoke and things came into being. Pope Francis tells that God “speaks to us and grant glimpses of God’s infinite beauty and goodness . . . through the greatness and beauty of creatures” (LS, 12). Besides, as we see in Gen 1:1-25, in the order of creation, the universe and the earth came first and human

beings later. This means that world existed before humans came to be. In fact, we were created out of the womb of the earth (Gen 2:4-8). As Pope Francis reminds us: “The earth was here before us and it has been given to us” as the primary place of God’s manifestation” (LS, 67). Hence there is something bigger, deeper and more complex driving the entire global, cosmic enterprise. Adrian Van Kaam calls it the *Cosmic Epiphany* of God, which points to the “atomic and sub-atomic cosmic dance of the ongoing formation and reformation occurring at every moment in the universe.”<sup>7</sup> Studies in Theoretical physics have revealed that cosmos is an all-embracing energy process of continuous inter-formation which is true not only of macro-but also of the micro cosmos.<sup>8</sup> Hence before we are or begin to act, we are immersed pre-consciously or unconsciously and carried along by a process of multiple connectedness, engaged intensity and mysterious interactions happening faster than the speed of light.<sup>9</sup>

Hence we need to realize that “we can neither escape the continuous cosmic epiphany unfolding in life and world nor authentically speak about human formation without constantly referring, at least implicitly, to the cosmic interformation process. We are inserted in it from conception to death”<sup>10</sup> The mystery of this cosmic interformation thus appears as a dynamic web of inseparable formation energies, outside of which no psychophysical or physical form can survive. Hence all forms that emerge in the cosmos can only be understood in terms of their surrounding field of formation. The cosmic epiphany of God is thus a dynamic, indivisible whole, which in some way always includes our own life-in-formation. All our forming actions take place in time by the interweaving of form energies at play in the formation fields within which we happen to move. We must simply accept our primordial cosmic belonging; that we are made out of the “dust of the earth.”

This new world view should re-define several aspects of our self-understanding, while also providing us with a challenge to engage differently with every aspect of the created universe.

## **2.2. Awareness of God Working through Creation**

First of all, God works primarily through this creation and not merely through humans. “Creation in its entire cosmic and planetary dimensions needs to be reclaimed as the primary manifestation (revelation) of what God is and how God works among us.”<sup>11</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas once wrote: “If we don’t understand creation correctly, we can’t hope to understand God correctly.” In recent times Teilhar de Chardin speaks about the revelatory presence of the God in creation:

All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have

only had to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. But it is not only close to us, in front of us that the divine presence has revealed itself. It has sprung up so universally, and we find ourselves so surrounded and transfixed by it that there is no room left to fall down and adore it, even within ourselves. By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined as distant and inaccessible, where as in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. *In eo vivimus*. As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, this world, this palpable world to which we brought the boredom and callousness reserved for profane places, is in truth a holy place and we did not know it.<sup>12</sup>

Thomas Merton speaks about the Eternal Word that has taken flesh and born among us and of its implications for monastic spirituality: “If our life is a search for Jesus, the Word made flesh, we must realize that we are not to act like the pagan mystics, who repudiate the visible world as pure illusion, and who seek to black out all contact with sensible and material things. On the contrary, we must begin by learning how to see and respect the visible creation which mirrors the glory and perfections of the invisible God.”<sup>13</sup>

### **2.3. Acceptance of a Fundamental Giftedness of Life and World**

This world has been a gift to humanity; it has been given to us and we have always and continue to be within its ambience. “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (Dt 10:14). There has to be recognition of the fundamental giftedness of life: the air that we breath, the water that we drink, the earth that we walk upon, the food that we eat, along with the birds that sing, the trees that give shade, the plants that bring forth fruits, the flowers that blossom etc. Whatever is gifted is always a gift and we have no absolute ownership on it. We are called to take care of it, mend it, protect it and defend it. We are therefore, called to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). Precisely because of this reason, “dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28) is not to be seen as absolute ownership or unbridled exploitation. Pope Francis comments: “We must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute dominion over other creatures. . . ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing, or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human being and nature” (LS, 67).

We are invited to “expand our sense of organicity, viewing the entire creation as essentially alive, with a dynamism that determines the life quality of every other

creature, ourselves included. O'Murchu writes: "Aliveness belongs first and foremost to the universe, mediated to us through the Earth, with its range of chemical and physiological process that makes human life possible."<sup>14</sup> We are so much a part of it that we cannot take a stand outside it. That is why Pope Francis cautions us: "If we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (LS 11).

#### **2.4. Respect for the Mysteriousness of Life and World**

We must accept that the marvel of universal formation of cosmos, history and humanity is a mystery that we cannot solve. No one can claim to have mastered all the secrets of the ongoing formation of the universe, of humanity, history, and individual existence. Van Kaam describes it:

We know that we are unable to penetrate the ultimate why, how, and when of the cosmic processes that we share and that still surpass us, for we can never dominate all of them in every detail; neither can we fully penetrate the secret of their hidden consonance, of the ultimate meaning and purpose of our role in them. No matter how far we disclose their meaning and dynamics, there remains a residue of an enigma we cannot unravel.<sup>15</sup>

#### **2.5. Awareness of Inter-relatedness**

We have seen that the scriptures of all religions speak about the inter-relatedness of everything that exists and hence the desire for greater harmony, interconnection and affiliation with all other life-forms; a more integrated cosmic and planetary interdependence believed to have been the experience of humans for many thousands of years. Nothing makes sense in isolation. Life, therefore, is not merely a biological outcome, embodied primarily in human beings. It is a process; humans are events rather than objects. Everything in creation grows, changes and develops. Our superior sense of domination and control is, therefore, a misguided arrogance that we need to leave behind. It is true that we are not like stones in a wall or brooms in a closet; we can always take a stand in relation to our cosmic insertion and give form to it but our primordial belonging to the womb of creation is an inescapable dimension that in turn also shapes and forms us. Our uniqueness, therefore, is to be seen not in our isolation or in our superior status, but in the "identity that begins to emerge from our sense of belonging and the inter-relatedness that arises from that cosmic affiliation."<sup>16</sup>



Awareness of this inter-relatedness expresses also a “yearning for an ecological integration essential to a reversal of the extensive destruction humans have caused to the natural world, and essential if we are to evolve a culture based on justice, non-violence, ethical care, and adult responsibility for the womb of our becoming.”<sup>17</sup> For contemporary human being, it is a formidable challenge as we have been indoctrinated into a being the superior species with a mandate to control the dead matter of the physical universe. “For long we have objectified and commodified the creation to which we intimately belong, and without which our lives neither purpose nor meaning. We face a process of change and conversion far more demanding than religious belief ever required.”<sup>18</sup>

## **2.6. Hearts filled with Gratitude and Humility**

The more we realize this giftedness, our hearts will naturally be filled with gratitude to everything that has been given to us, filling our hearts with a “spirit of generous care, full of tenderness” (LS 220); it is a disposition of “gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift and that we are called to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works” (LS, 220). It entails an awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of the creatures, but joined together in a “splendid universal communion” (LS, 220). We do not look at the world from without but from within and experience a relational universe, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings.

Along with the deep sense of gratitude, comes also a certain humility. Humility is a virtue that we no longer talk about, perhaps because it was wrongly understood and lived. The goal of this virtue is not become a doormat so that others can walk over you. The outcome of true humility is to gain the courage to walk in the truth of who we really are, along with our embodiment and cosmic belonging, to be respectful not only in relation to yourself and but also in relation to others and everything around you. Once we lose humility, we become enthralled with the possibility of our own superiority, arrogance independence, exclusion, limitless mastery and aggressive control over everything. We end up inevitably, harming others, society and environment. Once we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, we will begin thinking that our subjective feelings can define what is right and wrong.

## **2.7. Respectful Listening**

Hence a respectful listening, abiding and engagement with the world has to be the fundamental attitude of the humans towards the entire created reality. Each

creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us and the assurance that “Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light” (LS, 221). There is also the recognition that “God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore” (LS, 221). We must learn to look at creation and the intrinsic laws that govern it and free ourselves from a look, clouded with anxious pre-occupation with control and manipulation or just with profit and gain. Jesus said: “Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Lk 12: 27). He speaks of the birds of the air that “not one of them is forgotten before God” (Lk 12:6). We are called to nurture that “sublime fraternity with all creation” (LS, 221).

