

***Laudato Si'* - A Call for 'Ecological Conversion'**

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Introduction

In his recently published encyclical, Pope Francis voices his serious concern about the burning issues of ecological crisis clamouring for our attention and concrete responses. Pope Francis begins his encyclical by expressing his deep anguish at the way the Earth has been treated: "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" (2).¹ "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." Besides taking stock of the present failures, the root causes for the same need to be grasped firmly. Concrete suggestions are to be put forth and any number of suggestions would be of no help unless there takes place a sincere ecological conversion on the part of the individual and society.

What is Ecology?

It was Ernst Haeckel, the German biologist, who coined the word 'Ecology' in 1866. The term comes from two Greek words, *Oikos*, meaning 'house' or 'home' and *logos* meaning 'reflection' or 'study'. It follows then ecology would mean the study of relation or condition that makes up the habitat of every individual person.² Ecology, in general, refers to 'that branch of biology which deals with the interrelationships between organisms and their environment'.³ Ecology points to the bonds that unite the natural and cultural organisms, stressing thereby the interdependence and interrelationality of all the elements in the network of phenomenon that constitutes the ecological unity. Consequently, everything on this earth is related to every other thing in every respect. For instance, a flower is related to the great explosions fifteen billion years ago.

Ecology tries to put everything in relation to the past, because they have taken billions of years to reach the

present stage and forms. Just as they are related to the past, they are oriented towards the future as well. Hence, we need to cultivate a broader outlook of thinking about developing a form of solidarity with the future generations.⁴ These multiple varieties of understanding of ecology only help us reflect the innumerable explanations of the crisis that is affecting the global Earth.⁵ Now, let us go on with the description of the environmental issues that are affecting us.

Environmental Problems

Green House Effect

It means the rise of earth's surface temperature (Global warming) because of the accumulated carbon dioxide and other gasses in the atmosphere. Due to the rise in the temperature, the upper part of the Ocean and other water bodies get warmed up and gradually the lower level or the deeper level of the ocean and other water bodies too will get heated up. This would lead to climatic changes in various parts of the world⁶ (23). Consequently, it will reduce the resisting power of particularly the old people and chronically ill and debilitated people. Global warming will also result in air pollution causing increase of morbidity and mortality from lung diseases, death of vegetation, trees, plants etc. Climatic changes and its eventual consequences such as, deforestation, desertification and soil erosion will create a very negative impact on the socio-economic and health spheres, leading to migration, starvation, epidemics,

emergence of infectious diseases and ultimately poverty. Our silence to these tragedies affecting our fellow human beings will be a serious loss of sense of our responsibility towards them (25).

Deforestation

Deforestation is undertaken for various reasons, namely, to develop cash crops, to maintain plantations of special type of trees for industrial purposes, for sale of the wood, timber exports, road construction, dam construction, urban development etc.⁷ The *Chipko* movement in the northern part of India, whereby people staged a strong protest to the felling of trees by hugging the trees is well-known to every Indian. There is also the tragedy of destroying of tropical rainforests which are the oldest of planet's biological communities and a powerhouse of biodiversity (38). According to the estimate of United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) done in 1991, the world's tropical rain forests are being destroyed, cut or burned at a rate 42 million acres per year. This has been aptly described as 'ecological Cancer'.⁸

Deforestation has indeed serious consequences. First, it has direct bearing on the poor people who live near the forests, for whom, forests are important resources providing water, firewood, wood for their houses, fruits and so on. For many of them, forest is the dwelling place of their gods. Secondly, forests play a critical role in protecting animal organisms, and in particular tropical rainforests

The Myth of Progress and Wrong Paradigm of Development

Many studies done recently prove that ecological crisis, in India, is mainly due to the single-minded concentration on the economic growth, sidelining completely the environmental sustainability. This growth model leads to massive exploitation of rural environment for the benefit of the rich people and this ultimately destroys the ecological balance. Extraction of ground water with abandoned, reducing rivers to sewage drains, spread of mining activities with little safeguards, deforestation and displacement of millions of people are among the serious consequences of the recently accelerated economic growth in India.¹¹ Industrial pollution is on the increase alarmingly. Everyone would remember well the havoc created by the gas leak in Bhopal. According to comparable data available, air pollution has risen so high that India has been rated as the most polluted among the 132 countries. India's natural resources are estimated to have been shrunk by 6 per cent in value terms between 1998 and 2008. This is just a 'harbinger of things still to come'. Many environmental damages are likely to get accelerated in the near future. Indian government's plan to build dams in hundreds on the Ganges is a case in point!¹²

