Christian : a Friend or a Foe to Nature?

Introduction

Cubatao, Brazil is one of the leading petro-chemical centres in Latin America. Most days it is shrouded in a deadly mist, fed by the 1,000 or so tons of toxic gases trapped by the 2,000 feet range of hills around. Of every 1,000 babies born in Cubatao 40 are dead at birth and another 40 perish within a week. Most of them are manifestly deformed. A number of the infants who survive are either deformed or seriously weakened. It has been established that babies are contaminated in the womb and break down. In 1975 a pollution monitoring machine was set up. But it was exposed to such intensity of pollution that it broke down in 1977. The machine had indicated that there were 1,200 particulates per cubic meter of air which is more than twice the amount which, the WHO said, produces "excess mortality" after 24 hours.[1]

This is but a single illustration of the ecological crisis. The common masses are obliged to be more and more concerned about ecological problems because they are brought face to face with the degradation of the great *Puncha Bhutas* the most basic Elements of Nature. The soil is no more as fertile as it used to be. Water pollution has crossed its limit. Water in most of the wells is not potable at all. In some of the cities there has been such an amount of air-pollution that people need to take the help of oxygen-booths. Food poisoning due to excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides is also becoming an everyday experience.

The Role of Religions

In this context, it may be pertinent to consider whether it is possible for religion to help people solve the problem related to ecological crisis?

1. Cf. John Carmody. Ecology and Religion, Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature, Paulist press, New York, 1983, p. 3.

The nature of the ecological crisis is such that it can never be defused simply by some scientific devices and technological improvements. It is only an alternative life-style, supported by a world-view which is sympathetic to Nature, that can really solve the present-day crisis. Viewed from this angle, the role of religion becomes much more crucial. People of all religions are called to address themselves to this specific problem of the contemporary world, each from one's own religious point of view, and find out ways of resolving them through inspirations drawn from one's own Sources. Particularly Christians have a special responsibility. While the religions of Asia are all known for their eco-friendy approach to Nature, Christianity has been accused of a "domineering attitude to earth". Unless Christians prove that their Sources are equally eco-friendly in their world-view, they will not establish the relevance of their faith in today's context of ecological crisis.

More specifically, it is Christian theology that is challenged to give a genuine religious response to the ecological challenges of today, A traditional definition of Theology is: "Faith seeking understanding". Paraphrased in cultural terms it may be re-defined as "mediatcn between a given culture and the role a religion plays in that culture."[2] Whenever a new era sets in, a new cultural issue crops up calling for fresh research and approach from the thinkers and academics, When a particular cultural issue is raised, studied and interpreted by experts in sociology, religious questions are bound to crop up in "dialectics" because deeper questions of outlook, worldview or ultimate assumptions and value-framework are brought into debate with the cultural issue and it is religion that normally provides all these. Now that in our contemporary culture, the ecological issue is the most crucial, it calls for serious consideration from genuine seekers of religion and serious theologians.

There is today all the more reason for the Christian theologians to deal with the ecolcgical issue. Some scholars have

2. Ibid, p. 1.

made an allegation of an anti-ecological stance against Christianity. For example according to Lynn white Jr, the root cause of the ecological crisis is the Christian world-view, particularly as manifest in the biblical view of creation. Unless Christians enter into the debate and meet the challenges squarely, Christian faith may lose its lusture in the contemporary world. In order to do it, we must first understand the accusation. So, the first part of this paper gives an account of the roots of the crisis as alleged. The second part is an attempt to give the Biblical world-view on this question. It will bring out how the basic constituents of Biblical world-view are considered to be in contrast with the ecological world-view. The final part, will resolve the conflict between the two world-views and thereby indicate ways in which Christian faith can contribute to solving the problem at hand.

Part I: The Historical Roots of the Crisis

Today it is clear that the contemporary science and technology is the real cause of the ecological crisis. But, modern Science and Technology are distinctly occidental not only because the scientific and technological movements got their start and acquired their characteristics in the West, but also because they were determined by assumptions of the European Christianity.

True, the present day Europe is living in a "post-Christian age" because the forms of thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian. However its cultural pattern is substantially akin to that of Christianity. People's daily habits of action are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress. This is rooted in Judeo-Christian teleology unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or the Orient. People continue to live as they had lived for about 1700 years very largely in a context of Christian axioms.