## **2.7. Prophetic and Contemplative Life style**

Before we begin to act upon creation, there has to be a contemplative abiding in it, to understand the inner laws that are written into it and the dynamisms that internally govern this complex universe. This calls for a “prophetic and contemplative life style” that is capable of deep enjoyment, free of the obsession with control, manipulation and consumption. There is an ancient lesson found in all religious traditions that joy lies in simplicity. Pope Francis writes:

A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment. . . It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures (LS, 222).

Detaching our minds and hearts from surface appearances, we enter into eternal stillness, the mysterious and silent source out of which everything emerge. All forms share this silent source.

A contemplative look will help us discover that “nature is filled with words of love. But how do we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wrecking distractions, or the cult of appearances.” We must take time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found uncovered” (LS. 225).

The fruit of a prophetic and contemplative life style is simplicity. How do we define simplicity? Van Kaam calls it, the “celebration of things in their simple givenness” or giftedness. During such moments things become present to us as “shrines of the sacred”<sup>19</sup> and we experience the “interformative harmony of things in nature.”<sup>20</sup> When lived freely and consciously, moments of simplicity can be liberating. We learn to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. We let go unsatisfied needs and reduce their obsesiveness and weariness. Living on little we can live a lot especially when we cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, service, in developing our gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature and in prayer. Happiness, according to Pope Francis, means “knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer” (LS, 223). Van Kaam writes:

Reasonable concern for the subjection of things and their prudent manipulation is commendable. We are stewards of this corner of the universe. It is part of humanity’s responsibility to give form to the world, to make cosmos out of chaos. Obsession with such subjection becomes deformative if it excludes other modes of presence, if for example, compulsive control leaves no room for simple presence to things in reverence and wonder. If we become too possessive and manipulative, things lose their fascination as epiphanies of the mystery.<sup>21</sup>

Self-centeredness and greed will only increase and we begin acting in ways oblivious to the demands of social justice, peace and mercy.

## **2.9. Ecologically Based Mysticism**

An expanded cosmic and planetary view can help us re-vision mysticism. Much of the popular christian literature on mysticism tends to describe it as a kind of absorption into God, above and beyond all sense of earthly connection.<sup>22</sup> Discovering the call to befriend God’s creation, one can find within its amorphous sense of mystery, tangible and sensible evidence for the God who not merely inhabits but reveals, recreates and co-creates within the evolutionary dynamic of creation that involves people, events and things. Such an ecologically based God experience can reawaken religious sentiment with a potential for re-connection far extensive and deeper than that is usually available within formal religion. This sense of awe of supreme sacredness tends to be articulated through mystical experiences, known to humans across all ages and cultures.

This new ecologically based spiritual consciousness is elaborately described by Douglas Christie:

The term *contemplative ecology* suggests . . . that there is a way of thinking about spiritual practice that has an ecological character, or a way of thinking about ecology that includes reflection on the moral or spiritual dimensions of experience. . . . The aim of contemplative living, in its wider application, is to address the fragmentation and alienation that haunts existence at the deepest possible level and, through sustained practice, come to realise a different, more integrated way of being in the world.<sup>23</sup>

## **2.10. Experience of the Call to Conversion, Personal and Communal**

If human being is indeed the “crown of creation,” it is to be seen not as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but as the capability of rising above and developing a different capacity to manage and care for with responsibility that stems from our faith. Ecological crisis, therefore, is also a moment for profound interior conversion, whereby, according to Pope Francis, “the effects of the encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS, 217). Healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion. This includes recognition of errors, sins, faults and failures, not only in relation to people but also in relation to the world around us, with all its realities and leads to a heartfelt repentance and desire for change.

However, personal conversion alone is not enough. Even when we realize that we need to change, in isolation, we can lose the ability and the freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset. We can become easily victims to unethical consumerisms, devoid of social or ecological awareness in the present world of “compulsive consumerism” (LS, 203). A compulsively consumeristic culture leads to us to believe that the most important freedom is the freedom to consume while it covers up the actions of the minority who in fact hold economic and financial power and push others to the margins. Social disparities and unrest are as dangerous as extreme weather especially when only a few people are able to participate in a consumeristic lifestyle. So we need a new vision of our place in the world that results in community conversion, offering us the possibility for global planning and strategies against, what Janet K. Ruffing calls, the “colonization by an unsustainable form of free market capitalism.”<sup>24</sup>

## **2.11. Discernment through Dialogue, Net-working and Communion**

This is where we need dialogue, networking and community discernment.<sup>25</sup> Discernment is not just about the influence of good or bad spirit on our desires

and behaviors. It is fundamentally about attending to the living Spirit, who is understood to function with a creative freedom that cannot be tied down by any set of institutional norms or procedures. We see in Gen 1:1 that the Spirit is at work at the dawn of creation, infusing pattern and meaning into the chaotically unfolding process.<sup>26</sup> This would suggest that the Spirit is operative and continues to be so in all creative unfolding thereafter. This living spirit, therefore, is manifesting herself in the wider contemporary culture by various movements, calling us to engage intelligence and imagination in more collaborative ways.<sup>27</sup> Such discernment embraces a more amorphous understanding on how wisdom is acquired, appropriated and utilized, with strong emphasis on dialogue and mutual collaboration.

Social and global problems, therefore, have to be addressed by community networks and not simply by individual good efforts. The work of respectful engagement with the world and creation calls for a “union of skills and a unity of achievement that can only grow from quite a different attitude.” (LS, 219). It is also a moment for community conversion. If consecrated men and women are called to be experts in communion, that very same expertise must be used to educate people for this kind of “community conversion.”

We need one another. It is good recognize our interdependence in order to tide over conflicting interests and to confront new forms of violence and brutality. Consumption leads to a world that mistreats life in all its forms (LS, 231). Hence, we also need a collective approach. According to Pope Francis, the love as expounded in the Gospels is not just between individuals; it is also civic, political and social. Love for society and commitment to common good are creative expressions of a charity that affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro relationships, social, economic and political ones.”<sup>28</sup> In order to make the society more human, more worthy of the human persons, love in social life, in all its levels (political, economic and cultural) must be given renewed focus and should be treated as the “constant and highest norm for activity.”<sup>29</sup> Collective interventions motivated by social love can initiate larger strategies to prevent environmental degradation and to foster a culture of care which too is part of spirituality and therefore matures and sanctifies us.

Though not everyone is called to engage the world politically, leaders of the Church and consecrated men and women must know how to motivate and collaborate with other organizations which work to promote the common good and defend the environment whether natural or urban. Pope Francis brings out a number of such initiatives as examples: concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square) and projects of actions

oriented to protect, restore, improve or beautify as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, new relationships and networks develop or are recovered; new social awareness and solidarity emerge; and the communities break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. In this way the quality of life of the poorest are cared for, with a sense of solidarity and make us aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions undertaken as common expressions of charity can also become intense spiritual experiences (LS, 232).

### 3. EDUCATION IN SPIRITUALITY

Required, therefore, is an education in such a vision of genuine spirituality which, first of all, will offer a critique of the ‘myths’ of modernity, grounded in utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated markets). Positively, it will educate people in “responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world and in concern for the needs of the poor and the excluded and the protection of the animals and other living creatures. It will also initiate environmental practices as a new form of asceticism. Pope lists a few of such ecological practices, such as avoiding the use of plastic, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can be reasonably consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car pooling, planting trees, turning of unnecessary lights etc. Such practices “benefit society . . . for they call forth a goodness which albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread” (LS, 212). We need educators capable of “developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (LS, 210). Conscious formation of habits that limit our self-centeredness and self-absorption are important. Adopting such habits will sensitize or consciences so that we will be able to “develop a different life style and bring about significant changes in society” (LS, 208).

Such an education should happen in many settings: in schools, colleges and universities, in families, in the media, in catechesis, political institutions, various social groups, seminaries, houses of formation. Francis also examines the relationship between a good aesthetic education and upkeep of a healthy environment. A pause for natural beauty and response to the creation is a natural form of contemplation which re-educates our hearts. ”By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-centered pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without any scruple” (LS, 215).