And so Guha observes:

After economic liberalization... environmental safeguards have been systematically dismantled. The ministry of environment and forests has cleared destructive projects with abandon. Penalties on errant

industries are virtually never enforced. Although by law, every new project has to have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), these, as the then environment minister Jairam Ramesh candidly admitted in March 2011, are a 'bit of a joke', since 'under the system we have today, the person who is putting up the project prepares the report'.¹³

The modern state in its approach to development is in close companionship with science and technology, which tries to overpower, manipulate and exploit the nature. This was not the case with the traditional societies, which always lived with ecologically sensitive knowledge system. The ecological movements contend that the economic system that is followed widely today is such that it cannot stimulate development without social exploitation internally and globally and without ravaging the environment. It cannot produce wealth without at the same time generating poverty. The readily available by-products of the industrial systems are garbage, toxic and radioactive wastes, acid rain, atmospheric contamination, etc. which deteriorate the quality of life.¹⁴ The worst affected in the Indian society are the poor, the Dalits and the Tribals.

The myth of progress has so overwhelmed us that it is no longer 'religion but growth that has become the opium of the people'.¹⁵ Nuclear weapons are manufactured and stockpiled; radio-active and toxic wastes are dumped into the oceans and in the homelands of the rural poor and the powerless people; acid rains destroy plants, animals, lakes, rivers and human beings; major cities are full of toxic fumes.

Three-Mile Island, the Bikini Atoll, Bhopal and Chernobyl are symbols of human sacrifice demanded by the economic and political system that we have adopted. They are ominous warnings of what is in store for us in the future, if we continue to go on with the profit-oriented and unethical economic and political system.¹⁶

Human being is considered just economic beings, *homo economicus*. The truth is, there is more to being human than just the rational calculations in terms of costs and benefits. The commercialization of the modern society has so overwhelmed us that we are often confused between the standard of living and quality of life. We are caught up in consumerist trap. We are not so much alarmed by our precarious situations because we believe that we will be freed by science and technology, forgetting that it is science and technology that has created the problem we are facing now¹⁷ (108, 109, 110). Pope Francis laments that we have developed a tendency to believe that increase in technological power means increase in ‘security, usefulness, welfare, and vigour...’ (105). The truth is that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well”.... “Because, our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience” (105). Cartesian and Baconian advocacy of science has severed the responsibility of human beings towards their mother Earth of which they are a part. In fact, one can notice a close link between

science, power and violence. According to this view, "nature was an enemy which needed to be defeated and tortured so that its secrets or powers could be extracted for the benefit of the human race."¹⁸

Absence of Just Relationship with Earthly Community

Gandhian Philosophy would hold that the ecological problems have their roots primarily in the individual behaviour and attitudes: a utilitarian attitude towards nature as well as institutionalizing of domination and hierarchy and the authoritarian mentality. A greed-based economic system and unbridled production and consumption pattern will stretch the earth beyond its regenerative capacity. "The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept limits imposed by reality" (204). Unless there is a huge 'rethink' and check on this system, obsession with such consumerist lifestyle will only lead to violence and extinction of human species (204). After all, nature can still go on without even human species. Greed justifies instrumentalization, which, in turn, goes along with manipulation and negation of equity, as power and domination are at play. "As the 'love of money is the root of all evil' (1Tim 6:10), so is greed at the root of the ecological crisis."¹⁹

It is said well, Justice is actualized in just relationship. There are different angles to be studied here. In the first place, as the Pope contends, environmental destruction

necessarily leads to economic exploitation and vice versa. He quotes the Pastoral Letter of the Bolivian Bishops' Conference: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (48). This point is clear in the case of deforestation and depletion of fishing reserves directly affecting the small fishing communities. When there is massive deforestation, the poor are driven out from their habitat.