Some scholars have tried to probe into the fundamental presupposition of the western Christianity with regard to our

relations with the Environment. For instance Lynn white Jr.[3] holds in an intriguing article the following contentions: (1) The story of creation, which Christianity inherited from the Judaic religion says that the all-loving and all-powerful God created in gradual stages light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds and fishes and finally human beings. So it is the transcendence of the infinite omnipotent and omniscient God that is primarily inculcated in the Bible. (2) Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen. Man in the Christian world-view not only shares in great measure God's transcendence of nature but also serves as the end of the whole of creation. No item in the physical world had any purpose save to serve the humans. And humans themselves are made in God's image.

Thus in absolute contrast to ancient religions of the East, Lynn says, Christianity established not only a dualism of God and nature but also that of the human and nature. It even insisted that it is God's will that the humans exploit nature for their proper ends. In the ancient times, Lynn says, everything in nature, tree, spring, hill was considered to have its own guardian spirit. So, before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook it was important to placate the spirit. But Christianity by destroying animism, made it possible to exploit nature indiscriminately. To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical object. The whole concept of sacred grove was alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West.[4] The missionaries even considered it to be idolatrous to assume spirit in nature.

No doubt the present day disruption of the global environment is the product of a dynamic Technology and Science. But,

3. Cf. Lynn White Junior; "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," first published in Science Magazine March 19, 1967, reproduced as Appendix I in Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology, Hodder and Stroughton, London, 1970. pp. 70-85.

4. As contended by Lynn White Jr. in the article cited.

their growth cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes towards nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma about nature. So, the conclusion of Lynn is that Christianity's world view is ultimately responsible for many of the ecological effects.

Another critic has carried on the discussion further by holding that today's ecological crisis is basically a moral crisis, which arises out of a faulty ethics.[5] Quoting Albert Schweitzer, Professor Richard L. Means says that "the great fault of all ethics hitherto has been that they believed themselves to have to deal only with the relation of man to man". But, no more can it be taken for granted that moral dimensions of human behaviour is limited to man's relations with man only. On the contrary, man's relation with the animals, the plants, the trees, the air etc., will have to be taken into consideration within the moral dimension of human behaviour. Particularly our failure to consider the collective or social side of man's relation to nature, involving the actual social consequences of myriad and unconnected acts, or the combined results of a mistreatment of our environment gives rise to the crisis. It may be the negligence of a small businessman on the River, the irresponsibility of a large corporation on the Lake, the impatient use of insecticides by a farmer on his Field, the stripping of Land by certain mine operators - through these and similar acts there has been unnecessary destruction of natural resources on the face of the earth.

Referring to his own experience in America, R. L. Means cites the well-known case of the passenger pigeon which once flew across the land in tremendous numbers but is not seen any more now, and the abundant species of whales which have been destroyed owing to the commercial fishing. Such cases, he says, must be seen as leaving a void in God's creation and in the imagination of people for generations to come. Again, he says attempts to build dams mile after mile of the Grand Canyon in

5. Cf. Richard Means, "Why Worry About Nature?": first published in Saturday Review December 2, 1967, reproduced in F. A. Schaeffer, op. cit. as appendix II pp. 86-93.

order to produce more electricity must be considered a sin, because electricity is a commodity. But the Grand Canyon is not a commodity. It is just a 'happening'. Uncontrolled by man, created by nature, it cannot be duplicated. Any assault on its natural state is an equal attack on man's capacity to wonder, to contemplate his environment and nature's work. The destruction of nature by man's gratuitous 'busyness' and technical arrogance, according to Means, is the result of a thoughtless human activity and so sinful.

Going further to the root-cause of this crisis, Means says that this moral crisis is a historical crisis involving human history and culture, tracing its roots to our ethical and religious views of nature which have been relatively unquestioned in this context. It is in this connection that Means agrees with Lynn's analysis and concludes that the root cause of the moral crisis is the Christian notion of a *transcendent God, far removed from nature* and breaking into nature only through revelation, and the removal of spirit from nature. All this according to Means has allowed, for an easy exploitation of nature.

In sum, the accusation made by the critics is this: the Christian world view is in conflict with the ecological world view so much so that it becomes the fundamental cause of the ecological crisis.

Part II: The Biblical Views of Nature

The critics base their arguments on solid facts of history. They also seem to support their arguments with an analysis of the Christian world view. It becomes, then, necessary for us to have a clear-cut start with the presentation of the world-view, offered by Christianity, based on the Biblical account of creation.

