

THE IMMORTAL DIVINE SPIRIT IN ALL THINGS (WIS 11:21-12:2) AGAINST 'TYRANNICAL ANTHROPOCENTRICISM' (LAUDATO SÍ, 68)

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Abstract

Disproportionate emission of greenhouse gases has impacted very negatively on humans, animals and the entire environment. Humans perpetuate environmental degradation through their actions; and terminal ailments have become commonplace.

Some environmentalists fault the anthropology of the Judeo-Christian Scripture or religion, accusing it of tyrannical anthropocentrism, which encourages humans to exploit the environment all the more. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Laudato Sí*, has rightly pointed out that this is a wrong interpretation of the Bible. He has rather called all humans to work together to protect the dignity of all creatures.

This study has affirmed the Pope's assertion through an in-depth exegetical study of Wis 11:21-12:2, a text that asserts the "immortal divine spirit" in all things. Every created thing has its immortal form in the divine mind that created it for a specific purpose. The form remains even when human beings can no longer see the matter. This study establishes a strong footing for authentic environmental theology. Consequently humans should not abuse any creature. Practical things that individuals could do daily to care for the environment are discussed.

Keywords: Divine Spirit, Environment, Environmental Theology, *Laudato Sí*, Pantheism, Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis

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Introduction

Global warming due to the disproportionate emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere has a lot of negative effect on humans, animals and, in fact, the entire environment. Human beings exploit the earth through desertification, random killing of creatures, wastages and 'throw-away' lifestyle, the consort of consumerism. Some sicknesses like cancer which used to be rare are now rampant due to toxins, atmospheric pollutions and application of all kinds of hazardous chemicals. Wars, especially ones fought with nuclear weapons, devastate humanity and its environment. All these are not amoral actions.

To compound the above problems, some commentators on environmental crises have accused the Judeo-Christian Holy Writ and doctrine of unlimited anthropocentrism that encourages and supports human exploitation of other creatures. This paper debunks this accusation and elaborates instead on how the Bible impresses upon humans the dignity of nonhumans.

In his new encyclical, *Laudato Sí* (LS), Pope Francis states, "Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures" (LS, 68). This study is to deepen his statement and propose solutions to environmental challenges. The best text is Wis 11:21-12:2, where is found the affirmation of the presence of the divine spirit in all things, especially 12:1. The text is analyzed exegetically; and then with the help of the works of theologians, environmental commentators, religious leaders, especially Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, some ways of establishing a better rapprochement between humans and nonhumans are expatiated on.

The Background of the Issues in LS

Today, the world basks in amazing economic, technological and scientific advancements; but their concomitant ecological disasters are gradually and steadily turning against humans, hence the need for authentic and progressive social and moral ethics to regulate them (LS, 4). This is why Pope Francis, first Pope to devote an encyclical to environmental issues is calling for a global ecological conversion which leads to an authentic human ecology. The passionate appeal is made to all humans whom the Creator gives the stewardship of all his creatures. This is why he addresses the encyclical to all peoples, irrespective of faith, race and other affiliations. The Pope stresses the contributions of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who asks all,

to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which 'entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God's world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion.'¹

The Crux of the Section, "The Wisdom in the Biblical Accounts" (LS, 65-75)

In LS 65-75, the Pope gives a biblico-theological basis for the Church's interest in environmental questions. According to him, the Bible emphasizes not just the dignity of the human person (Jer 1:5), created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), but also the dignity of all creatures, since everything God created was very good (Gen 1:31). Consequently, "human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (LS, 66). Sin ruptured these relationships; and hostility, which was foreign to the original relationship between God, humanity and the other creatures, set in (LS, 70). Today's environmental and ecological crisis is a continuation of that hostility which sin causes.

The accusation that the Bible supports man's exploitation of nature through its injunction, "subdue it, and have dominion" (Gen 1:28), is a distorted interpretation. There is also the injunction of "tilling and keeping it" (Gen 2:15). While 'tilling' refers to cultivating, 'keeping' denotes governing, caring, protecting and preserving. "This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" (LS, 67). There are injunctions about rescuing animals in danger (Deut 22:4) and protecting the mother bird with the young (Deut 22:6). Sabbath and sabbatical year were meant even for animals and lands (Ex 23:12; Lev 25:1-4), and jubilee for the people was accompanied with the restoration of sold properties (Lev 25:10-13, 23) (LS, 71). By their mere existence, creatures give glory to God, who rejoices in his works (Ps 104:31). All creatures, like sun, moon, stars and waters, praise the Lord, who created them (Ps 148:3-5). Humans should not claim unlimited or absolute power over other creatures and trample them underfoot (LS, 75).