At this juncture, it needs to be made clear that the Pope is very emphatic about affirming the universal destination of the goods to which is subordinate the right to private property. Everyone has a right to use the goods of the world.²⁰ The Bible says that earth is God's. This belief relativizes any claim for absolute ownership. Pope Paul VI is very emphatic: "Private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditional right."²¹ "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, *without excluding or favouring anyone*" (93). Pope John Paul II asserts that "The goods of this world are originally meant for all.... Private property, in fact, is under a 'social mortgage' which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the universal destiny of Goods."²² Secondly, there cannot be just relationship between unequal partners. That is to say, the relationship between human beings and Mother Earth is not that of equal partners. On the contrary, human beings

dominate and exploit the earth – one of the principal causes of ecological crisis. This will be taken up little later.

Unequal Distribution of the Population and Poverty Growth

While the world would hold population explosion as one of the causes of the ecological crisis, Pope Francis would not blame it. He would quite rightly point out that it is the imbalance in the density of the population that needs to be held responsible for the immediately noticeable effect in the loss and degradation of common property and natural resources (50). Due to the unprecedented growing migration from villages into cities for various reasons, the country becomes more urbanized. Due to this, the local governments will have enormous pressures to provide for all the infrastructural needs such as housing, water supplies, sewage treatment, waste management, public transportation etc. It would be unable to provide for health-care, social programmes needed by these *extra people*. Due to this people will suffer from heavy pollution, and natural hazards. The worst affected are the urban poor who will have to face malnutrition and other environmental hazards. Social scientists have observed that population growth in urban centres perpetuates poverty. How are we going to manage this situation is the challenge before us.²³

To blame population growth instead of over consumption and unequal distribution of the resources would mean to escape facing the issue (50). Therefore, it is the social and ecological impact of high rates of consumption among the

rich that should really worry us. Maguire's contention is that the present ecological jeopardy is grounded in an unjust distribution of wealth and power between the affluent few and the numerous many. The growing gap between the rich and the poor is reaching its new heights. This makes him conclude that 'the overconsumption of a few impoverishes the many'.²⁴

Absence of Interdependence

The whole creation is the result of God's love and from a definite choice and never from chaos or chance (77). "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (Wis 11: 24). This shows that both humans and nature are meant to grow and develop through mutual interaction. Even, biological evolution holds that no single species is independent or self-enclosed or static; everything has to undergo a change and mutation. Not even the human beings are an exception to this, thereby reinforcing our relationality in the universe and interdependence of the entire creation. Viewed from this evolutionary perspective, anthropocentrism has no place and we realize how much we depend upon the various elements of the universe – earth, air, fire, water, sky, - *Panchabhuta* in the Hindu Tradition – for our very existence. The Pope points to this truth, citing the Catechism: "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the

sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, in the service of each other"²⁵(86).

Although we humans stand out from other creatures, being endowed with self-knowledge, self-possession and giving themselves freely as gifts, as creatures (65), we belong to a universal family, as reiterated by the Pope: "God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement" (89). This is very much in the consciousness of our primeval people who have a sincere attachment and relationship with the Mother Earth. Primeval people consider the earth as their mother; the earth is personified, respected, praised and worshipped by the primeval people. In their view point, the total human population and all that grows on the earth are the crops of God brought forth and raised by the Mother Earth. They have even a kind of filial attachment with Mother Earth. In short, the land is central to their history, identity, spirituality, culture, economy and to their very survival. To regard earth as a commodity that can be sold and purchased is unimaginable for the tribal communities.²⁶

And yet, the attitude of 'might is right' has given rise to inequality, injustice and violence. The nature has come to be viewed as a source of profit and gain, causing serious

consequences to the society (82). We can no longer see ourselves as rulers over nature but must think of ourselves as gardeners, caretakers, mothers, fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends of a world that while giving us life and sustenance, also depends increasingly on us in order to continue both for itself and for us.²⁷

In conclusion, in some very basic sense, the human project and the earth project are one single project; if the earth project cannot succeed, neither can human project succeed! That this has not been adequately understood by us is the real challenge before us today. "We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth" (109). Against the above sketched background, it is amply clear that there is an urgent need to look into the model of development that country has pursued and a move from a spirituality that alienates us from the natural world to the one that makes us intimate with it, from the spirituality that speaks of verbal revelation of the divine to the spirituality that believes in the revelation of the divine in the visible world around us and from a spirituality that is concerned only with human justice to a spirituality that includes the justice of the larger earth community is of absolute necessity!²⁸

Towards an Eco-Theology

The problems discussed above are far from being solved, unless there is a determined and sustained political will (54, 175, 181, 196, 197). The religions of India, too, have to come together and develop an appropriate eco-theology (199, 201). This would presuppose that the religions make a serious introspection and find out to what extent they have been responsible for the crisis by promoting anthropocentric view (200). Eventually, there has to come about also a change of paradigm in our very manner of relating to the Earth. For, "Today, in a word, the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle" (206).