Some Preliminary Notions

To understand the Biblical view of creation in the proper perspective it is necessary to keep in mind certain preliminary remarks. First of all, the prime concern of the Bible is not to

give scientific truths about the world, but to narrate the "salvation, history" of a particular community. The one original experience of Israelites as a whole was the great event of "Exodus" by which they grew into a great unity from a mere nomadic tribe, and to a centralized nation from an enslaved people. It was purely thanks to the power of God that they could get their deliverence from all the oppression they had suffered. He had revealed Himself to them as a Deliverer. He had manifested His supermacy not only over the powerful Pharaos but also the indomitable powers of nature. Moreover, He was an all-loving provider to them. He gave them all that they needed : food, drink, safe passage, a land to live, protection etc.[6]

This experience of God, as the all-powerful *Liberator* as well as the all-loving *Provider* was still vivid in the memory of the people. God's faithfulness in the past was a guarantee that He would be there in any future need. He was their deliverer and provider throughout time. On the basis of this core-experience as a whole, and putting together many pieces of such experiences in particular places and times for many years, decades and centuries, the sacred author is able to have a grasp of what was emerging as a movement in Israel's past history.

But still the experience of the concrete situation by the sacred writer was one of utter conflict, disorder, disharmony, evil and sin. So the question was : where could evil come from? It could not come from God, because community's experience says that He is the all-benevolent *Provider* as well as the all-powerful *Liberator*. Nor could it come from Nature because the created world is "good". Even if it were to express itself violently it could be suppressed by the all-powerful God. In fact He has already done so. Conflict can therefore come only from a free human being whose wickedness is experienced quite often.

6, L. John Topel, The way to Peace : Liberation Through the Bible, Orbis Books, Third printing, 1982. p. 10.

With this clarity in mind the sacred author gives a "myth" about the harmonious nature on the one hand and the conflict making humans on the other. This process of reconstruction about the origins, by which an ancient author sought to explain an experienced situation by an earlier historical event of which he had no proper historical knowledge is what is called "historical etiology".[7] And the Biblical narratives of Creation are just etiological accounts.

It is also to be kept in mind that there are two traditions offering the etiological explanation of Creation: the J (Yahwist) and the P (Priestly) traditions.[8] The J tradition narrated in Gen 2: 4b-25 is probably the earliest. It is purely an anthropo-centric account. The P tradition comprising of chapter 1 and 2:1-4a is clearly a later addition because it follows certain clear cut formulae which were liturgical in nature. This was set at the head of the whole Bible because it not only served as prologue to all of Salvation History, but also it set the J tradition in a new context giving it a deeper meaning. The very first verse sums up even the intended prologue: "In the beginning when God created the universe the earth was formless and desolate".[9] This is not a metaphysical statement meant to explain the theory of creation "ex nihilo".

On the contrary, it is an etiological statement to indicate that this was God's first act in salvation history, bringing order out of chaos. The significance of this statement will become clear if it is contrasted with other creation stories which were common in the ancient Western Asia. Those myths perceived the world as a flux of chaotic, uncontrollable elements and conceived of creation as a struggle between the chaotic powers and that gods produced order only at the end of a titanic struggle with them.

7. Ibid., p. 33.
8. Ibid., p. 34.
9. Ibid., pp. 43-45

The Narrative of creation : The P Tradition

As against the ancient myths of creation, the P tradition begins by showing that Yahweh liberates the world from the chaotic water pcwers effortlessly, without any materials and without any resistance from other powers.[10] Again the other ancient creation myths conceived that those counter-powers and the natural disasters continue to plague humankind even after the creation. But the sacred author pinpoints that God's ordering at the beginning was a one-time act and an accomplished act. The central message of P tradition, therefore, is that nature in the beginning was harmonious.

The author of P tradition arranges the world of creation into six days, the simpler inanimate creatures being created first, then the animate world and finally humanity at the summit. This order is also utterly in contrast with other mythologies. While they find the cosmic powers as demonic and anti-god, the P narrative affirms that the whole order of things has come from the good God and are subservient to His good intention. Hence after each day's work there is this concluding formula : "God saw that it was good."

The "P" account of creation of humans (1:26-30) bears certain distinctive marks. All other things of nature were created with a command: "let there be . ". This sort of third person imperative is abandoned in the case of humans. Instead the first person imperative is used. "Let us make man ..". Thus there is a personal difference indicated between people and animals. At the same time, it is said that both the animals on land as well as human beings are said to have been created on the same day. Thus the continuity between the animal kingdom and humankind is affirmed too.

Another distinguishing mark of this passage is that it speaks of God creating human beings in his own image and likeness both male and female. That means equality of sex

10. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

also has been clearly inculcated. Finally, the power of dominion over all the things on earth is given to both.

In short, then, there is a threefold harmony clearly implied in P account of creation:

1) harmony between the Creator and the created (in sofar as He brought the natural powers under control).

2) harmony between humans and other creatures (in sofar as they share in God's power of dominion over creatures).

3) harmony between humans themselves (in sofar as the dominion-power is equally applicable to both the sexes).