Consequently, Pope Francis declares that the Bible does not teach "tyrannical anthropocentrism." His exposition of the Bible with

¹John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press 2012; LS, 9.

regard to environmental questions is highly commendable. However, what he has given could be deepened. So, this paper studies exegetically Wisdom 11:21-12:2, which offers the fundamental reason why humans should love and protect their environment.

The Context of Wisdom 11:21-12:2

This pericope is within the big section of the book of Wisdom, chapters 10-19, which depicts the Wisdom of God at work in history. In Wis 10:1-11:3, the sage gives a historical resume of (pre-) patriarchal personages, most of whom he constantly designates as *ho dikaios* (the righteous one, verses 4-6, 10, 13). He stresses that it was wisdom that saved these people from all the dangers they encountered. Even though the first humans sinned, it was the compassionate wisdom that saved and restored them to the custodianship of the whole creation, owing to their repentance.

Crenshaw considers 11:15-16:15 as a big pericope, where God uses nature in general as plagues for Egyptian oppressors but as a means of salvation for the Israelite fugitives.² In spite of God's plagues on his creatures, he still shows them mercy. Wis 11:21-12:2 stands out within its big pericope because it explains to some extent God's actions in history. It is also a refutation of the existence of any other god, in the case of those who worship idols and attribute God's work to them. It is the mighty hand of God that created everything out of his love. He gives a direction to the entire universe.

The Exegesis of Wisdom 11:21-12:2

This text points out in a preeminent way the importance of all creatures. The frequency of the adjective that depicts totality (*pas* - all), used both attributively and substantively, buttresses the main point that God loves and sustains all that he created. The text brings out the enormity of God's power, His mercy and protection as regards all creatures. The peak of God's benevolence is that His spirit is in all things.

The Enormity of God's *Kratos* (Power) over the Whole World (Wis 11:21-22)

In verse 21, the sage begins with the expression of God's might. *To ischuein* (to be powerful) is always a characteristic of God. *Pantote*

²James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, 166. He refers to also James M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences*, *Analecta Biblica* 41, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970.

(always) shows that there is not even a second that God loses grip of all that he created. The earth and all within it are the Lord's (Ex 9:29; 19:5; Deut 10:14; Pss 24:1; 50:12; 89:11; 1 Chron 29:11; Job 41:11; 1 Cor 10:26). He is in perpetuity in charge of all. With a metaphor, God is described as one who wields power in his hand; and no one will withstand or oppose (*antistēsetai*) him. God does mighty deeds with his arms (Lk 1:51; Jn 12:38; Acts 13:17). Apart from the verb *ischuein*, the noun used for power is *kratos* instead of *dynamis*. While both nouns could mean 'power, strength, might, force, ability, capability' brought about physically,³ *kratos* goes beyond this meaning to stress the sense of 'sovereign, rule, sway, lordship, authority.'⁴ This does not necessarily imply physical force but the invisible force.

The whole world (*holos ho kosmos*) is before God like a speck. The word, *hropē*, is a problematic word; and it appears in many texts with various meanings: decisive moment (Josh 13:22) and decisive influence (Wis 18:12; Sir 1:22). The expression, *hropē zygou*, in Prov 16:11 and Isa 40:15, means 'speck/tinny particle' on a balance/scale.⁵ Such an infinitesimal particle has no effect on the scale. This is the meaning in Wis 11:22. The sage is using two similes to describe God's power over the world. Before God, the whole world is like an insignificant microscopic speck on a scale or like the drop of early-morning dew on the ground.

God's Mercy towards Humans and Love for all Things (Wis 11:23-24)

José Vílchez opines that God' mercy is the centre and the hinge of this text.⁶ In spite of the diminutive status of the whole world before God, he elevates all his creatures, humans and nonhumans or the animate and the inanimate. In verse 23, the sage becomes anthropocentric, beaming the searchlight first on fragile, weak, ignorant and pitiable human beings. Sinful humanity is not the original divine intention. God shows mercy (*eleeō*) to the dissipated humanity. The mercy is directed to *pantas* (all) because of the

³"Dynamis," in F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker, ed., *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965, 52; "kratos" in F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker, ed., 113.

