

A METAPHYSICS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY FOR AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The Relevance of Teilhard and Whitehead for the vision of *Laudato Sí*

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Abstract

Integral ecology is a key concept in Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, '*Laudato Sí*. In seeking solutions to the complex environmental crisis, Pope Francis calls for an integrated approach that explains interrelatedness in the cosmic reality.

In this paper, I suggest that a revision and combination of the insights of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) will produce a new intersubjective relational understanding of God, the world and the human community. This process-oriented metaphysical notion of intersubjectivity can be explained as a balance between multiplicity and unity, between multiple subjects of experience and the higher-order levels of existence and activity, which they achieve by their dynamic interaction. I propose that the notion of intersubjectivity can lay a metaphysical foundation for the vision of an integral ecology.

Moreover, I argue that the notion of intersubjectivity helps us to repudiate the one-sided anthropocentric worldview and to embrace a

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balanced ecocentric worldview of reality. Finally, I suggest that an interrelated approach to the different dimensions of ecology enumerated by Francis, namely, environmental, economic, social, cultural, and human, will be a comprehensive solution towards Francis' appeal for combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

Keywords: Ecocentrism, Integral Ecology, Intersubjectivity, *Laudato Si'*, Process metaphysics, Panentheism, Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead A.N.

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (hereafter LS), Pope Francis has given a wakeup call to the whole of humanity to be aware of the present crisis of our common home and to plunge into action to rebuild it with the tools of integral ecology. In the first chapter, "What is Happening to Our Common Home," Francis makes a study of the current situation presenting the best scientific findings available today. In the second chapter, "The Gospel of Creation," he makes a review of the Biblical foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition pointing out certain aspects that have been misinterpreted regarding creation. The third chapter, "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," is an analysis of the root causes of the ecological crisis where he points out the excessive self-centeredness of the human being. After a thorough study of the causes and consequences of the ecological crisis in the first three chapters, Francis proposes "Integral Ecology" (with the same title) in the fourth chapter as a new approach which "respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings" (LS, 15).

1. The Basis of Integral Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Reality

In an appealing and simple style the pope has developed the vision of integral ecology from the simple premise that, "reality is interconnected." He stresses the aspect of interconnectedness several times in the encyclical: "the conviction that everything in the world is connected" (LS, 16), "All creatures are connected" (LS, 42), "everything is related" (LS, 92, 142), "everything is interrelated" (LS, 120, 138), "everything is connected" (LS, 91, 117) and "everything is interconnected" (LS, 72, 138, 240). Moreover, Francis begins the fourth chapter, "Integral Ecology," with the words: "Since everything is closely interrelated, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions" (LS, 137). In his attempt to respond to the ecological crisis, Francis highlights the 'interconnectedness' of reality as a whole.

Throughout the encyclical, Francis has attempted to show that the Divine, the human and the world of nature cannot be separated from each other. He argues that the approach of dualism between the Divine and the human on the one hand and human and the nature on the other has led to this ecological crisis. In the second chapter of the encyclical, reflecting on the Genesis accounts of creation, Francis explains that traditional theology and theological anthropology which see God as creator and human beings as the image of God have been misunderstood as a licence for an anthropocentrism and for the view that nature is nothing but the raw material for economic exploitation (LS, 65-68). Francis takes pains to amend this incorrect interpretation. Nevertheless, though Francis stresses several times that the Divine, the human and the world of nature should not be separated, he has not sufficiently explained how they should be or are related or interconnected. A truly integral ecology demands that an interconnectedness be presented in the right perspective.

2. Insights of Teilhard and Whitehead on Interconnectedness of Reality

In this paper,¹ I attempt in a modest way to develop the ontological interrelatedness of the cosmic reality as a whole, that is, the interconnectedness of God, human beings and the world, from the process metaphysical point of view. In my opinion, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), two prominent philosophical thinkers in the first half of the twentieth century, provide rich metaphysical insights into the interconnectedness of reality. These insights, revised and combined into a metaphysics of intersubjectivity, are promising contenders to illustrate the interconnectedness of reality in order to lay a metaphysical foundation for the vision of an integral ecology. In fact, one can already find traces of these insights in the encyclical of Francis, particularly the insights of Teilhard (LS, 83), which the pope employs in proposing a new vision of reality as integral ecology.