The J tradition's account of creation

Now, as we turn to the Yawhist account of creation, it is true that we find it to be clearly anthropocentric. It begins with Yahweh already having created the earth and the heaven. But the earth is not productive. It is to make the earth fruitful that Yahweh creates man from the ground and by breathing his spirit into the mud. But what is to be noticed even here is that the organic relation of man with the earth is emphasised. The very terminology expresses this connection. It may be noted that the word "adam" meaning man, and "adamah" meaning earth, are closely related. At the same time the distinctive characteristic of man is also brought out by affirming that God breathed into him the breath of life (v.7).

After creating man, Yahweh creates the vegetation of the Garden of Eden and puts him in it. In the ancient Western Asia, it was characteristic of a ruler alone to have a garden. The whole of creation is ordered to and for man. So, the superiority of man is made clear to him. However,

his role in the garden is specified as that of "cultivating it and guarding it" (v. 15).

The superiority of man is brought out also by the naming ceremony (v. 18-20). In the ancient Western Asia, giving a name meant that one claims and exercises power over the named. Now, Adam is asked by God to name every creature. So he is made the lord of creation. However there is one deficiency. The man could not find the perfect helper, fit for him in animal kingdom which is subject to him. It could only be some one who has the same sovereign nature, who can confront him and console him. So a woman is created from one of his ribs (v. 21). The man's joyful cry of recognition speaks of his contentment too : "At last here is one of my own kind, bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh..."(v. 22). Here again equality of man and woman is affirmed. It is because of the mutual complementarity of man and woman, as well as the needs and strength of a woman that a man is asked to leave his father and mother and stay with his wife (v. 24). So, what is emphasized here is the psychological union of the couple as a necessary condition for harmony in the family.

Finally J account concludes with the remark that nakedness was not felt as a matter of shame. Thereby, it is indicated that originally human sexuality was integrated into a personal commitment of trust and esteem between man and woman. This idyllic relationship is the Yawhist's final comment on the harmony of the whole creation.

The sovereignty given to human kind was not absolute sovereignty. It belongs to God alone. It is only relative superiority. They can be lord of the creation only so long as they are obedient to the will of God. They must be subject to him for their perfection. Hence the command not to eat the fruit of the tree in the centre. It is of great significance to see that there is a correlation between the positive command of "cultivating and guarding" the garden (v. 15) and the negative command of "not to eat the fruit" (v. 16). Both are two sides of the same coin ex-

pressing the one truth that human use of natural resources will have to be limited and restrained in order that harmony in Nature may be maintained.[11]

The original harmony (Paradise) was a gift of God. But such a gift implies also the living out the implicit relations of the gift. The first humans refused to live up to their nature and destiny and so failed to enjoy immortality with God. Determining their own way of life by attempting an unrestrained use of nature has created evil and disharmony for themselves, the world, and their relation with God. It is humans that have created the evil, conflict and disharmony in the world and not God. Rejection of God's command was rejection of man's role as linch-pin in the whole order and thus destruction of it.

The sin is pride in the creatures and the result was disharmony. First there is disharmony in man's nature himself (shame within). Next, disharmony in his interpersonal relations (association in guilt destroys communion among them). So much so, when questioned, man blames God for giving woman, and then blames the woman herself. And the woman in turn cannot face the truth of her guilt. So she blames the serpent (3:12-15). Finally estrangement from God's company (3:8-10) is depicted as pushing them out of the Paradise. Death which must have always been natural to human beings is now given as a symbol of that destruction and disorder which they have sown in all creation by their sin. The disharmony in all their relationships have revealed that their sovereignty was not supreme and that they were not determiners. Since life is life with God, humankind has lost it and must become aware of this fact by a violent separation from the garden and the tree of life.

The whole of human history since then has been the story of combating with the powers of evil. Finding themselves in the midst of the battle field human beings have

11. One of the papal documents itself refers to such an interpretation. Cf. Pope John Paul II Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici, 1989, No. 44.

to struggle to do what is right and it is at great cost and aided by God's grace that they succeed in achieving their inner integrity.

By his incarnation, Jesus Christ has identified himself with fallen humankind. And by his passion and death he offered himself for salvation of humankind and delivered it from Sin. Through his resurrection he has merited for humankind the new life in and through Holy Spirit. His grace restores what sin had damaged in humanity. In other words, Christ makes humans fully manifest to themselves and brings to light the exalted vocation of humans.

So, resolution of conflict consists in the fact that humans unite themselves with Christ by baptism and participate in the life of the Risen Christ. By way of summing up the Christian traditional position it may be useful to give the following citations from the universal *Catechism*. This will not only sum up the whole world-view of the Bible but also it will express the the official position of Christian tradition in our contemporary times.