For an authentic spirituality needed for our times, we will have to recover what was lost, namely, the ecological dimension of our Christian spirituality. Pope Francis comes to us as one who was specially sent by the Holy Spirit to help us rediscover that wisdom central to authentic Christian spirituality. Discovery of this wisdom alone will not help; we have a long way to go in assimilating, educating and translating it into viable practical goals, contributing to the transformation of humanity and our common home.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change: Wisdom for Confusing times* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2012), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Clarke, ed., *Ways of Knowing: Science and Mysticism Today*, (Exeter UK: Imprint Academic, 2005), 234

<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical (24 May, 2015), 202. For easy reading, all references to this document will be placed in the main text as *LS*, followed by the number.

<sup>4</sup> Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving way to Spirituality*, (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley, 2005). Such an aspiration is seen in the words of the Dalai Lama (posted on Facebook, Sept. 10, 2012): “All the world’s major religions, with their emphasis on love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness can and do promote inner values. But the reality of the world today is that grounding ethics in religion is no longer adequate. That is why I am convinced that the time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics beyond religion altogether.”

<sup>5</sup> Such a holistic vision of a foundational formative spirituality is worked out by Adrian Van Kaam in his multivolume work in *Formative Spirituality, I-VIII* (New York: Crossroad, 1983-1995).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Berry *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006; Mathew Fox, *Original Blessing*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1983; Adrian Van Kaam, *Formative Spirituality, I-VIII* (New York: Crossroad, 1983-1995) and works in Quantum Physics are examples.

<sup>7</sup> Van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation, Vol.1, Formative Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 187.

<sup>8</sup> According to Van Kaam, there is an energy field within which forms emerge and disappear in constant energetic inter-formation with other merging and vanishing forms. God as this forming mystery manifests itself in this field as a mystery of “universal inter-formation between rising and falling forms. It gives rise to a subtle and complicated web of forming interactions between changing forms with a variety of life spans that appear briefly in cosmos, history and humanity.” (Van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation*, 187)

<sup>9</sup> O’Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> O’Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 31.

- <sup>12</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 89.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Merton, *Basic Principles of Monastic Spirituality* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1996), 30-31.
- <sup>14</sup> O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 81.
- <sup>15</sup> Van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation: Formative Spirituality*, 185.
- <sup>16</sup> O'Murchu, *God in the midst of Change*, 82
- <sup>17</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Random House, 2010), 73.
- <sup>18</sup> O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 82
- <sup>19</sup> Van Kaam, *Formation of the Human Heart; Vol III, Formative Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 39.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 41. He explains it as follows: "The rhythmical song of the seasons is revealed to us in changing leaves, in the ebb and flow of the tides, in the restoration of our health. Animals and plants, deep valleys, and distant stars point to a common source when we immerse ourselves in them simply and directly in carefree contemplation."
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 40.
- <sup>22</sup> Please see Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).
- <sup>23</sup> Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17, 36.
- <sup>24</sup> Janet K. Ruffing, "Reflections on the Spirituality in Laudato Si," *Vinayasadhana*, (Vol VII, No.1, January 2016), 26.
- <sup>25</sup> In the mainstream religion, *discernment of spirits* refers to the need to distinguish between the influence of a good or evil spirit upon a person's desires and behaviors. When used, specifically in the Christian faith, it refers, primarily to the care of souls as practiced in spiritual direction or retreat ministry. Rarely is the word used in a social, ecclesial context. Here we evidence dualistic splitting within Christian faith itself, with the spiritual dimension relegated to a more private, personal and secondary role.
- <sup>26</sup> In this new emerging spirituality, we need to admit the key role of the Holy Spirit as that Great Spirit working at the dawn of creation. Unfortunately, the history of theology seems to have had long held reservations about the diminished role of the Spirit, playing second-fiddle to Father and Son; the new spirituality wants to address this imbalance, seeking a much more exalted role for the Spirit. Besides, the notion of the Great Spirit in indigenous spirituality (all over the world) incorporates understandings that theology has neglected to consider, which, however, are gaining more significance in our time. See Diarmuid O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 176-183. Also Carter Phipps, *In the Beginning was the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).
- <sup>27</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action\\_research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_research).
- <sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 2.
- <sup>29</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 582.



## MODELS OF ECOLOGY FROM THE HEART OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

**Josy Fernandes, OFM (CAP)**

“I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that wherever you go, the least plant may bring you clear remembrance of the creator. A single plant, a blade of grass, or one speck of dust is sufficient to occupy all your intelligence in beholding the art with which it has been made,” said St. Basil (329 – 379). “From the creation, learn to admire the Lord! Indeed the magnitude and beauty of creation display a God who is the artificer of the universe. He has made the mode of creation to be our best teacher,” reflected St. John Chrysostom, (347 – 470). “Some people, to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?” wrote St. Augustine (354 – 430). “Believe the one who knows: You will find something greater in woods than in the books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters,” pondered St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153). “He who is not illuminated by such great splendor of created things, is blind; he who is not awakened by such great clamor is deaf; he who does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; he who does not note the first principle from such great signs is foolish. Open your eyes, therefore, prick your spiritual ears, open your lips and apply your heart that you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honor your God,” philosophized St. Bonaventure (1217 – 1274). “It helped me to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things, I found a remembrance of the creator. I mean that they awakened and recollected me and served as a book,” added St. Theresa of Avila (1515 – 1582). “God passes through the thicket of the world, and wherever His glance falls He turns all things to beauty,” so contemplated St. John of the Cross (1542 – 1591).<sup>1</sup>

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There is no saint who was not drawn to contemplate God's creation and none who was not inspired by it to a greater or lesser profundity. From creation to the Creator is a journey on which every one ought to set out from the moment of one's birth until the instant of one's return to the Creator. However not everyone has the sensitivity of a saint or the depth of a mystic. These miss the creation's way to make it to creator's abode.

Ours is an unmatched age wherein ecological concern is turning out to be the most critical issue for humanity and all living creatures on earth, the home which we share. The ecological movement and many years of study and research have doubtlessly demonstrated that it is not lack of scientific knowledge or technology that makes environmental problems so difficult to solve, rather human arrogance concerning his position in the global ecosystem. Quite a few genuine ecologists have felt the need of incorporating models for a healthy and harmonious relationship between nature and humanity, as well as amongst human beings. These models would contribute to the formation of a more advanced environmental ethics based on the reinterpretation of traditional texts with ecological insights. In what follows, an effort is made to present four renowned saints who lived at different times in the history of the Church as models of Ecology.

## **1. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1181-1226)**

Hundreds of years before the environmental movement, St. Francis of Assisi recognized God in creation and changed his life. He was a great lover of God's creation, much before the ecological crisis. He exemplifies many of the best attributes of what it means to be an environmentalist today though not an environmentalist himself in the modern sense of the word.

Behind Francis' personification of nature and his mystical experiences of nature, lie an intuitive sense of interconnectedness and interdependence. Religious personalities like Francis provide a sound moral attitude towards caring for the mother earth.

For a while, let us focus on the life-story of St Francis of Assisi, the universally acclaimed medieval model of the Christian world who easily went into ecstasy overwhelmed by the beauty of God's creation. He is specially remembered for his close relationship with nature and his dialogue with natural elements like water, fire, air, earth, plants and animals.

### **1.1. St. Francis of Assisi and Ecological Consciousness**

The life story of Francis is colorfully documented by two of his early biographers,

Thomas of Celano, and Bonaventure who commenced with it shortly after his death.<sup>2</sup>

### ***1.1.1. Glimpses at Early Life***

Francis was born in 1181 in the wealthy family of Pietro Bernardone, a well-to-do textile merchant in Assisi, a part of the Umbrian province in Italy. As a typical young and rich libertine from the bourgeois class, Francis lived a worldly life of gambling, banquets, singing and dancing, the life of a typical, carefree troubadour.<sup>3</sup> As an emblematic young man, Francis considered many options for a career but none really spoke to his heart. He often withdrew to the caves and forests, the beautiful natural surroundings of Assisi, to ponder on his life's direction. During these retreats, he became convinced that he should follow Christ, the Poor Man *par excellence*. His option for the lifestyle of the poor, pledging to marry 'Lady Poverty' was quickly set into action. The *Poverello* (the little poor man), as his admirers fondly called him, began to repair dilapidated churches around Assisi, seeking to discern his call. He even left the luxury of the city and his class, lived in a leprosarium, associating himself closely with the lepers. All this led his father to disown him in the presence of the bishop of Assisi, where Francis stripped himself naked covering himself with the penitential garb of the church and calling God as his Father henceforth.<sup>4</sup>

### ***1.1.2. Lover of Nature***

Francis' love for nature kept growing. He praised 'Brother Fire'. He was inspired by nature as God's book,<sup>5</sup> in which God communicated his beneficent power, love and care for everything. It became a sign or sacrament of God's providence. Francis found God everywhere, "whether human lepers or lowly worms."<sup>6</sup> He was not the first one to be bonded with nature but in becoming a nature mystic, he was new and innovative in that he found a 'brother' and 'sister' in God's creation bound with the same genetic code. A closer look at some demonstrations of Francis will reveal to us his cosmic kinship.