3. Need to Go beyond the Anthropocentric Worldview

In order to craft a new vision of integral ecology, the pope repeatedly appeals, from the beginning of the encyclical, for a change in the thinking, conduct and lifestyle of humanity. Perhaps, in a nutshell, this could be put as a need for a change in the worldview of

¹A short version of this paper was presented at the International Conference, "Ecology of Community: Process, Identity, and Transformation," organized by the Center for Process Studies, Claremont in California, USA, from 23 to 25 October 2015.

humanity. Half a century ago, historian Lynn White blamed the anthropocentric religious worldview of the western form of Christianity for the ecological crisis, and suggested that “since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious.”² In other words, as Brian G. Henning, professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, points out, White did not suggest abandoning the Christian religious worldview but rather searching within the tradition for resources for rethinking.³ Joseph Prabhu, a professor of Philosophy and Religion at California State University, is of the opinion that Francis has heeded White’s call to rethink⁴ (while Francis, in effect, blames modernity for the crisis (LS, 116), and proposed an “alternative Christian view” which he calls integral ecology. In my opinion, formulating an alternative religious worldview calls for going deeper into the foundations of this worldview. The foundations on which the worldview is grounded are essentially metaphysical presuppositions. Indeed, what Francis means when he asks us to “look at reality in a different way” (LS, 114), I think, is a call to change the presuppositions behind an anthropocentric worldview that has led to the ecological crisis.

The excessive anthropocentric worldview, the pope laments, considers everything including human beings as objects. This worldview “sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given’, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into a useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere ‘space’ into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference” (LS, 115). As a consequence, the resulting dualism between God and human beings as well as between humans and nature has given rise to a sense of separation and disconnectedness of the human beings from the rest of reality. What is needed, as Joseph Bracken, an American process philosopher and Catholic theologian, points out, is a new socially oriented worldview which gives ontological priority to relationships rather than to entities and which emphasizes the dynamic interrelatedness on both an individual and

²Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967) 1205, 1207.

³Brian Henning, “Stewardship and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” in *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si’*, ed. John B. Cobb and Ignacio Castuera, Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015, 42.

⁴Joseph Prabhu, “The Game-Changer in the Vatican,” in *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si’*, ed. John B. Cobb and Ignacio Castuera, Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015, 82.

corporate level.⁵ In other words, it is to stress the point that reality is not just constituted by individual things existing in their own right but also by their dynamic relationship to one another which in effect, brings the things into existence. We do not live in a world of things, relatively fixed and unchanging ‘objects,’ but in a world of interrelated processes of the ‘subjects’ of experience. Thus, in my opinion a metaphysical notion of intersubjectivity which not only describes the interrelation but also provides an ontological ground for this interrelatedness within the human community on the one hand, and within the cosmic reality as a whole on the other is both possible and required for fostering a worldview of integral ecology.

4. Intersubjectivity as a Metaphysical Ground for Interrelatedness

Intersubjectivity, as Bracken explains,⁶ basically implies a balance between multiplicity and unity, between multiple subjects of experience and the higher-order levels of existence and activity, which they achieve by their dynamic interaction.⁷ Furthermore, the metaphysical notion of intersubjectivity is a process of the ontological interrelation of fields of activity between entities of the cosmic reality — the interrelatedness of the divine, human and nature — as subjects of experience.

We can find the elements of intersubjectivity in the works of Teilhard and Whitehead. While Whitehead is acclaimed as the most systematic exponent of a philosophy of process metaphysics, Teilhard’s metaphysics, too, has implied processual characteristics. The similarity between the two is the central role that they accord to inherent dynamicity in nature. However, the key difference is the way in which they view the cosmic process. Teilhard, in *The Phenomenon of Man*, has a teleological and theological outlook: nature is directed towards a converging destination in Omega, particularly the evolution of the *noosphere* of human consciousness to its final culmination in Cosmic Christ, the Omega.⁸ Whitehead, in *Process and Reality*, emphasizes the diversity and multiplicity of nature in “actual occasions” as “the final real things of which the world is made up.”⁹

⁵Joseph A. Bracken, *The World in the Trinity: Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014, 2.