Eco-Justice Vs Social Justice

The understanding of 'Justice' needs to be expanded so as to include eco-justice. Both human justice and Eco-justice are inextricably interrelated. To understand and practice eco-justice, we need a vision of unity of the entire reality. A separation of one from the other is certainly to our detriment. Boff puts this in his own way:

Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common.... Both discourses have as their starting point a cry: The cry of the poor for life, freedom and beauty (cf. Ex 3: 7) and the cry of the earth (cf. Rom 8: 22-23). Both seek liberation of the poor... and a liberation of the Earth.²⁹

“Social injustice leads to ecological injustice and vice versa.”³⁰ The Pope voices his strong concern for equal rights of all creatures of the universe. “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (118). “It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted” (92). Hence, overcoming the false arguments and developing a new synthesis are imperative today, given the seriousness of the crisis. Concern for the environment needs to be accompanied by the concern for our fellow human being (91).

Developing Eco-Spirituality

We need to develop an eco-spirituality that comes from awareness that God is present in all creation and he is the origin of all things (Jn 1: 13) (233, 234), as taught by St John of the Cross (234). The Spirit is immanent in everything – a *Panentheistic* and not *Pantheistic* understanding: “Not everything is God, but God is in everything.... God flows through all things; God is present in everything and makes of all reality a temple”.³¹ The Earth spirituality is well expressed in the *beatitudes* which are blessings on those who are not after consuming and possessing things, who feel great sorrow over the loss of species and destruction of eco-system, who learn to walk

over the Earth with gentleness rather than with vandalistic attitude, who maintain right relationships with other beings, whose pure hearts seek a clarity of vision about the world order, who learn to live at peace with minimal violence to any other creature (225), thus maintaining integrity and a deep sense of gratitude in spite of persecution and ridicule (227). Our belief in *resurrection* also provides a basis for Earth spirituality.³²

That is, our cycle of life and death involving decomposition of organic matter and its assimilation of food confirms our 'kinship with all earth creatures.... (It) spans the ages, linking our material substance with all the beings that have gone before us on earth and even to the dust of exploding stars'.³³ Leonardo da Vinci is quoted saying: "We may say that the earth has a spirit of growth, and that its flesh is the soil; its bones are the successive strata of the rocks... its cartilage is the tufa stone; its blood the waters of its vein."³⁴ Such a spirituality, recognizing the Self as part of the whole, needs to be cultivated. The rich heritage of Christian spirituality developed over twenty centuries has a precious contribution to make to Christians and lead them to sound '*ecological conversion*' (216 217).

A Life of Communion and Common Relationship with Mother Earth

An attitude of perfect solidarity, 'universal fraternity' and communion with nature on the part of the humans has become imperative today, after all God is, as Jesus

has taught us, our common Father (203, 228). It will help forge a new relationship with the mother earth with a sense of shared responsibility (229). This presupposes an *ecological conversion* on the part of the individual and community which will foster the spirit of generosity and sacrifice (220). Therefore, it is a high time that the meaning of community gets widened. "Communion and community are no more to be viewed as inter-human realities; they need to be taken as applying to the relationships of humans to the Earth with all biotic and a-biotic realities inhabiting in its womb."³⁵ Such a communion with the Mother Earth will also lead to a profound experience with the divine³⁶ (240).

Similar common relationship is expressed by different religions. For instance, Hindu tradition speaks of *lokasamgraha*, that is to say, world maintenance to which each individual person has to give his share.³⁷ Humans need to develop a philosophy of life, and a new universal consciousness of 'Dharma and Karma' that 'what we sow, we reap,' and 'everything is connected to everything else.' Such recognition will also send a message that people living in any part of the world are brothers and sisters and there will certainly emerge a collective responsibility.³⁸