### ***1.1.3. Dialoguing with Nature***

Numerous tales manifest Francis' all-embracing love and empathy for all of creation, from God to soil and rocks and everything in between, small and great.<sup>7</sup> Francis not only cared for cultivated plants but also markedly wild ones. He insisted that his fellow friars leave a border around the community garden for wild grasses, flowers and herbs to sprout. In similar vein, he forbade the chopping down of a whole tree so that it could sprout again.<sup>8</sup> His esteeming of the intrinsic worth of

creation was taken a step further with his preaching to plants. It was shortly after his (second) 'conversion', when he preached his Sermon to the Birds (1213 AD) that he also started preaching to flowers, cornfields, vineyards etc. He then realized that this was his new calling rather than contemplative meditation and prayer as part of the eremitic lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> Nature, in turn, spoke to him of God with even the twigs in a hedge becoming a sacrament or sign of the cross to him, easily putting him into an alternative state of rapture where he met and was united with the Creator of all.

Celano tells of Francis picking up a worm on the pathway along which he was walking and putting it in the soft vegetation on the side, fearing that it would be crushed. This not only illustrates his sincere empathy for and bond with such low life forms as worms, but also confirms his attribution to them of intrinsic dignity, even 'rights', derived from the Divine. Francis believed that the incarnation sanctified all life and that God reveals himself even in these lowly creatures that shine with 'Divine radiance'.<sup>10</sup>

Bees impressed Francis with their diligence and foresight, and he would often speak of them for a day on end.<sup>11</sup> A similar marvelous story is told of the cicada (cricket) which Francis kept in his cell in Portiuncula.

Francis was one of the few saints who felt empathy for fish, as fish is *ipso facto* considered as food. It was near lake Rieti that fishermen caught a large **tench** which they gave to Francis.<sup>12</sup> As he was sitting in the boat, he felt the same empathy for it as for other living things, and addressed it as 'brother' and set it free.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***1.1.4. Nature Mystic***

Although Francis echoed many that went before him in his ecological consciousness, his nature mysticism made him unique: Francis' nature mysticism was his most untraditional positive reaction to creation. The story most famously told to prove that Francis was a nature mystic is about the waterfowl (probably a water-hen or duck) that he held in his hand and then went into ecstasy.

The story of the Temptation by Mice is quite an interesting one for a different reason. Francis fell sick in a cell near St Damian's and was constantly tormented by mice. Amazingly he endured this 'diabolical temptation' with cheerful patience and allowed them to keep on running over him instead of considering some kind of exorcism to drive them away.

Two other 'furred beasts' that Francis lovingly reached out to were the hare that was caught in a snare and the deer that crossed his path. Here again we get the idea of Francis being a wonder-worker, perhaps more than an animal lover.<sup>14</sup>

The taming of the Wolf of Gubbio eloquently refers to this animal as ‘a beast from the books, not from the woods.’ Francis reconciled the wolf of the wood with the wolves of the city. The story once again highlights the saint’s status of being equipped with a divinely derived power over nature.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.1.5. *Francis and Birdbath***

One of the popularly sculptured images of Francis of Assisi is that of the bearded little man standing on a birdbath. This figure is so universal that it can be found even in an Episcopalian’s backyard or a Buddhist prayer garden as at a Franciscan retreat center. To set Francis on a birdbath or in a flower garden or to depict him with birds circling his head is simply a popular way of saying, “This man had a special link with all God’s creatures, and it’s just like him to be standing there humbly among them.”

Francis was in awe of the swallow, the cricket and the wolf. “Where the modern cynic sees something ‘buglike’ in everything that exists,” observed the German writer-philosopher Max Scheller, “St. Francis saw even in a bug the sacredness of life.”<sup>16</sup>

In spite of his closeness to God through creation and his ascetic lifestyle of prayer and contemplation, Francis was still uncertain about the exact path of life he had to choose. Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare, his closest friends, helped him discern his call for evangelization. He immediately set out upon his new mission. Near Bevagna, he came across some birds of different kinds in a field which gathered around him, and there he preached his famous Sermon to them. This was *the* event in his life for which he is remembered. Ever since, this event has been commemorated by placing a statue of Francis in or next to a birdbath, showing him conversing with birds.<sup>17</sup> Francis addressed the birds as brothers or sisters<sup>18</sup> and exhorted them to praise and thank God for his loving care of providing them with feathers as clothes, wings to fly, homes and food. This event became the inspiring and decisive moment for Francis to henceforth literally apply the biblical command of preaching the gospel to all creatures (Mk 16:15).<sup>19</sup>

### **1.1.6. *Canticle of the Creatures***

The climax of Francis’ ecological consciousness finds expression in his composition of the Canticle of the Creatures in the year 1225, just one year before his death. The canticle also alludes to the peace he made with Sister Death which he was preparing himself to embrace. He was almost blind by then and probably suffered from tuberculosis. Many biblical passages like Genesis 1, Psalm 104, 148,

Daniel 3:57–88 and Job 38–39, to name but a few, are ‘echoed’ in the poem which starts and ends with praises to the most High God filling the lines between with praise and thanks for the Brother Sun for its light and splendor, Sister Moon and the stars for their beauty, Brother Wind that determines the weather and Sister Water which sustains life.<sup>20</sup> Brother Fire is praised for its heat at night, and Sister Mother Earth for producing and nurturing fruit, plants and herbs. Even forgiving humans are a part of his praises. The poem is not only inclusive of all of nature but, remarkably for its time, also gender inclusive as is clear from his way of addressing everyone as brother and sister. In the words of Warner, ‘the Canticle is remarkable for the way it points out a principle that ecologists have only recently begun to prove scientifically: all of life is interconnected.’ Francis’ respect for nature is characterized by an ‘I-thou’ relationship instead of an ‘I-it’ relationship.”<sup>21</sup> Setting aside the negative opinion of the critics, we can boldly affirm that Francis, being convinced of the fraternity of all, offered a spiritual description of the interdependence of an eco-system.<sup>22</sup> His open personification of everything is simply a logical outcome of his faith stance.

## 1.2. Wrap up

Francis’ overwhelming sense of the interconnectedness of all life is perhaps the outstanding characteristic that made him the indisputable patron saint of ecology. At the same time, it acknowledged him as a special (moral) figure in the conversation with science, as Pope John Paul II envisaged in 1979. Our task today is to retrieve the green values of this icon of Christianity of the past and translate them meaningfully and creatively for our contemporary culture while addressing the ecological crisis. Emotions precede actions, they trigger what we do,<sup>23</sup> and therefore the compassion and empathy that this icon of the past had for nature should become our own and inspire and energize our green acts.<sup>24</sup>

For Francis, every creature was sacred. The world in which he lived was not something evil to be rejected but a sacred ladder by which he could ascend to his Creator, as his biographer St. Bonaventure noted more than once. In the 21st century, St. Francis has come to symbolize two very contemporary struggles: the protection of nature and the opening up to other religions. On 29 November 1979, Pope John Paul II named Francis the patron saint “of those who promote ecology.”<sup>25</sup>

Francis is the patron of those who cultivate ecological consciousness, but that means a lot more than being the patron of environmental educators. His example really points to a mystical or a spiritual vision for the entire creative world as brother and sister, as he describes in his Canticle of the Creatures. Part of what we have to

recover - which has been so thoroughly lost in our modern understanding of the world - is a sense of enchantment at God's fascinating creation.