⁶Joseph A. Bracken, “Teilhard, Whitehead and a Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity,” in *Rediscovering Teilhard’s Fire*, ed. Kathleen Duffy, Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2010, 164.

⁷Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, 1978th ed., New York: The Free Press, 1929, 237–238.

⁸Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall, New York/London: Harper and Row, 1959, 261–265.

⁹Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

The works of Teilhard and Whitehead contain rich insights in terms of intersubjectivity. However, neither exploited these insights to develop a metaphysical scheme of intersubjectivity, for their metaphysical projects had different goals to achieve. In the following paragraphs, in order to highlight specific similarities as well as bridge essential differences I shall discuss three key insights of Whitehead and Teilhard: (1) reality is multiplicity and unity of subjects of experience, (2) God's relationship to the world as panentheism, and (3) reality as a system of structured layers of fields of activity. A revision of these insights, I believe, will help us to illustrate a theory of intersubjectivity to build a vision of an integral ecology.

4.1. Reality is Multiplicity and Unity of Subjects of Experience

First of all, both Whitehead and Teilhard endorsed a vision of multiplicity and unity in the cosmic reality. In stating that "the final real things of which the world is made up" are 'actual occasions' or momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, Whitehead provides the necessary plurality of subjects of experience needed for the metaphysics of intersubjectivity.¹⁰ These 'actual occasions' or 'actual entities,' as Bracken explains, are not minute things like material atoms but momentary self-constituting subjects of experience which are constantly engaged in relationships that drive the process of self-constitution. They "prehend" or internalize all the previous actual entities in their world of experience and incorporate them into their individual self-constitutions here and now in terms of both the energy of those past actual entities and their patterns of self-constitution. A set of actual occasions, woven together in a form or pattern, self-constitute into societies. Whitehead referred to societies as "environments"¹¹ in "layers of social order" limiting the self-constitution of any given set of actual occasions here and now.

Teilhard, on the other hand, was clearly thinking in intersubjective terms with his notion of the noosphere or the collectivity of consciousness of humankind as the necessary consequence of his metaphysical principle that "union differentiates."¹² Teilhard's numerous writings point towards a unity in the cosmic process. To quote a few passages: he spoke of the collectivity of consciousness as "something like a community of individual reflections uniting themselves in "a single unanimous reflection"¹³ in which

¹⁰Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18, 47-48, 145.

¹¹Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 99.

¹²Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 262.

¹³Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 261.

“multiplicity will be preserved in this final unity,”¹⁴ as “each person ‘loses [her/]himself’ in the great One, [s]he will actually find in it all the perfections of [her/]his own individuality”;¹⁵ for “the ultimate state of the world must be a system whose unity coincides with a paroxysm of harmonised complexity.”¹⁶ In other words, while stressing the unity of the created world in the Divine, Teilhard laboured to preserve the identity and multiplicity of the world of creation. However, in the final culmination of cosmic reality in the Divine, in his zeal to preserve the primacy of human consciousness, Teilhard seems to be rather vague about the presence of intersubjectivity at various non-human levels of existence and activity. Nevertheless, Whitehead, with his notion of ‘actual occasions’ that are woven together in layers of structured societies, as we shall see a little later, can help Teilhard to extend intersubjectivity to all non-human levels of existence and activity. On another level, with his insight of the unity of the One and Many, that is, the harmony of the multiplicity of the created world in the Divine, Teilhard can contribute to Whitehead to revise the latter’s understanding of God-world relationship as we shall see in the next section.

4.2. Panentheistic Understanding of God-world Relationship

The second key insight in Teilhard and Whitehead, which springs from the first insight discussed above, is their understanding of God’s relationship to the world as creation. Teilhard, synthesizing the evolutionary philosophy of Bergson with Roman Catholic theology in *The Phenomenon of Man*, portrays God’s relationship to the world as, “God all in all.”¹⁷ But, for Whitehead, in *Process and Reality*, God and the world are “contrasted opposites.”¹⁸ I am of the opinion that while, on the one hand, there is a clear difference in the way they understand this relationship, on the other, a combination of these two views, in a complementary way, brings out the panentheistic aspect of the God-world relationship. According to John Cooper, a professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, panentheism literally means “all-in-God-ism” or “the doctrine that all is in God.”¹⁹

¹⁴Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War*, trans. Rene Hague, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, 113.

