

SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY OF CREATION

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Abstract

Under the title “Creation Spiritualities in Dialogue” the author has initiated an intercontinental series of conferences in Latin America, Asia and Africa to bring representatives of different religious traditions into dialogue with each other. Within the framework of three successive continental conferences, different spiritualities of creation in the various religions of the world are perceived, developed and theologically reflected upon. Questions of creation spirituality and creation theology in the Latin American, African and Asian contexts will be addressed in an interreligious perspective. On the one hand, it is about those creation myths of different cultures that shape patterns of perception and action until today, on the other hand, it is about questions of theology of creation and finally about perspectives of a justice of creation that different religions worldwide bring into the discourse of a “care for the common home.” The article presented here goes into the second continental conference “Creation Spirituality and Creation Theology” with its focus on Asia, which took place at the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram in Bangalore (India). The first step was to focus on creation myths in different religious traditions. The focus was

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on the question of the understanding of creation in the different religious traditions, on similarities as well as differences. Alterity was discovered as a special value of the interreligious conference, because it expresses what individual religious communities can bring into the interreligious exchange as their specific feature. In addition, the focus was on the spirituality of creation in the great Asian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and, last but not least, in the traditional religions. Finally, the participants of the conference dealt with the question of how a contemporary responsibility for creation can be shaped. Here, the ethical consequences arising from religious, anthropological and ethnological foundations were discussed.

Keywords: Ecology; Interreligious Dialogue; *Laudato si'*; Myths of Creation; Spirituality of Creation; Theology of Creation

Asian Theologies of Creation in Dialogue

In his environmental encyclical *Laudato si'* published five years ago in May 2015 Pope Francis explicitly stated: "I wish to address every person living on this planet" (LS 3). That is an unusual step for a pope, given that papal encyclicals are addressed first and foremost to Christian followers of the Catholic Church. However, in matters of creation there are no religious, denominational or national boundaries. How the human family can survive on the earth as its common *oikos* was a trans-national, inter-faith issue well before the advent of globalisation. In the interests of our common survival, representatives of religious communities must transcend religious and denominational boundaries and conduct an inter-faith and intercultural dialogue on creation.

It was to this issue that Pope Francis devoted his attention in his Encyclical Letter "*Laudato si'*, On Care for Our Common Home,"¹ in which he highlighted the significance of ecology (and the economy) for the survival of mankind and expressly stated: "I wish to address every person living on this planet" (LS 3). The vision of an economy linked to ecology and social justice is at the very heart of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*. The pope from Argentina had previously expressed sharp criticism in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of an "economy that kills" and condemned the excesses of a neoliberal economy which pose a threat to human life.² Having couched his opposition to exploitative economic structures in

¹Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; hereafter abbreviated as LS.

²Cf. Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, ed., *Evangelii Gaudium*. Voices of the Universal Church (One World Theology, Volume 7), Freiburg, 2015.

prophetic language in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,³ the head of the Catholic Church went on in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* to focus on the concept of sustainability. In this encyclical the pope reflects on a responsible approach to creation as well as on the development of a just world economic order in which all the inhabitants of planet earth as their common *oikos* enjoy a fair share of global goods, such as the atmosphere and the water, and of regional goods, such as mineral resources, forests, etc. His vision is one of intra- and inter-generational social justice and ecological responsibility. Ultimately, everything revolves around the crucial question for humankind of how ecology and the economy can be reconciled in a way that enables the human race to coexist and survive both now and in the future.

In his ecological encyclical of 2015 Pope Francis advocated an inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue on creation, saying: "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor and building networks of respect and fraternity" (LS 201). There are many different facets to the dialogue Pope Francis proposed. On the one hand, there is a need to engage with different, culturally influenced concepts of creation and initiate a discussion on them and, on the other hand, to pay close attention to the social and ecological challenges the world now faces.