## **2. HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (1098–1179)**

Hildegard of Bingen, also known as Saint Hildegard and Sibyl of the Rhine, was a German Benedictine abbess. She lived most of her life in the valley of the Rhine close to where the River Main flows into it.<sup>26</sup>

Hildegard, the tenth child of a noble family was given into the care of anchoress Jutta of Spanheim. The strength of her character was fundamentally shaped by her early childhood spent in the company of this holy woman. When Jutta died in 1136, Hildegard was elected abbess of the women who had been a part of the small Benedictine convent. Hildegard's visions which began at the age of forty-two, caused her grievous suffering and, for a time, paralysis. In them she bore witness to the mysteries of creation, fall, redemption, the incarnation, and the power of sin to "dry up" what was full of life. Hildegard's most important work, *Scrivias* (Knowing the Ways of Light) was completed in 1151. She can be seen as an ecological prophet both in her cosmology and in her assertion that there is a profound and life giving power of lush greenness immanent in all creation, and that the destruction of that wet and wondrous life through sin leads to dryness and death at physical and moral levels. Hildegard's visions, her knowledge of the science of her day and her religious faith gave her the conviction of the interrelatedness of all created things. Her contributions are significant as they present an understanding of the universe as an organic living entity. She was a writer, composer, philosopher, Christian mystic, visionary. She is recognized by some, though unofficially, as the Patroness of Ecology. She is also regarded as the founder of scientific natural history in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

### **2.1. Creator and Co-creating**

The line of her thoughts considers God's active love in all of Creation; every creature has what it needs to be creatively fruitful. The Creator gifts, embraces, kisses and loves all of Creation. Humans share in the great privilege of co-creating and loving. God is the power that empowers all of Creation, not just to exist, but to be "green", fertile, to be creatively fruitful. We can delight in the "greening" of the earth, its beauty, radiance and fertility.

Hildegard reminds us of how important our interaction with nature is for the well-being of all the members of our one earth community. How can we gaze at dawn or sunset, moon or stars, fields or streams, mighty oceans or sparkling lakes,

babies or puppies without being drawn to a sense of wonder, of oneness, of mystery, of the divine, she asks.<sup>28</sup>

## **2.2. Ecofeminism**

The work of Hildegard, the mystic, makes a unique contribution to the Christian understanding of the eco-feminism in her times. She believed that the “divine is present in the greening of the earth” and that humanity and nature shared similarities in their relationship to the divine.<sup>29</sup> Celebrating the feminine fertility dimension in her poetries, she throbbed with love for the earth as she compared the great love of creator and creation to the love and fidelity with which God binds man and woman together.<sup>30</sup>

## **2.3. Hildegard and Cosmology**

In the 12th century, cosmology was the study of the whole of creation to ascertain its inherent order. Hildegard took cosmology to its ultimate extension. Her hermeneutics were anagogical and eschatological. Her spiritual interpretation included God, the Creator of all, the whole universe and all times. For Hildegard the beginning of time was from the story of creation of Adam and Eve ending with revelation. In her visions, Hildegard witnessed the creation of the universe with all its myriad of beings, planets and stars, angels and devils, plants, minerals, animals, and even the primordial elements. These visions were considered by her to be Divine Revelations imposed upon her humble personage. Hildegard learned that the human being stands at the centre of creation and is supported by all of creation. The human being contains all of creation. The individual is the microcosm of the total universe which is the macrocosm. Just as the ontogeny of a foetus recapitulates the phylogeny of the human race, Hildegard’s perfected man is born of the dust of the earth and becomes a shining stone in the heavenly New Jerusalem. For her, the universe is like an egg in the womb of God. Her view of the universe, obviously conditioned by her times and her education, represents her visionary understanding of God’s motherhood of this sphere that we call the universe. Here is a view that is organic and holistic, refreshing and strikingly “true” in its perceptions around the source of created life.<sup>31</sup>

## **2.4. *Viriditas* of God**

In her praise of the greening power, the *viriditas* of God, Hildegard writes: “In the beginning, all creatures were green and vital. They flourished amidst flowers.”<sup>32</sup> Perceptibly Hildegard’s unique vision and cosmology celebrated the Living Light of



God. Matthew Fox's book of Hildegard's illuminations depicts the very beautiful Rhineland landscapes that were the source of much of Hildegard's inspiration.<sup>33</sup>

Hildegard's theology and cosmology grew out of her visions and her appreciation of the living power of light inhabiting all created beings. This living power of life and light, she called, *viriditas*. It has no English equivalent that adequately expresses Hildegard's understanding. Hildegard created the term *viriditas*, or fecundity and it is an operating metaphor in her consciousness of God's role in the universe. *Viriditas* operates in the human body in its metabolism in particular with its sensitivity to the influences of constellations during particular times of the month and of the year.<sup>34</sup> Hildegard calls it "greening love" that "hastens to the aid of all. With the passion of heavenly yearning, people who breathe this dew produce rich fruit."<sup>35</sup>

*Viriditas* has a moral aspect reflected in the relationships of men and women. The earth grants sprouting fecundity according to the nature of human beings, depending on the quality and direction of their lives and actions. Men and women are the light-green heart of the living fullness of nature. A direct connection exists between the heart of a person and all the elements of the cosmos. They effect together that which has been decided in human hearts.<sup>36</sup> "*Viriditas* expresses growth in fertility in all its forms, which is always experienced as opposed by or in tension with *ariditas*, a shriveling into barrenness."<sup>37</sup> In Hildegard's view, the imagery of fruitfulness and barrenness applies not only to natural processes but also to the spiritual life: "If we surrender the green vitality of virtues and give ourselves over to the drought of our indolence so that we lack the sap of life and the greening power of good deeds, then the powers of our very soul will begin to fade away and dry up."<sup>38</sup> Hildegard makes a surprisingly contemporary connection. "Injustice is the cause of sin because injustice is the ultimate dryness. A person who lacks the verdancy of justice is dry, totally without tender goodness, totally without illumination."<sup>39</sup> As we note in the world today, ecological disasters, disrespect for the earth, fall under the newly pronounced category of ecological sins promulgated by Benedict XVI. Ultimately, *viriditas* also has a redemptive quality. "The greening life-force (*viriditas*) has weakened because of the ungodly erring of human souls."<sup>40</sup> Yet, Hildegard says that the nature of God through whom "the fountain-fullness of the Word came to the embrace of God's maternal love, which nourishes us into life, is our help in perils, and—as a most profound and gentle love—opens us for repentance". She believes that "Christ brings lush greenness to shriveled and wilted people."<sup>41</sup> And this is the main activity of the word-*viriditas*. In sum, *viriditas* is not some form of supernatural chlorophyll. It is a life force emanating from the creative

womb of God. Its absence signals sin, creates suffering, breeds destruction, drought, and chaos. Its presence is the presence of God whom Hildegard heard speaking.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (1491 – 1556)

St. Ignatius was born in the family castle in Guipúzcoa, Spain, the youngest of 13 children, and was called Íñigo. He was proud to be a soldier in the Spanish army to fight against the French. A cannon ball that stuck him and the consequent surgeries ended his military career in 1521. As he recovered, he also discovered his real self and decided to be a soldier of the Catholic Faith. Having been brought up in the lap of Nature, Ignatius cultivated a great fondness for the beauties and marvels of God's creation. At Loyola during his convalescence, he would sit by the window at night and watch the stars. As he himself recalls: "It was my greatest consolation to gaze upon the heavens and the stars, which I often did, and for long stretches at a time, because when doing so I felt within myself a powerful urge to be serving our Lord."<sup>43</sup> He began to have visions, but a year later suffered from fears and scruples that drove him almost to despair. It was then he wrote his famous *Spiritual Exercises*. After traveling and studying in different schools, which he finished in Paris, where he received his degree at the age of 43. Many disliked his humble lifestyle. Yet he attracted several followers at the university, including St. Francis Xavier, and soon started his order called, *The Society of Jesus*, or the Jesuits.

#### 3.1. Seeking God

He began to seek God according to his ability and will but also with his heart. He would remain late beneath the stars, letting his eyes range over their shining forms, the work of God. His glance would stray from star to star, from one bright constellation to another even brighter, even more plunged into the heights of the cosmos and he was moved by the contemplation of the lines which one day the hand of God had traced in space. For the first time the firmament appeared to him as an immense act of love, and he thought of the divine sower who had scattered those mysterious points of light as the hand of man scatters the seeds of grain.<sup>44</sup> In the last decades of his life (1537-56), caught up with administration and writing of the Constitutions in Rome, Ignatius used to look out from the balcony of his office and gazing at the star-studded sky, taking great delight in it. He would spend as much time in the gardens and orchards of the Holy City whenever he could.<sup>45</sup>

Ignatius provides a foundational dimension to the spirituality in the contemporary Church. The incarnational grounding of Ignatian spirituality and its character of kinship act as means to understand and encounter God as Creator,<sup>46</sup> thus allowing

human ‘kinship’ with the Earth and all of creation permeating their covenantal encounter with the Incarnate Christ.<sup>47</sup> One manifestation of this deeper covenant is found in a Eucharistic Ecology that both emerges from the tradition and is imaged in Ignatian spirituality. This view is not simply instrumental, but rather sacramental: the very relational quality of God as actualized in creation.