¹⁵Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, trans. Gerald Vann, New York/London: Harper and Row, 1961, 26.

¹⁶Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 262.

¹⁷Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 310.

¹⁸Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

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

Though there are differing ways of understanding panentheism, it has acquired a commonly accepted generic definition: "The belief that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in Him, but (as against Pantheism) His Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe."²⁰ In other words, though the world is in God ontologically, God and the world are ontologically distinct and the Being of God transcends the world.

Teilhard clearly has a panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship.²¹ One could draw the insight from Teilhard that God is tripersonal rather than unipersonal.²² For him, God is not an individual subject of experience in an ongoing dialectical relationship with created subjects of experience (as in Whitehead's scheme), but rather a community of divine subjects of experience who make "space" within their own intersubjective field of activity for the emergence of created subjects of experience.²³ Francis echoes a similar thought: "The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships" (LS, 240). Teilhard's panentheistic ontology of 'many within the One,'²⁴ I think, will be a better solution to the implicit dialectical dualism between God and the world relationship in Whitehead's scheme. Then, indeed, the world of creation exists within God but is still distinct from God in terms of its own finite field of activity.²⁵

Furthermore, revising these insights on panentheism, Bracken proposes a systems-oriented approach to panentheism. According

²⁰E.A. Livingstone, "Panentheism," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 2014, //www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/acref/9780199659623.001.0001/acref-9780199659623

²¹Incidentally, Teilhard himself did not use the term *panentheism*. He tried to affirm himself as a 'Christian pantheist' and insisted that it is a "pantheism of differentiation." See Ian G. Barbour, "Teilhard's Process Metaphysics," *The Journal of Religion* 49, 2 (1969) 147. According to John Cooper, the term *panentheism* (coined by the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Karl Krause) did not come into common usage until Charles Hartshorne popularized it in the mid-twentieth century. See Cooper, *Panentheism*, 26.

²²Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, trans. Rene Hague, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, 42–45. This idea of the tri-unity of the Christian God is well affirmed by Karl Rahner while discussing Aquinas' two treatises, namely, *On the One God* and *On the Triune God*. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, 2001st ed., London/New York: Burns and Oates, 1970, 45–46.

²³Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, 42–45.

²⁴Cooper, *Panentheism*, 161.

²⁵Joseph A. Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 109–130.

to him, the cosmic reality is composed of higher-order and lower-order systems within the comprehensive system of the divine life. He says that God is neither a transcendent individual entity outside the world (as in classical metaphysics) nor simply the necessary principle of unity within the cosmic process (as in Whitehead's cosmology), but the all-inclusive system within a world composed of hierarchically ordered systems.²⁶ The term "system" is more comprehensive than "substance" in classical metaphysics since "system" can be applied to the analysis of individual entities as well as to social or corporate entities. Moreover, Bracken explains that within the systems-oriented approach, the triune God of the Christian faith can be understood as an ongoing process or system whereby the three divine persons are subprocesses or subsystems forming a divine community or higher order process or system. With this understanding of process, in my view, the analogy of *being* between God and creatures as in classical metaphysics can be revised as an analogy of *becoming* between God and creatures. In addition, as Whitehead claims in *Process and Reality*, we can assert that the concept of God is not an exception to the categories of the metaphysical system but its chief exemplification.²⁷ Thus, as *becoming*, the nature of divine community is not in the first place an entity but an activity. The primary activity of the trinity as divine community is creating unity out of multiplicity.