⁴"Kratos," in *The Abridged Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon in Bible Works*, 7.0; Norfolk, VA: Bible Works, 2006.

⁵"Hropē," in J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Vols. 1 & 2, German Bible Society, 1996, in Bible Works, 7.0, Norfolk, VA: Bible Works, 2006.

⁶José Vílchez, "Wisdom," in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. William R. Farmer, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 908-922, at 917.

hamartēmata anthrōpōn (sinfulness of human beings). The preposition, *eis*, is used in v. 23 to express the purpose of an action. The simple goal of this divine mercy is *eis metanoian* (for repentance).

In verse 24, the sage turns to the nonhuman beings, some of which could be seen as despicable and loathsome. The sage says of God: *agapas gar ta onta panta* (for you love all existing things).⁷ The implications of this statement cannot be overemphasised. God loves and desires everything in being, not only humans. *Ouden bdelussē* expresses the fact that God abhors nothing which he made; for he would not have created (*kateskeusas*) something or anything (*ti*) that he hates (*misōn*). This statement is recalling the Pentateuch history of creation. God created everything very good (Gen 1:31).

God Preserves and Sustains All Things (Wis 11:25-26)

In these verses, the concentration is on nonhuman beings. Two hypothetical questions are used in verse 25 to underscore the fact that God sustains all things that exist. The continuous existence (*diamenein*) of anything is based on God's will (*thelō*). "How would anything have endured if thou had not willed it?" How would anything be preserved (*dietērēthē*) if God has not called (*klēthen*) it. The force of *kaleō* here in verse 25 is "to call into existence, to call into life."⁸

Verse 26: God spares (*pheidomai*) all things (*pantōn*) for they are his (*hoti sa estin*). The grammatical analysis of this statement shows that the figures of speech are in neuter gender. Neuter plural pronouns *pantōn* and *sa* go with the singular verb, *estin*. So, the point of discussion is nonhuman beings. God, to whom all things belong, is addressed as *despota philopsyche* (O master, lover of life). Even though *despotēs* also connotes 'despot, tyrant of the Orient,'⁹ here it means 'master, lord, owner' (cf. Tim 2:9). It is a title for God, who has supreme power (Lk 2:29). This title is also used for Christ (2 Pet 2:1). God is the lover of life; and he loves all things. All things have 'life'. The sage leaves no one in doubt about this conclusion in his subsequent propositions.

Divine Spirit (*Pneuma*) is in all Things: Correction and Warning (Wis 12:1-2)

The most astounding, radical and insightful of all the propositions comes in 12:1, *to gar aphtharton sou pneuma estin en pāsin* (for your

⁷Addison G. Wright, "Wisdom," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (NJBC), Raymond E. Brown et al., ed., London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990, 510-522, at 519.

⁸"Kaleō," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*.

⁹"Despota," in *The Abridged Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon*.

immortal spirit is in all things). Does this statement invalidate the normal differentiation between humans and nonhumans, or the animate and the inanimate? Does it dismiss the monopoly of God's spirit in humans,¹⁰ which the account of creation in Gen 2:7 gives? Walther Eichrodt points out that *pneuma* primarily means 'wind or breath', just as *rūah* in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 8:1; Job 15:30); it denotes the movement of the air/wind within humans and outside humans; and among the ancients "wind was regarded as something mysterious, the bringer of life..."¹¹ The same *rūah/pneuma* is also translated as 'spirit';¹² and the source is God. This spirit which is in all things is *aphthartos*. *Aphthartos* means 'substantively immortal, incorruptible, imperishable' (1 Pet 3:4; Rom 1:23; 1 Cor 9:25; 15:52; 1 Pet 1:4). Its cognate, *athanatos* (Wis 1:15; Sir 17:30) appears more frequently in nominal form in Wisdom as *athanasia* (immortality, Wis 3:4; 4:1; 6:18f; 8:13, 17; 15:3); and this is the hallmark of the book of Wisdom.¹³ The sage came to the revelation that human soul is immortal, and used it to solve the great problem of retribution at death (Wis 3:1). Here in Wis 12:1 the sage applies the concept of immortality even to ordinary things. Nonhuman creatures have too immortal divine spirit. The consequence of this statement is capable of Copernican revolution. An erroneous interpretation of this verse could lead to pantheism, the belief that "God and the material world are one and the same thing, and that God is present in everything."¹⁴

In the final verse of this pericope (12:2), the sage turns attention again to rational beings, humans. The particle, *dio*, is an inferential conjunction. What is said here is consequential to the previous statement. God therefore admonishes and corrects sinners so that they may abstain from sin and trust in him.