> "The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in the original "state of holiness and justice". This grace of original holiness was to "share in ... divine life".[12]

> "By the radiance of this grace all dimensions of man's life were confirmed. As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called "original justice".[13]

12. The Indian Edition, TPI Bangalore, 1994, No. 375.
13. Ibid. No. 376.

"The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battle field man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity".[14]

"Christ's death is both the paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".[15]

To sum up

The Biblical worldview of creation implies two prominent ideas : (1) that God is set over the whole of creation, (2) that humans are set over the rest of creation as its active master and end.

It is precisely these two ideas that became the hallmarks of Christian tradition : one, emphasising the transcendence of God and the other emphasising the anthropocentric understanding of Nature.

Part III : Resolution of Conflict

The two ideas which are central tc the Christian worldview are found to be in conflict with the main ingredients of the ecological world view : (1) that the world or Nature is organic and holistic by itself, and (2) that human species are just a fragile fraction of the whole Nature.

Having realized that Christian worldview is in conflict with the ecological worldview, people have already been inclined

14. Ibid. No. 409.
15. Ibid. No. 613.

to consider that Christianity is a foe of the earth, a blind guide that has helped bring spaceship earth close to ditching. In this context the followers of Christian tradition are bound to face such questions as the following : Is it possible for Christian to maintain their faith in a transcendent God and yet promote the holistic understanding of the whole Nature? Is it possible to draw upon the Christian traditional teaching about humans, relation to the world so as to maintain the organic relationship with it rather than exhibiting a domineering attitude to it?

Unless these questions are answered in the affirmative, and unless the answers are substantiated with deep insights drawn from the Christian Sources, the Christian faith and tradition will become irrelevant to the present day context of ecological crisis. So, let me address myself to these questions now, and try to resolve the incompatibility between Biblical and Ecological world views. For the sake of clarity and brevity, let me refer to the two fundamental ingredients of the Christian world view mentioned early, and work out the synthesis with the two conflicting elements of the ecological world view.

The Transcendence of God Vs The Organic and Holistic View of Nature

It is true that the Judeo-Christian understanding of God emphasises the uniqueness of God by harping on the Infinity and Transcendence of God. However, it must be observed that the same understanding of God equally affirms the personal dimension of God. It is true that the infinite and transcendent aspects of God are stressed by pointing out the great chasm that exists between the Creator and the created, the self-existing, independent God and every other thing dependent on Him. But this chasm is indeed bridged by the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.[16] The Christian understanding of God is therefore not a deist understanding of God, as one who is completely cut off from the world, somewhere "out there" beyond the reaches of the world. He is very much

16. Francis A. Schaeffer, op. cit. pp. 35-38.

involved in the world and is continually moulding its progress (evolution), and even struggling with its difficulties. In fact the very idea of historic interventions of God, initiating the liberation movements in the history of the Jews which is the constitutive dimension of the Judaic understanding of God - is itself a clear proof of God's involvement in their history. So it is wrong to think that just because the transcendent aspect of God is emphasised it would be in opposition to the organic or holistic understanding of Nature.

Secondly, the Christian understanding of the world implies that the physical things are seen both as *symbolic* and *instrumental*.[17] The physical world is said to be *symbolic* in as much as it points to the mind of God, and the transcendental ideas of Truth, Beauty and Goodness of God's nature. It is a mode of God's revelation. At the same time the physical world is *instrumental* because it is through the earth and all the physical things in it that God effects what He wants to do for the humans. Because the humans are created after the image and likeness of God, they are unique among creatures ; they alone are persons as God is a person. Therefore, God makes the whole of creation an instrument to serve the end of humans.

But one should not ignore the fact that the humans are just created beings. It means that humans are united with the rest of creation and in that respect they also play the symbolic role of all the creation. On the basis of this understanding that the world is both symbolic and instrumental, it is said that physical world has also the sacramental value. The physical world points to God who is both symbolically expressed by the world and is also really operative in the world. Thus the instrumental character of this world implies ultimately the divine involvement in the world.

17. A. R. Peacocke, "A Sacramental view of Nature" in Hugh Montefiore, Man and Nature, Collins, St. James Place, London, 1975, p. 133.

Thirdly the doctrine of Incarnation brings out God's involvement in the created world supremely. Though God is the Creator beyond creation, His historical incarnation shows that He does not stand apart from the created. Rather he is immanent in creation. In as much as Jesus took on a real body of the human flesh, the body of human beings and nature is not to be considered low or unnecessary. But rather it should be treated as worthy of respect and as neccessary for attainment of one's own salvation. That means the organic and holistic understanding of Nature is not alien to Christian understanding of God. The significance of the incarnation of God is that the sacramental character of the material world has been made explicit and perfected. In this sense then one can very well say that the incarnate life of Christ was the supreme Sacrament. For, in this outward historical life God took, the holistic and organic understand -ing of Nature is clearly implied. In the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is both uniquely expressed and uniquely operative[18] that purpose of God that all life and all nature should fulfil.