Likewise, this principle of activity of creating unity out of multiplicity can be seen in every finite entity within creation. Whitehead indeed claims that God and every finite actual entity (occasion) is endowed with the principle of creativity; for he defines creativity as "that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion [actual entity], which is the universe conjunctively."²⁸ In the scheme of Teilhardian evolution, "God [...] makes things make themselves."²⁹ In this way, for both Whitehead and Teilhard, God is understood not just as the dynamic transcendent cause of the *being* (existence) of creatures, but also as the dynamic imminent ground of their *becoming*. Nevertheless, the immanence of God, according to Ruth Page, is to be understood as God is *with* creation rather than *in* creation or *over*

²⁶Bracken, *The World in the Trinity*, 75–76.

²⁷Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343; Bracken, *The World in the Trinity*, 87.

²⁸Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21, 88.

²⁹Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 79.

creation.³⁰ This understanding of God “companioning” creation, as Page views it, brings out the aspect of intersubjective interrelatedness between God and creatures where the Whiteheadian understanding of creativity and Teilhardian understanding of creative evolution can be seen as the structured fields of activity between God and creatures as subjects of experience.³¹ Thus, as Page points out, a panentheistic understanding of God’s creative activity *with* the world helps us address the issue of freedom and evil: “God, being freedom and love, desired the possibility of finite freedom and love, and took the attendant risk of constraint and evil [in enabling creatures to be creative themselves], without which freedom and love are not possible in this world.”³² Moreover, in the light of this discussion, I understand Aquinas’ affirmation that God is “to-be”³³ in terms of God as both an activity and an entity. Similarly Whitehead affirms that God has a consequent nature which is the actualization of the actual world in the unity of his nature and a primordial nature which is conceptual.³⁴ Thus, I am of the opinion that as an activity God is an immanently creative and relational subject of experience who, in companioning creation, enlivens and suffers with creation; and at the same time, as an entity (totality of being) God transcends the world.

4.3. Reality as a System of Structured Layers of Fields of Activity

The third insight that requires revision, in order to reconcile the Whiteheadian societies and the Teilhardian noosphere, as suggested by Bracken, is the notion of “field” instead of the classical Thomistic-Aristotelian ‘substance.’ ‘Field’ is a term taken from quantum physics where it indicates relations originating in energies or forces. A field essentially defines relations, and through relations it enables entities to come about as subjects of experience. Whitehead referred to field as “form” or the pattern of existence and activity when he asserted that “in the philosophy of organism it is not ‘substance’ which is permanent, but ‘form.’”³⁵ Bracken further points out that opposed to the classical understanding of “substance,” fields, which essentially define relations, can be layered into overlapping one another without

³⁰Ruth Page, “Panentheism and Pansyntheism: God in Relation,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004, 229.

³¹Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34.

³²Page, “Panentheism and Pansyntheism: God in Relation,” 232.

³³Aquinas, ST, I, Q. 3, art. 4.

³⁴Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

³⁵Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 29.

losing their individual identity as different fields of activity.³⁶ Individual substances, on the contrary, are rather closed terms and inevitably lie outside one another unless one of them is actively assimilated into the other as in the consumption of food by human beings and other animals.³⁷ For substances in the philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas do not change in their substantial form or basic intelligibility. Fields of activities undergo change over time since they are heavily conditioned by the dynamic relations to one another.

Thus, a process-oriented approach, which views reality as a sequential series of actual occasions as momentary self-constituting subjects of experience within hierarchically ordered fields of existence and activity in nature, replaces the older Thomistic-Aristotelian categories of substance and accidents. This, I think, is a suitable contemporary model required to represent the world we live in. While on the one hand, the notion of society replaces the Aristotelian concept of substance as the necessary principle of continuity, on the other hand, actual occasions as momentary self-constituting subjects of experience replace the “accidents” in classical metaphysics. Moreover, unlike accidents which are passive realities, actual occasions are active agents of change. By their dynamic interrelation with one another and with the external environment over time they produce a significant change in the governing structure of the society to which they belong.³⁸ This idea, in my opinion, squares well with Teilhard to revise his temporal process of “within” and “without” as ‘radial energy’ and ‘tangential energy’³⁹ as energy-fields or fields of activity.

5. Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity Furthers an Ecocentric Worldview

In the light of the above discussion of the three key insights of Teilhard and Whitehead, we can now turn to LS and claim that the metaphysics of intersubjectivity can help us to join Francis in dethroning the anthropocentric worldview that has led to the present crisis. Treating every actual entity of the cosmic reality, not as a thing (object) but as a subject of experience, paves the way to highlight a basic interconnectedness in the whole of reality. This interconnectedness between humans and nature recognizes the intrinsic value of each subject of experience and calls for, as Francis has consistently and emphatically appealed for, a due respect for the ‘integrity’ of every

³⁶Bracken, *The World in the Trinity*, 47–48.

³⁷Bracken, “Teilhard, Whitehead and a Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity,” 168.

³⁸Bracken, *The World in the Trinity*, 57–58.

³⁹Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 64–65.

entity both human and non-human. According to Maria-Teresa Teixeira, a Whiteheadian researcher, integrity of nature can be respected only when there is a sense of relationship with it. She observes that for Francis, the “category of relation debuts with the category of integrity.”⁴⁰ Moreover, as Henning observes,⁴¹ Francis has for the first time categorically rejected the excessive anthropocentric worldviews and recognized that the natural world has an intrinsic value independent of its usefulness to human beings, and therefore, must be respected and protected not only for the sake of present and future humans, but also for its own sake (LS, 140).

Nevertheless, an important point to be noted here is that in rejecting the excessive anthropocentrism, Francis has not endorsed a “biocentrism” but implied an “ecocentrism.” Biocentrism, according to Henning, is simply the view that if a being is living, then it is intrinsically valuable and deserves moral consideration for its own sake. The pope clarifies that, “a misguided anthropocentrism need not necessarily yield to “biocentrism”, for that would entail adding yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones. Human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognized and valued” (LS, 118). According to Henning, what Francis has advocated is an “ecocentrism,”⁴² though the term is not explicitly mentioned by Francis, which, going beyond the axiological egalitarianism of biocentrism, recognizes the intrinsic value of both each individual entity as subject of experience and the system of which it is a part. The pope further states that, “Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system” (LS, 140). Henning is of the opinion that everything has intrinsic value, but there are many degrees and grades of value achieved by different beings and the systems of which they are a part.⁴³ In addition, from the insights of Teilhard and Whitehead, as seen above, this could be further revised as a hierarchical form of ecocentrism that readily recognizes degrees of value. Moreover, an

⁴⁰Maria-Teresa Teixeira, “Ecological Conversion: The Plea for Sister Earth,” in *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si’*, ed. John B. Cobb and Ignacio Castuera, Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015, 432.

⁴¹Henning, “Stewardship and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” 44.

⁴²Henning, “Stewardship and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” 45.

⁴³Henning, “Stewardship and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” 46.

ecocentric worldview categorically rejects the dualism which led us to an insidious anthropocentrism. Francis is unequivocal in saying that “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (LS, 139). Nevertheless, a point to be noted here is that when the pope says “we are part of nature” it does not mean that the value of human beings is reduced to the level of any living being on earth. An ecocentric worldview grants humans a just and rightful place in the world of creation. In his scheme of evolution, Teilhard indeed disrobed humans of their centrality, but crowned them with responsibility: “[Hu]man [being] is not the centre of the universe as once we thought in our simplicity, but something much more wonderful — the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world.”⁴⁴ By insisting that human beings are the climax of terrestrial evolution, and by establishing a future and a hope for them in the *Omega*, Teilhard rendered them the axis of this evolutionary process, indicating that the success of achieving the evolutionary goal is, now, in their hands. On a similar note, Francis too has enkindled a hope in human beings that they can save the earth, and insisted that they are endowed with a call and responsibility to achieve this goal (LS, 61, 68, 81, 165). Thus, in a certain sense, the dream of Teilhard is being unfolded in the vision of LS (LS, 81-83).

In addition, the panentheistic understanding of the cosmic reality further helps to deepen the intersubjective nature of the ecocentric worldview. As we have already seen, albeit as a source of being of the world of creation, the panentheistic understanding views God not as a master or lord over the world of creation but as *companion* who accompanies creation. It follows that if God’s relation to the world of creation is that of a companion, then the relationship of humans towards nature also demands such a view. In this regard the stewardship metaphor of Francis clothes humanity with a role of responsibility. However, as Henning has rightly critiqued, if one is not careful, such a metaphor of stewardship can be a benign extension of the Promethean vision of the dominion over the universe.⁴⁵ I think the stewardship which the pope proposes is a much more radical one than it appears to be in which we are called to be stewards of ourselves. This, first and foremost, requires respecting

⁴⁴Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 224.