If all things have the immortal spirit of God, things have then divine purposes, which are beyond human comprehension. They may still endure in existence in another form, even though humans may erroneously think that they are no longer in existence. Many people are not aware of this imperishable divine spirit in all things, and so have abused nature and exploited it. This is *parapiptein* (to fall away, commit apostasy, Heb 6:6; Esth 6:10), to transgress and

¹⁰Addison G. Wright, "Wisdom" in *NJBC*, 510-522, at 519.

¹¹Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, London: SCM Press, 1967, 46.

¹²See "*ruah*" in F. Brown, S.R. Driver and A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2nd Print, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996, 924.

¹³Cletus U. Obijaku, *Biblical Wisdom Books and the Psalms: A Quest for Wisdom and Intimacy with God*, Gwagwalada, Abuja: Ugwu Publishing Company, 2016, 180.

¹⁴Encarta Dictionary, Microsoft Corporation, 2009 in CD ROM.

blaspheme (Wis 6:9). The word is more frequently found in Ezekiel (14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4). Throughout history, God wants to convince and correct (*elegchein*) such people. Danker interprets *elegchein* in the NT as showing that one has done wrong and summoning one to repent. The word can also mean 'bring to light, expose' (Jn 3:20) or 'convince, convict' (Jam 2:9). It has also the sense of setting right, *reproving and correcting* (1 Tim 5:20); and in an intensified sense, it means 'to rebuke, discipline, punish' (Heb 12:5).¹⁵ This act of transgression against nature is furthermore described with stronger moral terms, *hamartanein* (sinning) and *kakia* (wickedness, depravity, malice). God warns, admonishes and instructs (*noutheteō*) humans, reminding or bringing up to (their) mind (*hupomimmēsōn*) their sins stage by stage. The purpose of this humane and corrective measure of God on the erring humans is introduced with *hina* (so that). The aim is *apallagentes tēs kakias* (departing from sin) *pisteusōsin epi se Kyrie* (they might believe in you, Lord). This divine purpose recalls the *metanoia* (repentance) expressed in verse 23, which God wishes all humans to attain. This is why God has been overlooking human sins, and in this case, sins against nature.

Environmental Theology

The question of preservation of the world or environment seemed to have been left for scientists, environmentalists and biologists until Lynn White's scientifico-theological article in 1967, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," where he accused the Western Christianity as the root cause of environmental degradation.

Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny — that is, by religion... Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen... Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends... By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural ... For nearly two millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.¹⁶

¹⁵"Elegcheō," in Danker Frederick William, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition based on *Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000, 315.

¹⁶Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, New Series, 155, No. 3767 (March 10, 1967) 1203-1207.

An evaluation and indictment of this nature jolted some theologians, especially Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox Christians, to begin an intensive theological reflection on environmental issues. For Lynn White, a Presbyterian lay man, to get a solution to the ecological crises, a new religion or a rethinking of the old one is needed.¹⁷ Lynn White's argument is based on a wrong premise; and unfortunately some environmental theologians have bought his view.¹⁸ His is a prejudiced evaluation of Western Christianity. That Western Christian theology rightly recognizes the priority of beings is not an institution of dualism. This priority confers on the higher beings the duty to keep and care for the other beings. This is not an encouragement of exploitation. Western Christianity recognizes the being of nonhumans; but this does not permit the exaggerated pagan animism that leads to idolatry.

Wis 11:21-12:2 brings up issues that are relevant in reflecting theologically on environmental issues. A change of religion is not needed. Though a re-thinking of doctrines is always encouraged, it is more of seeking correct interpretation and application of the Church's teachings on environment.

Can Panentheism Correct the Error of Pantheism?

The implication of pantheism is that nature should be treated as God. Since this is obviously not tenable, some thinkers propose panentheism. Cooper expresses panentheism thus: "The being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in [God], but [God's] Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe."¹⁹ So, God is ontologically united with the world but distinct from it. Based on this ideology, McFague proposes an eco-theological principle that the world is the body of God. "God is sacramentally embodied: God is mediated, expressed, in and through embodiment, but not necessarily or totally."²⁰ This is also similar to

¹⁷Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," 1203-1207.