### **3.2. Application of the Spiritual Exercises**

A creation-centered and resurrection-centered approach can be found in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Ignatius’ view of Christ as “Eternal Lord of All things,” addresses the polarization of human transformation against the redemption of creation. For him, creation is the place for salvation. Within the wonder of creation, his mystical principle of “finding God in All things” can be traced. At the beginning of the Exercises, the retreatant experiences God through surrounding creation and is moved spontaneously “to praise, reverence, and serve.” In the third rule of discernment, Ignatius indicates that one cannot know God apart from creation. He presents consolation as “an interior movement . . . aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, as a consequence, can love no created thing for its own sake, but only the Creator of them all” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 316). The movement toward indifference in the Principle and Foundation, the Meditation on the Incarnation, and the Meditation on the Two Standards assist in increasing the ecological awareness.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.3. The Principle and Foundation**

Throughout the Exercises, Ignatius makes it clear that creation is both a resource from God as well as an avenue to Him. He even emphasizes that God is both dwelling in all creation and co-laboring in it. The Principle and Foundation exists as a starting point, set within the larger dynamic of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the goal of which is always greater interior freedom.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Ignatian indifference is not a matter of not caring for the things of creation, but rather relating freely to them. The goal of the Exercises is a spiritual journey toward ever-greater freedom. For this reason Ignatius asks the retreatants to begin to clarify the relationship between themselves and creation. The theological anthropology operative in the Exercises emphasizes humanity’s ability to discern both God’s ongoing labor in and through creation as well as God’s invitation for persons to cooperate in His divine work. Ignatius pointedly invites retreatants to marvel at the heavens, the sun and moon and all the stars, the earth with its plants and animals, and to consider how these created things sustain, nourish, and protect all. They keep us alive even when we ignore God and

refuse to praise the Divine Majesty; when we shut ourselves off in isolation and refuse to serve God; when we abuse and misuse creation (*Spiritual Exercises*, 23). The other beings within creation are companions helping humankind to attain the fullness of relationship with God even to the extent of giving it a share in God's authority, a real part in establishing, maintaining, healing, and restoring creation.<sup>50</sup> The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises makes the retreatants deeply aware of their involvement in the processes of sin at work in the world and thus increases their ecological awareness and sensitivity.

### **3.4. The Nativity and the Incarnation**

In the second week of the Exercises, the meditations on the Incarnation and the Nativity, like the Principle and Foundation, offer the retreatants an opportunity to raise their ecological sensitivity. Ignatius presents the contemplations on the Incarnation and Birth of Jesus as “models for all the other contemplations.”<sup>51</sup> He orients the retreatants to directly enter into the life of Jesus. “With the inner eyes of the soul” they imagine the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the size of the cave, and the persons they encounter. Each contemplation, like the Eucharist, becomes an encounter with both creation and the divine. The encounter becomes thereby a sharing in the transformation of the elements of creation, and indeed the universe as well. While the Nativity Meditation focuses retreatants' attention on the historical events within creation, the Meditation on the Incarnation focuses on the divinity of Christ and the mystery of the Trinity. Ignatius does not intend to present a theological formulation for the unity of creation in God, as his focus is always on human salvation. However, it is clear that his vision encompasses the whole of creation in all its concreteness. In fact, it is precisely through the Incarnation Meditation that Christ participates in and draws creation “back to God.” Creation is, therefore, the place to experience God's redemptive love. At this point, resonate the words from Paul's letter to the Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God” (1:15-16). At this time, the retreatants seek intimacy with the Cosmic Christ as was expressed by the historical Jesus. Because Jesus shares his identity with God, he shares the same relationship to creation as God. Therefore, it is clearly appropriate to say the Earth is Jesus' and everything in it belongs to Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.5. The Two Standards**

The meditation on the Two Standards (*Spiritual Exercises*, 136) leads retreatants into an understanding of both Christ's identity and virtue, as well as the deceits and strategies of Satan leading us to “riches, honor, and pride.” The implications of our greed and consumptive pattern related to the Earth's natural resources are easily

evidenced. Whether we examine water, food consumption, oil, building materials, land use, waste production, or energy, an unsustainable pattern emerges. The application of the interconnectedness revealed in an ecological worldview through the Meditation on the Two Standards makes the issues of greed and consumption awfully clear. When we choose the Standard of Christ, we observe his simplicity, humility, and way of finding God in the natural world. Knowledge of this Standard leads to awareness, to love, and to worship. Following the Standard of Christ reminds us that God “labors and works for us in all creatures on the face of the earth.”<sup>53</sup> A retreatant finds the Creator “in all things”. He is one with them in relationship with God which God lovingly established for us in union with our environment.

### **3.6. Contemplation to Attain Divine Love**

In the fourth week, Ignatius calls the retreatants to a new life in Christ. He asks them to consider how God dwells in creation. Spending time praying in and with creation fosters a communal consciousness, and a growth in kinship and responsible action. Even as the creation can be harmed from great distances, it can be healed and restored from great distances. As we grow in the awareness of our interconnectedness, we become more sensitive to the impacts of our consumerist behaviors and their global effects. If we drive less, eat moderately, use toxic materials sparingly or not at all, watch for signs of stress on ecosystems, use renewable, and do nothing that will degrade the water supply, then we are part of the Earth protecting itself. All of these opportunities have a cumulative effect in a closed earth system, allowing us to participate in the resurrection of the planet.<sup>54</sup>

Christ the “Eternal Lord of All Things,” and the humble self-emptying servant is the focal point of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The break up between human transformation and the redemption of creation seems to result from a separation of humans from the world or a too rationalized approach to the final transformation. If transformation is accomplished by God’s self-emptying and resurrecting love, and love preserves the ‘otherness’ of the other and does not simply subsume it, there would be no reason to deny the self-emptying and resurrecting of the universe as the place where humans (and Christ as human) can contemplate the immensity and diversity of God’s creativity, beauty, and harmony. Just as Teilhard de Chardin’s “Mass on the World” was shaped into the mountains and hills which burst into song, and trees which clap their hands, so all creation will come to sit at table in the Kingdom of God.<sup>55</sup>

### **3.7. Ignatian Imagination and the Examen**

The goal of the Examen is to have a discerning heart. The purpose of the ecological Examen is to discern how God invites every individual to respond to Him with greater sensitivity. The five movements in the Ecological Examen are similar to the traditional Examen. The first moment is that of thanksgiving and gratitude for the covenant God offers in the gift of God's self in all creation. The second one is when the devotee makes a specific request to have the eyes opened by the Spirit to find ways of caring for creation. At the third is undertaken a review of the challenges and joy experienced in this care. The devotee asks God how to be drawn into the divine presence by creation, and how to respond to God's action in that same creation. Is there some part of the relationship with creation that needs to be changed? The fourth, is to ask for a true and clear awareness of one's sinfulness, whether found in one's sense of superiority or in a failure to respond to the needs of other creatures. Finally the devotee asks for hope in the future, seeking greater sensitivity to trust in God's living presence in all creation.<sup>56</sup>

### **3.8. Summing Up**

The daily Examen and Ignatian Imaginative Prayer are two clear ways to cultivate an ecological sensitivity in our interior lives. We are well aware that God continually draws each one of us to Himself in and through Christ. We experience God's activity in our feelings, moods, actions, and desires. We believe that God reveals Himself in our feelings as much as He does in our clear and distinct ideas. Allowing God to draw us more intimately, the devotee must let God draw him at the core of his being, by becoming more aware of his feelings and, at the same time, noticing his resistance to God, which arises from sin in oneself and in the world. Using the technique of the Examen with an ecological lens allows one to reflect prayerfully on the events of the day. The devotee is able to witness his relationship with creation, detect God's presence and discern His direction for him.

## **4. ST ELIZABETH ANN SETON (1774–1821)**

### **4.1. Life in Brief**

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was the first native born American to be canonized by the Catholic Church. Born two years before the American Revolution, Elizabeth grew up in the upper class of New York society. She was a prolific reader. In spite of her high society background, Elizabeth's early life was quiet, simple, and often lonely. As she grew a little older, the Bible was to become her continual instruction, support and comfort. In 1794, Elizabeth married the wealthy young man William

Seton, with whom she was deeply in love. The first years of their marriage were happy and prosperous.