Particularly, mention must be made of the stress laid by John on the sacramentalism of the Lord Jesus. In the Prologue he says: "The word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us." (Jn. 1:14). Then he gives a series of instances which depict Jesus working many signs that testify to the divine power of love that fills his flesh, and through it, the world:

Transforming the water into wine (Ch.2)
Taking the blow of wind as an example of the spirit's movements (Ch.3)
Discoursing on the living water he has come to give (Ch.4)
Voluntarily going forward to heal a man because he had no one to put him in the miraculous pool (Ch.5),

18. Ibid, p. 134.

Feeding five thousand with merely five loaves and from there going to preach about the living bread, (Ch.6)

Supporting the woman caught in adultery but warning her not to sin any more (Ch.8),

Healing a man born blind through his saliva mixed with mud and water of the river (Ch.9)

Bringing back to life the buried Lazarus (Ch.11)-

Through all these "Signs", Jesus not only fills material things with the power of God but also manifests thereby God's involvemer.t in the world[19]. In fact sacramental {theology is based on this truth that Jesus continues to mainfest his glory through material things.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is another factor that contributes to the Christian tradition which wants to give emphasis on the involvement of God with the world. The Gospels insist that Jesus, after the resurrection could eat and be touched, and thereby bring out the real, historic, space-time event of Resurrection of Jesus. This body was not just an apparition of a ghost. This same body has ascended into heaven, and will one day be coming back in history to judge the living and the dead. At that time our bodies will be raised from the dead. It will be a real physical resurrection. From all these tenets of Christianity it is clear that God has made the body not as something to be despised but rather as a constitutive element of the one organic and holistic world which also speaks of the transcendence of God the Creator.

Finally, the Christian teaching of salvation also implies the organic and holistic world view. The Old Testament clearly establishes that when God determined to save human beings it was never to save them individually,but rather by entering into a covenant with the whole people : the covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:8-17), with the semites in Abraham (Gen 15:7-21), with

19. John Carmody, op. cit, p, 98.

Jews under the leadership of Moses (Ex 19-24). In these different kinds of covenants the one which is of importance to our interest now is the Covenant with Noah. In this Covenant God establishes his relationship explicitly with every living created thing, and also he explicitly mentions his 'covenant with the earth' (v. 13) and all living beings (v. 17). God is interested and involved in all the Creation. Therefore there is no reason to assume that God is cut off from the world and that the creation is not organic and holistic.

Pauline letters explicitly emphasise the value of the whole creation. For example, Colosians 1:15-20 celebrates not only the pre-existence of the Son, his work as Creator and his destiny as the goal of the whole Cosmos, but also as unifier. That means, the risen body of Christ is shown to be not only the origin and destiny of the human beings but also of the whole material world. As William Barclay suggests, the main thrust of this passage is not only having soteriological implications but also some strong cosmological implications.

To quote his own words :

> "Paul uses the strange phrase: "In him all things hold together". This means that not only is the son the agent of creation in the beginning and the goal of creation in the end, but between the beginning and the end, during time as we know it, it is he who holds the world together. That is to say, all the laws by which this world is order and not chaos are an expression of the mind of the Son. The law of gravity and the rest, the laws by which the universe hangs together, are not only scientific laws but also divine".[20]

The Humans' Domineering Attitude Vs. their being just a part of the Eco-system

The conflict between the Biblical world view and that of Ecologists arises not only because of the Bible's emph-

20. William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thesalonians, Theological publications of India, Bangalore, 1994. p. 120.

asis on the transcendence of God, but also because the Bible equally lays emphasis on the uniqueness of human beings and on their domineering attitude to the earth and other creatures. The ecological world view is keen on driving home the point that human species is just a part of the whole system. As such this species should try to maintain the balance between the various parts and that it should learn to function merely as the part never playing the role of the whole system. Therefore now we should consider whether this contention of the Ecologists could also be reconciled within the Christian tradition itself.