Kinship with Mother Earth and not merely Stewardship

Ecologically sensitive biblical scholars have brought to our attention that a rereading of Gen 1:26-28 is urgent to develop an attitude of stewardship towards nature (67). A paradigm shift from human-centred approach to an earth-

centred approach is urgently called for³⁹ (68, 69). But some of the eco-theologians go a step further and insist that one has to transcend even the stewardship model of relationship with earth, as there is again a chance of being 'infected' by anthropocentrism here. Therefore, one needs to move towards *Kinship with the Mother Earth*. St Francis of Assisi is an inspiration on this count! He always experienced a deep kinship with all living and non-living creatures of the universe (66). In his famous work, *Canticle of Brother Sun*, one could read that inanimate creatures are addressed by sibling terms (87). Such a relationship of *Kinship* is justified, as Edwards argues by referring to the work of Rosemary Radford and Elizabeth Johnson who support the notion of a 'community of creation'.⁴⁰ This is far from realization, unless there is personal conversion which entails the recognition of our tainted past, faults, and failures and leads to sincere repentance and willingness to change (218).

Towards Ecological Economics Transcending Sustainable Development

The ecologists propose that human beings need to move beyond 'sustainable development' that ensures the survival of humanity and focuses more about *intergenerational equity*. The Pope voices his serious concern that we cannot speak of sustainable development apart from *intergenerational solidarity* and this is not just optional but an imperative and fundamental question of justice (159).

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two concepts: The concept of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.⁴¹

Clearly, the concept of sustainable development is tied to anthropocentrism. This goes to show the least regard that the proponents of this ideal have for eco-justice. The aesthetic perspective of looking at nature as having value in themselves has to, fundamentally, characterize our relationship with nature.

...aesthetic perspective needs to percolate in all relationships of human beings to nature, including economic activity, and this would ultimately enhance and heighten the quality of human life, which is not to be measured on the basis of the capacity to extract maximum benefit from nature. Such an orientation is conducive to the practice of eco-justice.⁴²

It follows, then, that to have such an attitude of valuing nature in itself calls for *ecological economics* – the one that cares about the earth’s regenerative capacity and directs all economic processes with eco-sensitivity – in contrast to the prevailing dominant paradigm of liberal capitalism that least bothers about promotion of eco-justice and ultimately

social justice. Ecological economics does not pretend to be value-free; its preference is evident: the well-being and sustainability of our household, planet Earth. Ecological economics is a human enterprise that seeks to maximize the optimal functioning of the planet's gifts and services for all users. Ecological economics, then, is first of all a vision of how human beings ought to live on planet Earth in light of the perceived reality of where and how we live. We live in, with and from the Earth,⁴³ for which, humanity is urgently in need of an *ecological conversion* (217).

In a similar vein, Sen says that environment preservation should not be merely a question of *passive preservation* but also one of *active pursuit*. When developmental activities are pursued, sometimes, destructive consequences to nature accompany them. But, to check the environmental destruction and to enhance environment lies within our human power. He goes on to say that 'our power to intervene with effectiveness and reasoning can be substantially enhanced by the process of development itself. He substantiates his argument with concrete examples. To cite one, increased female literacy and women's employment can bring down fertility rate, which in the long run can help reduce the pressure on global warming and the destruction of natural habitats. Therefore, development, when viewed from the angle of increasing the effective freedom of people, ensures the constructive agency of the 'people engaged in environment-

friendly activities directly within the domain of developmental achievements'.⁴⁴ For true development is for expansion of human freedom and capability to lead a qualitative life. In this sense, both development and environment should be complementary to and interdependent on each other and never to be seen on a collision.⁴⁵

What can Religions do about Ecological Crisis?

Without doubt, all the religions and cultures have contributed to the present ecological crisis. The various religious traditions can play a major role in revisioning a sustainable future. They cannot just stop with explaining certain traditional doctrines from the evolutionary perspectives but must make serious analysis about what type of attitudes and praxis can be developed, worked out and applied (200). This has to be done by common engagement of all the religious traditions. This means that they bring out the best of their insights into the basic relations of humans to the nature and undertake the courageous process of re-interpreting some of their foundational conceptions regarding God, human beings and nature⁴⁶ (201).