Inevitable Destiny led Elizabeth to Italy along with her family. She went through many vicissitudes of life including the untimely death of her husband. All these served to draw Elizabeth's heart to God and eternity. Accepting and embracing of God's will, "The Will," as she called it, was a keynote in her spiritual life. Elizabeth's desire for the Bread of Life was to be a strong force leading her to the Catholic Church in 1805. Seton and two other young women, who helped her in her work, began plans for a Sisterhood. On March 25, 1809, Elizabeth Seton pronounced her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, binding for one year. From that time she was called Mother Seton. The Rule of the Sisterhood based upon the Rule of St. Vincent de Paul was formally ratified in 1812. Today, six groups of sisters trace their origins to Mother Seton's initial foundation. She was beatified by Pope John XXIII on March 17, 1963 and was canonized on September 14, 1975 by Pope Paul VI.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4.2. Ecophilosophy**

The writings of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton can be interpreted from the perspective of contemporary ecological philosophy.<sup>58</sup> To be true, Elizabeth never used the term 'ecology.'<sup>59</sup> Understandably Elizabeth did not share the same ecological concern as people in our time do for the simple reason that the crisis of climate change, and an understanding of water and air contamination, and the resultant destruction of the soil and many species, was not of her lifetime. Nevertheless, we find an amazing, constant insight in her writings that the natural and human world are interwoven in the life, order, and beauty of God, the Creator. She saw an inseparable interconnection between nature and human life, and she perceived both life and death as the necessary cycle of creation. She was convinced that we humans have a special calling, like the corals in the ocean, to be transformed by sufferings and hardships, through which we learn to trust God and attain the freedom of heart or the state of holy indifference.<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Seton's ecological sensitivity thus enriches our understanding of providential interdependence between nature and our human life. An ecological interpretation of Elizabeth Seton's writings offers a new awareness of the ecological dimension to her spirituality.

#### **4.3. Collected Writings**

The primary source, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, consists of three volumes. Volume One presents her writings both as a married woman and then as

a widow with five children; Volume Two contains her life as school mistress and religious founder living in community; and Volume Three is a collection of various other types of her writings.

Volume One, from which the ecological insights mentioned here are drawn, is a collection of Elizabeth's correspondence and her journals from 1793 to 1808. It also includes a journal to her sister-in-law Rebecca Seton which manifests how much Elizabeth loved nature, and how she found strength and consolation in it during the darkest period of her life in the quarantine San Jacopo Lazaretto.

#### **4.4. Characteristics of her Eco-spirituality**

In her writings from age 19 to 34, four characteristics emerge as constitutive elements: first, the beauty of nature as the space wherein her encounter with God and friends always took place; second, when she felt abandoned, Elizabeth identified herself with the surrounding natural environment and therein experienced consolation and God's mercy; third, Elizabeth saw God's equity in nature and learned ecological balance that accepts both life and death, joy and suffering; and fourth, while recognizing the rhythm of time in nature, Elizabeth realized the importance of living in the present and learned to be content in all situations by acquiring the virtues of moderation and harmony. An analysis of Elizabeth Seton's ecological spirituality brings out the four constitutive elements in her writings.

##### **4.4.1. *Nature as the Space where Elizabeth Encountered Friends and God***

From her letters to friends and family members it is clear that Elizabeth found happiness in the beauty of nature - sunrises and sunsets, the peaceful flow of a river, clear air, and singing birds.<sup>61</sup>

Elizabeth compares the cultivation of mind to the nurturing of a beautiful flower garden according to the order of creation. In fact, the primary characteristic of Elizabeth Seton's ecological spirituality is her constant love of nature's beauty, something that enabled her to meet her friends and her God more deeply.

##### **4.4.2. *Elizabeth's Experience of Unity with Nature in Her Abandonment***

During her experiences of abandonment, Elizabeth identified herself with the natural environment that surrounded her and learned to trust in the mercy of God. Through this identification with nature, she found the consolation and energy to rise up and pierce through the value of suffering, a transformational act both in the natural and human world.



#### ***4.4.3. Elizabeth's Italian Journal***

In her Italian Journal to Rebecca Seton, Elizabeth's experience of unity with nature is vividly manifested by its powerful energy to heal and console. While passing through a group of islands on the southeast coast of Spain, Elizabeth wrote of how much she was moved by the beauty of nature: "Can I ever forget the setting sun over the little Island of Yivica."<sup>62</sup>

#### ***4.4.4. Elizabeth's Awareness of Ecological Balance***

Contemporary biology recognizes that everything on Earth participates in a vast process which involves a continual breaking down, changing, and emergence into a new form. With this knowledge, we understand that death is an integral part of the life-cycle. "When death is recognized in a broader perspective as transformation in a larger system, it can be seen to be an essential aspect of elegant patterns that are orderly as well as beautiful."<sup>63</sup> If there is no death, the ecosystem cannot be maintained.<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Seton is a wonderful guide for us in regaining this perspective. Elizabeth's letters to her friends and family members, in their loss and misfortune, reveal how she saw God's equity in nature, and understood the place of suffering in the wholeness of creation.<sup>65</sup>

#### ***4.4.5. Elizabeth's Focus on the Present, Moderation, and Harmony***

Elizabeth called the present, "God's Blessed Time." She understood that each of us meets God in the present moment. Just as time is closely connected with order, Elizabeth saw the "Whole Natural Order" created by God's Word, recreated through the succession of ages.<sup>66</sup>

#### ***4.4.6. Summing Up***

Integrity, stability, and beauty are quite significant in understanding Elizabeth Seton's ecological spirituality better. As we have seen, Elizabeth appreciated and respected the integrity, stability, and beauty of this earth. We find this in her many insights into God's equity and mercy in all creation. However, what appears prominently in Elizabeth's ecological spirituality is her sensitivity and love for the beauty of nature. She knew how to balance her care for human beings with her concern for nature. Elizabeth saw the whole of God's creation in its totality, and also understood the relationships within it. Her relationship with nature was fundamental to the formation and maturity of her spirituality, and was as intimate and strong as her relationship with other human beings. Of course, God, as the Creator of both nature and humanity, always remained at the center of her heart,

uniting and vivifying her sensitivity to all creation.<sup>67</sup> Because of her love of nature, her insight into God's equity in creation, her practice of ecological balance and moderation, and her ability to identify herself with the sufferings of nature, which contains transformative power, it seems fitting to call Elizabeth Seton a model ecological saint.

## CONCLUSION

The saints who contemplated Creator God yet built a profound relationship with His mystifying creation, realized that in its entirety, the creation led them back to God the Creator whose creative love, glory, power and might are manifested in manifold and mysterious ways. History of salvation cannot be separated from the mystery of creation. The enduring interest of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and now Francis comes as a wake-up call to the Church. They teach that rekindling of such genuine interest is not only a *sine qua non* to God experience but also a necessity to save our planet earth by genuinely caring for creation. The doctrine of the "primacy of Christ" emphasizes that before the beginning of creation, the cosmic Christ was intended to come in human form. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15). Humanity is a part of creation, and all creation, not just humanity, is able to bear Christ. Therefore, creation is born in a special dignity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> List developed by the Care for Creation Committee of the Archdiocese of Washington June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Habig, M.A. (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English omnibus of the sources for the life of St. Francis* (London: SPCK, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Boff, L., *Cry of the earth, cry of the poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 206.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hooper, P. & Palmer, M., 'World religions and ecology: "St Francis and ecology"', in E. Breuilly & M. Palmer (eds.), *Christianity and ecology* (London: Cassell Publishers, 1992), 76–85; Viviers, H., 2014, 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and ecological consciousness', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35/1 (2014), 4; Art. #1310, p. 4 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sorrell, R.D., *St Francis of Assisi and nature: Tradition and innovation in Western Christian attitudes toward the environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Warner, K., 'Was St. Francis a deep ecologist?', in A.J. La Chance & J.E. Carroll (eds.), *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 228.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Viviers, H., 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and Ecological Consciousness', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35/1 (2014), 9; Art. #1310, p. 5 <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Warner, K., 'Was St. Francis a deep ecologist?', in A.J. La Chance & J.E. Carroll (eds.), *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 225–240.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Warner, K., 'Retrieving St. Francis: Tradition and innovation for our ecological vocation', in T. Winright (ed.), *Green discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (Winona: Anselm Academic, 2011), 114–127.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Viviers, H. 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and Ecological Consciousness', 5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>11</sup> Please see the Septuagint addition to Pr 6:6–8. Francis' complete commitment to poverty and not assembling (unnecessary) earthly belongings, however, made him negative towards ants that diligently store their food in summer for the long winter (Pr 6:6–8; 30:24–25).