It is true that the Christian tradition emphasises the uniqueness of human being created in the image and likeness of God. But it should be noted that according to Christian traditional teaching God is the source of all creation and human beings as well as other creatures share in a common relationship of having the same source. Especially the J tradition of the creation narrative specifies the earth to be the common element from which both human beings and other things are created. If human beings remember that they share a common kinship with other creatures, then there is no reason for taking pride in being unique. God has made me in his image and likeness, true. But it is the same God that has made all things the stone, the star, the tree, the bird etc. So, I need to treat each of those things with their integrity, each thing in its own order, each thing in the way He has made it. To think of any of these things as intrinsically low is really an insult to God who made it. It is only by respecting the order of things as they are I will be really respecting the Maker of this order of things. So, the uniqueness which the Christian tradition speaks of is not a matter of pride moving the humans to sit over the other creatures or to tamper with the order of things in Creation. But rather it is an obligation for the conscious human beings to treat all other things with integrity and deal with them with proper respect due to them.

It is also true that the Bible talks of humans having "dominion" over other life forms (Gen. 1:28). But this power of

dominion may be said to be stemming from God's initial creative purpose for the universe. It was never meant to be a dominion of exploitation. For there are many injunctions from the Bible (e.g. Leviticus 25:8-34) which clearly show that people's power to use land and the produce of the earth was limited. Their despotic totalitarian rule over nature was alien to the Old Testament concept of dominion. Even granted that humans have dominion over the lower order of Creation, the Bible never implies absolute power of dominion. Only God is the sovereign Lord. The humans are merely creatures who are always subject to divine dominion. And they are to use the things on earth as God means them to be used. In the whole of Creation human beings are the conscious and personal beings. Precisely because of this they will have to consciously see all other things of Nature as the gifts given by God. When humans exercise their dominion over nature with this consciousness they will necessarily use them with greater responsibility.

A parallel may be drawn from the parable of the Talents in Mathew 25:14-30. The money did not belong to the servants with whom they were left. They were to use it as they like, but with great responsibility. Hence, they were held accountable to the master. And he did exact accuracy and accountability in their dealing with the gift he had entrusted with them. So also, the whole nature is given under the dominion of human beings. But he or she will have to use them only as sacred gifts and with responsibility and a sense of accountability to God. In this connection it may be useful to keep in mind Karl Barth's observation regarding the gratuity of human life:

> "... the blessing of life is a divine loan unmerited by man. It must always be regarded as a divine act of trust that man may live. And the basic ethical question in this respect is how man will respond to the trust shown him in the fact that he may do so. Will he recognise and appreciate the value of the gift?...

> Will he handle it as a treasure which does not even belong to him of which he can dispose only according to the purpose of the One from whom he has it, and therefore not thoughtlessly nor arbitrarily, but remembering that he must finally give an account of his stewardship and use?[21]

Moreover, the "J" account of creation mentions clearly that the land was entrusted to humans in order that they "may cultivate and guard" it (Gen. 2:15). This means that the so called domineering attitude to earth in "P" narrative is to be coupled with the stewardship attitude.[22] This is the real inculcation of the biblical teaching of creation accounts. To be steward of God means to be accountable to God and to be responsible to Nature. By giving dominion to human beings, God has made humans answerable for the way they use their dominion. That means, humans will have to be cautious in their use of creation. If God is the owner, human dominion is only that of both a servant and a manager. And the manager must be responsible in using the different things of the Earth's household : rock, water, air, tree, bird and beast in their infinite complexity of interrelationship.

This in turn involves that the steward, must have ecological knowledge. Only then will there be a correctway of management with all the intricate decisions required by such manager. At least rudimentary knowledge of ecology is a must. How could one manage the household without knowing something about the household of life which one is to manage? As stewards, the humans are not hedged in on every side by exact rules and rigid regimentation. But there are general guidelines set in the very system itself, and there is certain range of freedom in our managing. Two different stewards might make different decisions but as long as goal is the care of the whole household, both decisions may be correct. As long as the humans draw their principles for

21. Karl Barth Church Dogmatics III/4 T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1961, p. 336.
22. Loren Wiliknson, op. cit. pp 275-325.

management from the creator and his creation, they are given the freedom to be cocreators with God. That is precisely what was implied in the dominion granted to the first humans with regard to their use of nature. That is why there was an injunction placed upon them not to eat the fruits of the central tree in the Garden. This injunction itself may be taken as a command from God that restricts the freedom of the humans and prevents them from an unrestrained use of things based on greed.

In this light then, the dominion given in Gen. 1:28 is poles apart from the kind of right to egoistic exploitation. It is essentially a perfect obedience to the will of God. If the humans abide by the will of the Creator, and use the resources of nature with restriction and limit, they are rewarded by a divinely ordered harmony and abundance in nature. Unfortunately humans disobeyed the law; therefore the conflict both within and without. All creation which was ordered to God through humankind has been unable to attain its purpose because humans have been unwilling to be proper stewards of its bounty for one another.