Hinduism on Ecology

Without exceptions, all the major religions of the world have eco-friendly attitude in their religious resources. The Hindu tradition encourages planting of trees and holds that

polluting the rivers which are holy is a sin. It considers all human beings to be the sustainer of interrelationships among various species on earth.⁴⁷ The *Advaitic* concept makes it crystal clear that God and the world are viewed neither as one nor as two realities. The relationship between the two, to put it in an aesthetic image, is exactly similar to the one between the dancer and the dance.⁴⁸ In olden days, not only the common folk have lived with a great sense of ecology, but also the rulers and Kings lived with environmental ethics. Despite this fact, the influence of alien cultural values, materialism, consumerism and corporate desire have contributed for the loss of ecological sense among Indian mass.⁴⁹

Christianity on Ecology

According to a few ecologists, Christianity shares the blame for most part for its negative contribution to humans' attitude of domination and exploitation of the nature. The Christianity, in general, is not to be blamed for what has happened. But the Christianity influenced by Western Enlightenment giving rise to anthropocentrism so as to make it serve its project did contribute to the misinterpretation of Gen 1:28.⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Pieris argues that a limited understanding of rights theory – this holds that *rights* are exclusive prerogative of the humans – drawn from scholastic theology based on the *misinterpretation of Gen 1:28* is the principal reason for Christianity's 'eco-hostile theory'. He goes on to suggest that the context in

the first book of the Bible clearly shows that God shares His responsibility over creation with humans.⁵¹

The Biblical terms *Kabash* (subdue) and *Rada* (rule or dominate) require a re-interpretation. Particularly, the term *Rada* needs such re-interpretation in the light of current ecological crisis. It has to be re-read as 'caring'. Because, 'caring' would give constructive meanings, namely, a) to empathizing with someone – implying profound identification with the other, b) recognizing the boundaries of one's freedom and power and finally, and c) tending, that is to say, ensuring everything its proper place⁵² (67).

In the creation account, God taking rest is a clear indication of his sense of security and the confidence he has in his masterpiece, i.e., the human beings. "God, far from human calculations and comparisons, relies on human participation and care in the exercise of dominion over creation."⁵³ Both Humans and earth need rest, because it helps humans to get energized and earth to rejuvenate its fertility. If humans respect this rhythm in nature, then there are both eco-justice and social justice. As is contended, the code of holiness in Leviticus 25 demands the application of the Sabbath and Jubilee laws to both humans as well as nature.⁵⁴

We read in the Acts of the Apostles about the immanence of God to His creation. "He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries

of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:26-27). The incarnation of Jesus Christ shows that God is both immanent and transcendent in creation; the whole creation lives and moves and has its being in Him. Catholic Social Teachings of the Church have developed an integral humanistic approach on ecological issues. Whatever may be the case, Christianity does have the insights to build a sound Eco-theology.

Public Discussion, Media and Political Engagement

The role of public discussion is central to ensure any achievement of demands of eco-justice. Further, to understand better the deepest roots of our present failures and ill effects of environmental degradations affecting the people – this is not always easy to grasp – a vigorous exercise of public reasoning is a must and it will also facilitate an enlightened wider participation in the political debate (26). Clarifying the means for the pursuit of social reasoning, agitation, public meetings, media campaigns, strikes, demonstration, public-interest litigations etc., could form part of the public discussion. Given India's shockingly defective record in poverty reduction and checking environmental degradations, environmental questions should become lively subjects of public discussion.

The more urgent need for public involvement (state involvement) in areas such as deforestation, pollution of different forms, waste disposal, public hygiene, and health

education should be brought to the attention of the democratic politics by collective public reasoning. We know that such a vibrant public discussion through debates and arguments in today's context can be initiated and expanded by an active Indian media. Understandably, media and investigative journalism could create greater impact by playing an active role and exposing the lapses in virtually every department of life to the general public.

Pope calls to our attention that the present failure in ecology is, for most part, to be attributed to the weakened political will (54). A Healthy and far sighted politics capable of an integrated approach to handling the various aspects of the crisis is certainly the need of the hour (197). The political authorities should be able to transcend their short term gain and results with ulterior motives and honestly work towards 'reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming pressure and bureaucratic inertia' (181).

True that along with the institutional means, the behavioural patterns also matter a great deal (215), as Amartya Sen points out, "Indeed, we have good reasons for recognizing that the pursuit of justice is partly a matter of the gradual formation of behavioural patterns."⁵⁵ So, what is needed most is to create a spirituality of transformational attitudes and values among the people in such a way that they pursue policies and programmes sensitive to the protection of the environment. A serious rethinking of

consumeristic and utilitarian life style is an urgent task in view of recycling process. There need to be a thorough attitudinal change and transformation in the mindset and lifestyle of the people; human beings need to form firm convictions that 'less is more' and develop 'a capacity to be happy with little' (222). The ecological conversion aimed at is, therefore, also communitarian conversion (219). And yet, the role of political engagement in addressing environmental issues can hardly be replaced by anything, as the change of mindset alone can be thoroughly inadequate without the political leadership. Both should be complementary to each other, one reinforcing the other very substantially for a successful practice of eco-justice.