¹⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Toward an Ecological-Feminist Theology of Nature," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995, 89; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eco-Feminism and Theology," in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994, 202. Rosemary Radford Ruether links feminism to ecology: "We cannot criticize the hierarchy of male over female without ultimately criticizing and overcoming the hierarchy of human over nature." Cf. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 73.

¹⁹John W. Cooper, *Panentheism – The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, 27.

²⁰Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 150, 165.

the Eastern Orthodox eco-theology, as explained by Chryssavgis, an Orthodox Archdeacon, in an edited work:

While the divine essence (*ousia*) is eternally mysterious and unknowable, the uncreated energies or activity (*energeia*) of God cannot only be known but encountered and experienced in this life and in this world, for they are at work everywhere around us. Connected with this is the realization that the Eternal Son of God, the Logos through whom the world is created, is mirrored and expressed in all things — in every leaf and blade of grass — as their inner meaning or depth, their *logoi*.²¹

In the prefatory letter of the same work, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, expresses the sacredness of material creation, “formed out of nothing by our loving Creator and offered to humanity as a sacrament of communion and thanksgiving.”²² He had already expressed a similar view, indicating that, “the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.”²³

Panentheism can correct the errors of pantheism only to some extent. Seeing the created world as the body of God or the sacrament of God should have a limitation. Nature is sacred but not absolute sacredness. Wis 11:21-23 describes the whole nature as a speck before God, who brought all into being. So, in our effort to respect nature, the transcendence of God over nature should never be compromised. This also plays out in our practical life. Even though humans can partially see God in nature, He is quite a super-mysterious being before which every creature bows and wonders.

Environmental Protection: A Religious Obligation

In Wis 12:1-2, we see the divine *pneuma* in all things and the correction and warning that ensued. Recognition of the divine spirit in all things entails an acknowledgment of biodiversity. O’Brien emphasizes the need for humans to reclaim and maintain the biodiversity, which God established, but is being eroded by Western industrialization and technology. Humans’ exploitation of the nonhuman world degrades humans themselves. “To recognize that the ways human beings relate to our environments are connected with the ways we relate to one another is to recognize the reality of

²¹John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, ed., *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 3.

²²John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, ed., *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration*, xii.

²³Patriarch Bartholomew, “Global Responsibility and Ecological Sustainability,” Closing Remarks, Halki Summit I, Istanbul (20 June 2012) quoted in LS, 9.

environmental injustice.”²⁴ God’s spirit in all things should not be understood in a radical way as animists, pantheists and some panentheists do; otherwise, it leads to an erroneous theological principle. What is the immortal spirit of God in all things? If God created all things, it means that before creation, all things existed in the divine world of ideas, and continue to endure in divine mind after creation. And so, all things have eternally divine imprint or seal. If God sanctions the being of a thing, human beings should not for no justifiable reason hamper or obliterate it.

Catholic doctrine maintains that human dominion over nonhumans is not absolute. Just as humans respect one another, so also humans must exhibit “a religious respect for the integrity of creation.”²⁵ Recalling the gentleness and kindness with which Saints Francis of Assisi and Philip Neri treated animals, the Catechism teaches, “It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.”²⁶ What is said of animals applies also to all nonhumans because all have the spirit of God, though quite in a relative mode.

Humans and Things: On the Same Pedestal?

According to Pope Francis,

Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: ‘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). Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world (LS, 77).

But does this divine love for all creatures entail the equality of all beings? Wis 11:23-24 explicates the divine mercy towards humankind and the divine love for all things. The pattern of these two verses already introduces a big demarcation between humans and nonhumans. While God has mercy on all humans and overlooks their sins so that they could repent, he simply loves all things that he created. Receiving mercy and forgiveness or expressing repentance is not connatural to nonhumans. They are incapable of these actions.

So, the sage talks about mercy, forgiveness and repentance only with respect to humans, but not to things. This shows that only humans are moral beings with moral duty, made in the image and

²⁴Kevin J. O’Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity: Christianity, Ecology, and the Variety of Life*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010, 5.

²⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vaticana: Veritas-Libreria Editrice, 1994, no. 2415.

²⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2418.

likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). A proper Christian theology must maintain this hierarchy of beings for it to have a goal. God deals with humans as persons with a distinct eschatological end. The rationality of humans lends support to this assertion. It is humans that have the capacity to direct creation to its final goal (cf. Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:26). Although the Catechism teaches, "God wills the interdependence of creatures,"²⁷ Pope Francis says, "Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator" (LS, 83).