<sup>12</sup> Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish (e.g. Lk 5:1–11) probably inspired this anecdote.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Viviers, H., 2014, 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and ecological consciousness', 6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> *The Thomist*, Volume 13, Thomas Press 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Modern scholars, like Dennis et al. (1996:107) and Hooper and Palmer (1992:84) amongst many others, argue for the letting go of the sentimental, even 'soppy' modern habit of people placing all kinds of figurines of Francis chatting to birds in their gardens.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. The Fioretti, one of the early sources on Francis, lets him address the birds as 'sisters' (Armstrong 1973:60) whilst according to Thomas Celano, he called them 'brothers' (Sorrell 1988:60).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Viviers, H., 2014, 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and ecological consciousness', 7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>20</sup> The Italian word *per* can be understood as 'for' or 'through'. Francis could therefore praise God 'for' (causal) these natural elements' characteristics or praise God 'through or with' (instrumental) them (Sorrell 1988:129; Warner 1994:232).

<sup>21</sup> (Sorrell R.D., *St Francis of Assisi and nature: Tradition and innovation in Western Christian attitudes toward the environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134. Confer also Cf. Viviers, H., 2014, 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and ecological consciousness', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35(1), Art. #1310, pp 7 -8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>22</sup> Warner, K, "Was St. Francis a deep ecologist?", in A.J. La Chance & J.E. Carroll (eds.), *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*, 228.

<sup>23</sup> cf De Waal, F.B.M., *Primates and philosophers: How morality evolved*, Princeton (Princeton: University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Viviers, H., 2014, 'The Second Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi and ecological consciousness', 9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1310>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bula *Inter Sanctos*.

<sup>26</sup> The Rhine forms a water highway from its origins in the Alps to its mouth in the English Channel and North Sea, passing through several countries of Europe.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jöckle, Clemens. *Encyclopedia of Saints*. (London: Konecky & Konecky.2003), 204.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Matthew Fox, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times: Unleashing Her Power in the 21st Century*, drawn from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com); Also confer Barbara Newman's *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. McDonagh, S. *The Greening of the Church*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 173.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae, *On-line version* ISSN 2412-4265; Studia Hist. Ecc. vol.40 n.2 Pretoria Dec. 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Jean Evans, RSM, *Viriditas and Veritas: The Ecological Prophets Hildegard of Bingen and Miriam Therese* (2009) from [www.sistersofmercy.ie](http://www.sistersofmercy.ie); [www.sustainablelawrence.org/macgillis.html](http://www.sustainablelawrence.org/macgillis.html).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. L. Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 62; also "Sustaining Earth. Sustaining Spirit" from [www.grailville.org](http://www.grailville.org).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. T Hessel-Robinson, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5-20.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. R. Craine. *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 75.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mathew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1985), 30.

<sup>36</sup> Cf R Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mathew Fox, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> R. Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> M. Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. R Craine. *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ*, 75. Also Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Autobiography, 11, [Note: first person].

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Papasogli Giorgio, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, (trans.) Paul Garvin, (New York: Society of St Paul, 1957).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Father Genelli, *The Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, (1923). From ([http://books.google.co.in/books/about/the\\_life\\_of\\_st\\_ignatius\\_of\\_loyola](http://books.google.co.in/books/about/the_life_of_st_ignatius_of_loyola)).

<sup>46</sup> We live in a broken world. The 1999 Jesuit document on ecology states that Ignatius affirms a "three-fold relationship of subjects" between God, humans, and the rest of Creation; *Promotio Justitiae* 70 (1999), 21. In his address to Arrupe College in Harare, Father Kolvenbach insists that these three relationships are "so closely united that a person cannot find God unless he finds him through the environment and, conversely that his relationship to the environment will be out of balance unless he also relates to God." "Our Responsibility for God's Creation," August 22, 1998, address at the opening of Arrupe College.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology: Entering into Conversation with the Earth," a paper presented at the International Seminar on "Ignatian Pedagogy and Spirituality" on November 7, 2014 in *Jesuit Higher Education* Manresa/Barcelona, 4(2): 6-7 (2015).

- <sup>48</sup> Cf. Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology." 4(2): 6-7 (2015).
- <sup>49</sup> Roger Haight's recent article "Expanding the Spiritual Exercises," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 1-43 expands on this and other points of Creation Spirituality.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Joseph Carver, Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology," in *Jesuit Higher Education* 4(2): 7 (2015).
- <sup>51</sup> Adolf Haas, "The Mysticism of St. Ignatius," in *Ignatius of Loyola: His Personality and Spiritual Heritage*, ed. Friedrich Wulf (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1997), 188.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Spiritual Exercises 103, 210-217; Cf. Trileigh Tucker, "Ecology and the Spiritual Exercises": *The Way*, January 2004; Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology," in *Jesuit Higher Education* 4(2): 8 (2015).
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology" in *Jesuit Higher Education* 4(2): 8 (2015).
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. "Ecology and the Spiritual Exercises," *The Way* 43, no. 1 (2004): 7-18, <http://www.theway.org.uk/Tucker.pdf>.
- <sup>55</sup> Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology," in *Jesuit Higher Education* 4(2): 10 (2015); cf. also *Hedwig Lewis, Saint Ignatius Loyola, Retrospective-Perspective- Reflective, Nature's Embrace (Ahmadabad: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2006)*
- <sup>56</sup> Joseph Carver, "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology," in *Jesuit Higher Education* 4(2): 6-14 (2015).
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. [www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=180](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=180).
- <sup>58</sup> Arne Naess defined ecological philosophy thus: "The study of ecology indicates an approach, a methodology which can be suggested by the simple maxim 'all things hang together.' This has application to and overlaps with the problems in philosophy: the placement of humanity in nature, and the search for new kinds of explanation of this through the use of systems and relational perspectives. The study of these problems common to ecology and philosophy shall be called *ecophilosophy*. The word 'philosophy' itself can mean two things: a field of study or an approach to knowledge.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. It can mean one's own personal code of values and a view of the world which guides one's own decisions. When applied to questions involving ourselves and nature, we call this latter meaning of the word 'philosophy' an *ecosophy*." Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. by David Rothenberg (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36; Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 55.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Sung-Hae Kim, "Indifference as the Freedom of the Heart: The Spiritual Fruit of Apostolic Mysticism – Christian, Confucian, and Daoist Cases," *Vincentian Heritage* 30:2 (2010): 27-46. Elizabeth also talked about abandonment and indifference as the most desired state of complete trust in God's providence. See *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, ed. by Regina Bechte, S.C. and Judith Metz, S.C., 3 vols. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2000-2006), 2:78, 103, 140, 156. Hereafter cited as *CW*.
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. *CW*, 1.11, "To Eliza Sadler," Long Island, 18 June 1797; *CW*, 1:14. Volume one contains 32 of Elizabeth's letters to her.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. "Journal to Rebecca Seton," Gibraltar Bay, 8 November, *CW*, 1:247. This entry to Rebecca Seton was written in 1803.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Shepard, *Encounter with Nature*: ed., Floren R. Shephard (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, n.d), 69- 70. This understanding was well developed by Zhuangzi, an ancient Chinese philosopher, who taught that the Dao, as the great transformer, gives life to all living beings through the natural cycle of prosperity and disease (chapter 6).

<sup>64</sup> cf. Nathan Edward Kowalsky, “Beyond Natural Evil” (Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006). He states that “to equate suffering with evil is hedonistic, and hedonism is variously anthropocentric.”

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *CW*, 1.19, “To Julia Scott,” New York, 16 May 1798; *CW*, 1:30.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *CW*, 43.31, “Journal to Amabilia Filicchi, Elizabeth laments the blindness of a redeemed soul not accepting the mystery of the Eucharist.

<sup>67</sup> Both Bruté and Elizabeth use the word ‘atom,’ such as “All earth an atom... I, an atom.” See Shin Ja Lee, S.C., “The Practice of Spiritual Direction in the Life and Writings of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton” (The Catholic University of America, UMI Dissertation Services, 2010), 277-278.

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