Conclusion

The present pathetic situation must make us realize that essential scale of values must be: conservation and not consumerism; need and not greed; enabling power and not dominating power; integrity of creation and not exploitation of nature. The present ecological crisis compels us that we choose a sustainable form of developmental model, and be committed to values of eco-justice and eco-spirituality. Thus, the discussion on interreligious eco-theology comes to an end with the following eloquent words:

The seeds are calling out from inside the earth: God is calling out from inside the seeds. Set him free. A field awaits liberation from you, and a machine awaits its soul from you. And you can no longer be saved, if you don't save

them... the value of this transient world is immense and immeasurable: it is from this world that God hangs on in order to reach us; it is in this world that God is nurtured and increased... matter is the bride of my God: together they struggle, they laugh and mourn, crying through the nuptial chamber of the flesh.⁵⁶

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Footnotes

¹ Here and later in this article, the number within brackets refer to the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

² Boff. L., *Ecology and Liberation*, New York, Orbis Books, 1995, p. 9. See also Sarkar. R. L., *The Bible, Ecology, and Environment*, New Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, p. 59.

³ Lima. E. D., "Ecological Concerns and Jesus' Vision of a New Society: Making Space for all," in Mattam. J. & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns: An Indian Christian Response*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1998, p. 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵ Aguirre. A. C., "Eco-theology: Epistemological Approaches," in *Concilium*, no. 3, 2009, p. 57.

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¹¹ Dreze. J. & Sen. A., *An Uncertain Glory, India and Its Contradictions*, London, Penguin Books, 2014, pp. 41-42; Abraham. K. C., "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," in Hallman. D. G. (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, New York, Orbis Books, 1994, pp. 66-67.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Guha. R., "Terminal Damage," in *Hindustan Times*, 24 July, 2012.

¹⁴ Michael. S. M., "Christianity as a Movement: Mission for the 21st Century," in *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 74, no. 12, 2010, p. 918.

¹⁵ Heredia. R., "Towards an Ecological Consciousness: Religious, Ethical, and Spiritual Perspectives (II)," in *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 55, no. 10, 1991, p. 570.

¹⁶ Statement of the ITA, in Mattam. J., & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns*, p. 137. See also. Rayan. S., "The Earth is the Lord's," in Hallman. D. G. (ed.), *Ecotheology*, p. 145; Michael. S. M., "Christianity as a Movement," p. 918.

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²⁰ Cf. Francis., *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii gaudium*, no. 189: AAS 105 (2013), pp. 1099.

²¹ Paul VI., *Encyclical Letter, Populorum Progressio*, 26 March, 1967, no. 23: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 268-269. Pope Leo XIII defended it as a natural right in a completely different context so as to defend the dignity of human persons. Cf. Francis., *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 189: AAS 105 (2013), p. 1099.

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²³ Dwivedi. O. P., "Hindu Religion and Environmental Well-Being," in Gottlieb. R. S. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, Oxford University Press, New York 2006, p. 174.

²⁴ Maguire. D. C., "Population, Consumption, Ecology," in Hessel. D. T, & Ruether. R. R. (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Wellbeing of the Earth and Humans*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 405-406. See also Mische. P. M., "The Integrity of Creation: Challenges and Opportunities for Praxis," in Hessel., & Ruether. (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 592-593; Schramm. J.

B. M., "Incentives, consumption Patterns, and Population Policies: A Christian Ethical Perspective," in Hessel, & Ruether. (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 440-441.

²⁵ See also Catechism of the Catholic Church, 340

²⁶ Vadakumcherry. J., "Primeval People: Keepers of Mother Earth," in Mattam. J. & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns*, pp. 44-46. See also Painadath. S., "Ecosophy," in Mattam. J., & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns*: p. 94; Longchar. W., "Natural Resources: Perspectives of Primeval Traditions," in *Jeevadhara*, vol. 60, no. 235, 2010, pp. 28-32.

²⁷ McFague. S., *Models of God*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1979, p. 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁹ Boff. L., *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, New York, Orbis Books, 1997, p. 104.