Building a Proper Rapprochement between Humans and Nonhumans

The quest for environmental protection should not make humans detract from the fundamentally rational and ontological principles, which, in most circles, had remained unchallenged until the debut of the modern ecological questions in 19th century.²⁸ The divine transcendence over creatures, the human priority over nonhumans and the human authority to govern nonhumans are fundamental truths. To fault these is akin to a double standard. These truths, which Judeo-Christian Scripture and doctrines also express, remain sacrosanct. Pope Francis, having given credence to the sublime universal communion of all created beings, flaws any ideology that underrates these truths (LS, 90).

Discussing the human root of ecological crises, the Pope cherishes the positive contributions of science and technology, but bemoans the devastations they have caused (LS, 102, 104). The planet should not be squeezed dry beyond every limit, for science and technology should not become an epistemological paradigm (LS, 107). Rather proper ethics should guide them. This is the true road to authentic advancement that is not inimical to environment. Fred Dyke opines that the primary environmental ethic constitutes in the recognition and defence of "the intrinsic value of nature and nonhuman species, even when technology makes their former utilitarian values obsolete."²⁹ This intrinsic value of a thing is that purpose for which God created it, even if human mind is not able to grasp it.

Instead of the falsely alleged biblical tyrannical anthropocentrism, it is 'modern anthropocentrism' that is tyrannical and reduces everything to immediate self-interest, thereby causing ecological

²⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 340.

²⁸The English word "ecology" was coined only in 1873.

²⁹Fred Van Dyke, *Between Heaven and Earth: Christian Perspectives on Environmental Protection*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010, 2-3.

crises. Pope Francis suggests practical things each person can do daily to protect the environment: minimizing water consumption, separating waste, care for humans and nonhumans, tree planting, car-pooling, etc (LS, 211). He also calls for ecological education “at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere” (LS, 213).

Just as Wis 11:23 calls for *metanoia*, Pope Francis calls for ecological conversion that is both personal and communal. “In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion” (LS, 218). There is need for spiritual sobriety and simplicity, which entails being “detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack” (LS, 222). All religious leaders and their associates should follow the example of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis in their concern about the environment. Wilkinson, reiterating the words of Ban Ki Moon, stresses the ecological challenges before religious leaders: “The world’s faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and accelerating impacts of climate change... You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your political leaders, through your wisdom, through your power, through your followers”;³⁰ and this entails what Wilkinson calls “climate conversion.”³¹

The principle of ‘common good,’ which is central and unifying in social ethics, is also linked to ecology. Humans have to take care of fellow humans and then nonhumans. Everyone has the duty to care for nature, but above all to protect humankind from destruction. This is what O’Brien expresses, “So the story of biodiversity’s decline is not just about humans dominating other creatures, it is also about humans with wealth, privilege, and power dominating other humans and the natural systems upon which we all depend.”³² The 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit states, “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development.”³³ This is why Pope Francis constantly links the preferential option for the poor to his ecological discussions (LS 10, 25, 29, 49-50, 71, 117, 123, 158, etc.).

³⁰Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 1.

³¹Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 9.

³²Kevin J. O’Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity*, 6.

³³Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development (14 June 1992), Principle 1, available online, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/acconf15126-1annex1.htm>, accessed 10/09/15.

Conclusion

This study has recalled the reality and the danger of ecological and environmental degradation. Some scholars' indictment of the Judeo-Christian Holy Writ or the Western Christianity and her doctrines of empowering humans to exploit the earth has been proved to be misplaced. Pope Francis' LS faults the ascription of such 'tyrannical anthropocentrism' to the Scriptures. Instead, the Bible and the Christian doctrine emphasize the intrinsic value of nonhumans, for they have the "divine immortal spirit" in them (Wis 12:1). The exegetical and theological implications of this assertion have been x-rayed. This assertion does not elevate nonhumans to the same status as humans, to say nothing of God. It only means that humans should recognize that there is a purpose for which God created every single thing, and therefore should not value them only in terms of their utility. This should form the basis of environmental ethics. Nonhumans are to be treated with respect, while avoiding self-centred and merely-utilitarian inclinations. All creatures are in existence for the common good of all beings. Consequently humans should always consider their fellow humans and nonhumans in their environmental attitudes. It is human activities that cause most of the crises; and many of them are avoidable if humans could change attitude. All religious leaders and their collaborators should wake up to the urgency of calling humanity to environmental conversion.