And the Christian hope is that in Christ as the perfect human being, God's perfect servant-steward, creation is once again oriented throgh humankind to God.[23] He is indeed the unifier who is holding together the whole creation that has already been torn asunder through conflicts. It is up to the humans to realize their responsibility and enter that perfect stewardship of Christ by personal commitment of faith and bind themselves with personal Covenant of love of God in Christ's own spirit. By this we should be able not to work for liberation of human beings from the socio-political oppressions but also for the liberation of the whole cosmos which in Paul's terminology is groaning for[24] the dawning of a new world and to the day of God's lordship over his creation.

23. L. John Topel, op. cit. p. 118.
24. Rom. 8:22.

Part IV: Concluding Remarks

By way of Resuming

After making certain methodological considerations regarding the ecological issue, Part One of this paper brought out two key elements of the ecological world view viz. (i) that Nature is self-integrative, holistic and organic and (ii) that the humans are just a part of the Eco-system. It also demonstrated that ecological changes were due to human interventions, which were themselves claimed to be dependent upon the biblical world-view.

Part Two presented the Biblical view of creation, the Christian world-view namely (i) that God is the transcendent and all powerful Creator of the world and (ii) that human beings share in the uniqueness of God in some measure and therefore have the power of dominion over the world.

Here, we found a challenge thrown to the Christian tradition. Granted that ecological considerations are scientific truths, and given the fact that the two ingredient features of the ecological world-view are in conflict with the two basic features of the biblical world-view, the problem for today's Christians is whether they should give up their tradition or whether it is possible for Christains to find support for the emerging ecological consiousness within the framework of the Christian tradition.

It is in this context that the third part of the paper tried to re-cast the basic ingredients to the Christian worldview. By this it was shown that Christians, without giving up the fundamentals of their faith, could also accept the ecological truths. Thus an attempt was made to resolve the conflict between the Ecological world view and the Biblical world view.

By way of concluding

If my attempt at the proposed synthesis, has proved successful, then it points to the following propositions:

1. Christians need not be dismayed at the conflict that arises between the ecological truths and the traditional truths. The existing resources from within the Christian tradition allow them to develop an ecological reading of their faith so as to envisage a transformed cosmos.

Just as Liberation Theology sought to interpret Christian faith in such a way that it transcends the immediate dimensions of personal salvation to include the world of socio-economic and political reality, there is now a need for Christians to take another step to identify the cosmic claims and the groanings of the Mother Earth within the purview of their faith-consideration.[25]

In other words, God understood by Christianity, is not only one who saves souls from sins; He is not only a God who responded to the cries of the oppressed people, but He is also God of Heaven and Earth who is keen on liberating the Cosmos from the impending ecological disasters.

2. It is high time that Modern Science and Christian Religion deal with the natural world adequately by changing their relation to one another, becoming allies rather than adversaries. Religion need not think that its doctrine of Creation should only centre around God's transcendence of Creation and uniqueness of human beings, but rather the same doctrine of Creation could also give due emphasis on need of our intimacy with nature. In this way the Christian tradition can walk hand in hand with the other religions of East and collaborate with them for ecological peace and harmony. This is how interreligious dialogue will be easily promoted and inter-religious cooperation fostered.

3. This possibility of interpretation of the traditional view of Creation will actualize itself in *ecological option* on the part

25. J. Patmury, 'Mission and Ecology : Rejection or Redemption of the world". in Joseph Mattam & Sebastian Kim, Eds. Dimensions of Mission in India, St. Paul's Bombay, 1995, pp. 125-147.

of Christian tradition. This would imply an understanding of God such that emphasis will not only be laid on the distinction between God and the world but also on the immanent presence of God in the world.

4. The ecological option will also lead the Christians to a new understanding of Christ's mission. The centre of this understanding is not only that Christ is saviour of humankind from personal sins, but also that He is liberator of all kinds of oppression whose victims are both human beings and the mute creation.

5. Accordingly the mission of the Church will also be reinterpreted. This new understanding of Church's mission will inculcate in us greater sensitivity to the rest of Creation not only because the other elements of Creation are related to us as providing us with the sources of survival but also because Christ is the unifier of all things and that he is the Alpha and the Omega of all the Creation.

Over-all Conclusion

If Christian tradition is ready to re-interpret its understanding of God, Christ and its own mission, then surely it would have made its faith relevant to the present-day context of ecological crisis, and contributed to a meaningful and fruitful dialogue with the ecologists. Thus it can also find a resolution of conflict with the ecological world view and work for ecological transformation. In one word, then, a Christian need not necessarily be a Foe of Nature but could certainly be a Friend of Nature!

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