³⁰ *Idem.*, *Ecology and Liberation: a New Paradigm*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 25.

³¹ Boff. L., *Ecology and Liberation*, p. 51. Thomas Berry shares the same idea. See Berry. T., *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, New York, Bell Tower, 1999, p. 115. Vatican is not very much in support of this opinion because, it might play down the transcendence of God. But eco-theologians strongly argue that it need not be! Authentic Christian faith says that God is not only transcendent but also immanent. Dorr. D., *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching*, New York, Orbis Books, 2012, p. 435.

³² Darragh. N., "An Ascetic Theology, Spirituality, and Praxis," in *Concilium*, vol. 3, 2009, pp. 80-81.

³³ Gajiwala. A. L., "Making a Path to the Womb: Eco-Feminism and its Implications," in Mattam. J., & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns*, p. 56.

³⁴ As quoted in Gajiwala. A. L., "Making a Path to the Womb," in Mattam. J., & Kavunkal. J. (eds.), *Ecological Concerns*, p. 57.

³⁵ Wilfred. F., *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times*, New Delhi, ISPCK, 2010, p. 155. The same idea is shared by Amaladoss. Amaladoss. M., *Life in Freedom*, p. 52.

³⁶ See also Johnson. E. A., *Ask the Beasts. Darwin and the God of Love*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2014.

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³⁸ Dwivedi. O. P., "Hindu religion and Environmental Well-Being," in Gottlieb. R. S. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 173 & 175. See also. Maguire. D. C., "Population, Religion and Ecology," in Gottlieb. R. S. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 319.

³⁹ Singarayar. J., "A Christian Response to Global Warming," in *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 75, no. 12, 2011, pp. 906 & 908-909. See also Rhoads. D. M., & Rossing. B. R., "A Beloved Earth Community: Christian Mission in an Ecological Age," in Kalu. O.

U., Vethanayahamony. P., & Chia. E. K. (eds.), *Mission After Christendom*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 135; Titus. J., "Divine Agenda for Ecology in Genesis 1-3," in *Indian Theological Studies*, vol. 67, no. 4, 2010, pp. 322-323.

⁴⁰ Dorr., *Option for the Poor*, p. 433; Edwards. D., *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, p. 24. Dorr, for his part, prefers to use the term 'partnership' to describe the relationship of humans with the Earth. p. 437.

⁴¹ As quoted in Wilfred. F., *Asian Public Theology*, pp. 159-160.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 160. See also *Idem.*, "Eco-Justice," p. 13.

⁴³ Knitter. P. F., & Muzaffar. C. (eds.), *Subverting Greed. Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, New York, Orbis Books, 2002, p. 127.

⁴⁴ Sen. A., *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 248-249.

⁴⁵ Dreze. J., & Sen. A., *An Uncertain Glory*, pp. 42-44.

⁴⁶ Tucker. M. E., & Grim. J. (eds.), *The Christian Future and the fate of earth*, New York, Orbis books, 2009, pp. 44-45 & 53. See also Wilfred. F., *Asian Public Theology*, pp. 305 & 308.

⁴⁷ Gosling. D. L., *Religion and Ecology in India and Southeast Asia*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 163-164. See also Woloschak. G. E., "God of Life: Contemplating Evolution, Ecology, Extinction," in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2013, pp. 157-158.

⁴⁸ Wilfred. F., "Eco-theology," p. 49.

⁴⁹ Dwivedi. O. P., "Hindu Religion," in Gottlieb. R. S. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁰ Wilfred. F., *Asian Public Theology*, p. See also *Idem.*, "Eco-theology," pp. 49-50.

⁵¹ Pieris. A., "Re-Visiting the Faith-Justice Mission: One More Appeal for a Paradigm Shift," in *Third Millennium*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2012, pp. 11-12. Italics added.

⁵² Ancheta. R. R., "Sustainability Ethics and the Eco-Feminists Ethics of Care," in *Journal of Dharma*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2013, p. 144. See also Titus. J., "Divine Agenda for Ecology," pp. 316-318.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

⁵⁴ Pieris. A., "Re-Visiting the Faith-Justice Mission," p. 12.

⁵⁵ Sen. A., *The Idea of Justice*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ As quoted in Gottlieb. R. S. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 113. Pope Francis does explicate the same idea in nos 235 & 236.