⁴⁵Henning, “Stewardship and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” 48.

human life as well as life in all its forms. In other words, an integral ecological worldview demands that we devise ways of living that are in harmony with nature respecting the integrity of every entity in nature as subjects of experience. Integral ecology, in which stewardship is taken as companionship, aims at a comprehensive approach to reality:

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature (LS, 139).

In the context of India, an integral ecology founded on a metaphysics of intersubjectivity can help the indigenous Christian communities in reconceptualising their understanding of communion. Francis affirms that the values of integral ecology are “deeply rooted in indigenous peoples” (LS, 179). According to John Mundu, a professor of tribal theology, the cosmogonic, ontological and theological worldview of the indigenous peoples encompasses a communion of God-saints-human beings-nature.⁴⁶ As in the creation myths of the indigenous tribes, particularly that of the *Ho* myths⁴⁷ explained by Mundu, God does not work as a king or autocrat ‘up there’ but working in and through creation. I am of the opinion that God and the world of creation (spirits, ancestors, humans and nature) eternally co-exist — either in the visible or invisible realm — in an intersubjective communion. In response to the call of Francis “to show special care for indigenous communities and cultures” (LS, 146), the integral ecology founded on a metaphysics of intersubjectivity, I believe, will help the indigenous people to re-instate an ecocentric worldview that fosters respect and care for nature which seems to be getting diminished due to various reasons such as dire poverty as a result of exploitation and displacement.

6. Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude that an integral ecology grounded in a metaphysics of intersubjectivity advances a systems-oriented approach to reality in which the relationship between the whole and parts is structured in layers of fields of activity. In the light of a metaphysics of

⁴⁶John B. Mundu, *The Ho Christian Community: Towards a New Self-Understanding as Communion*, Delhi: Media House, 2003, 76.

⁴⁷John B. Mundu, *The Ho Christian Community*, 15. See also Dhanur Singh Purty, *Ho Disum Ho Honko*, vol. Book 7, Chaibasa: Xavier Ho Publications, 1982, 1–3.

intersubjectivity, the parts or members, within an overall enduring system-oriented approach,⁴⁸ are seen as layered and overlapping fields of activity rather than individual entities. Systems, as we see in any corporate group or society, come into existence or continue to exist by the ongoing dynamic interrelationship among constituent parts or members. The intersubjective conception of a 'structured society'⁴⁹ includes sub-societies that are interconnected in overlapping layers. This line of thought, in my judgement, harmonizes well with Francis' idea of an overlapping interrelatedness of the different ecologies, namely, environmental, economic, social, cultural and human ecologies. These ecologies need to function within the constraints of a broader ecological system whose goal is the continued existence of life on earth. These ecologies, as sub-systems, are ontologically interrelated and cannot be treated individually. In my opinion, the pope has justly denounced the "undifferentiated and one-dimensional" (LS, 106) approach, for instance, of modern technology insofar as it robs the world of nature of its intrinsic meaning and value⁵⁰ by treating entities of nature, and very often even human beings, as objects of utility. This, as discussed above, is the result of a worldview with a classical metaphysical presupposition of 'substances' which are viewed as 'objectively' unchanging. A new worldview such as integral ecology, in my judgement, will not achieve much if it is grounded on the old metaphysical presuppositions of the cosmic reality. Likewise, as new wine requires new wineskins, integral ecology requires a new metaphysical thought-system. A sound metaphysical theory of intersubjectivity, as I see it, can make a significant contribution towards the vision of LS for an integral ecology.

⁴⁸Joseph A. Bracken, "Comments on *Laudato Si'*," in *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to *Laudato Si'**, ed. John B. Cobb and Ignacio Castuera, Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015, 421.

⁴⁹Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 90.

⁵⁰Bracken, "Comments on *Laudato Si'*," 423.