The International Catholic Mission Society *missio* is committed to an inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue and it inaugurated a series of continental meetings in Latin America, Asia and Africa in order to facilitate discussion between representatives of the different religious traditions. The conferences were held consecutively in Salta (Argentina) for Latin America in 2017,⁴ in Bangalore (India) for Asia in 2019⁵ and in Gaborone (Botswana) for Africa in 2020.⁶ The purpose of these three continental meetings was to promote awareness, exploration and theological reflection of different spiritualities of

³Cf. Klaus Vellguth, "And Apple Trees Still Have To Be Planted. Journeying Together Down the Road to Ecological, Social and Economic Responsibility," in Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, *Creation. Living Together in Our Common House* (One World Theology 11), Freiburg, 2017, 221-236.

⁴The conference "We Are But Guests on Earth—In Memory of Berta Cáceres (1971-2016)—Latin American Spiritualities of Creation in Dialogue" was held from 3 to 5 January 2017 in Salta (Argentina).

⁵The conference "Finding a Home in Creation—Asian Spiritualities of Creation in Dialogue" was held from 19 to 21 February 2019 in Bangalore (India).

⁶The conference "Breathing Life with Creation—African Spiritualities of Creation in Dialogue" was held from 7 to 9 January 2020 in Gaborone (Botswana).

creation in the various religions around the world. Questions on the spirituality and theology of creation in different religions in Latin America, Asia and Africa were addressed at these conferences from an inter-faith perspective. The series of continental meetings on the theology and spirituality of creation initiated by missio represents a response to the exhortation issued by Pope Francis to commence an inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue on creation. It also takes up the appeal formulated in the Earth Charter: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. [...] The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life."⁷ In this contribution I will focus on the second conference in Asia.

The inter-faith commitment to creation proposed in *Laudato si'* is one of the main concerns of the Latin American pope. Just a few days before the Asian continental conference in Bangalore, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad Mohammad Al-Tayyeb used a language similar to that in the apostolic exhortation on the occasion of their meeting in Abu Dhabi. The "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" which they signed underlines the responsibility for creation:

Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.⁸

The second continental meeting on the spirituality and theology of creation focused on Asia and was divided up into four sections. The participants began by examining the creation myths to be found in the various religious traditions. They explored the understanding of creation in these traditions in order to ascertain the common ground and differences between them. In the second section the emphasis was on the spirituality of creation in the major religions in Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, the indigenous religions and Christianity. The participants then considered the issue of how, from the point of view of the main religions in Asia, responsibility can be assumed for creation in a way that meets modern-day requirements. How are we to live together in creation and how do we wish to do so? This question triggered a discussion of the ethical consequences arising from religion, anthropology and ethnology. Finally, the

⁷<https://charterforcompassion.org/350-org/earth-charter> (28.03.2017)

⁸<http://humanfraternitymeeting.com/en/declaration> (14.04.2020)

theologians considered the significance of *Laudato si'* from an Asian perspective.

The purpose of this dialogue was to enable the participants to learn, first of all, about the various religious traditions, their understanding of reality and patterns of behaviour, then to examine perspectives on the spirituality of creation and finally to discuss the justice of creation—all with a view to promoting a dialogue between the members of the different religions on fundamental issues facing mankind and on “care for our common home.”

Asian Continental Conference

The Asian continental conference, which formed part of the intercontinental project on the theology and spirituality of creation, took place at the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram in Bangalore (India) in February 2019. The exchanges between the participants were of a comprehensive nature that went beyond theological reflection to incorporate aspects of a dialogue of life, common action and spiritual experience.⁹ It is perhaps not accidental that a continental meeting in Asia, in particular, should have been so clearly focused on dialogue. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples highlighted the various dimensions of dialogue in their document on “Dialogue and Proclamation,” while at its First General Assembly in Taipei in 1974 the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) identified the “triple dialogue”—a dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor—as a specific feature of Asian theology. It was with this in mind that Clarence Devadass and other Asian theologians attending the conference in Bangalore said that the only way to meet the ecological challenge is by means of a dialogue which brings cultures and religions together.

Creation Myths in Dialogue

In the first section of the conference in Bangalore the speakers explored creation myths in the various religious traditions in order to establish both common ground and differences in the understanding of creation. They deemed otherness to be of especial value for interreligious dialogue in that differences were not perceived as being divisive but rather as a source of mutual inspiration and

⁹Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Instruction Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations*, 19 May 1991, no. 42. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19051999.html

enrichment in the development of individual identity. "This blossoms in dialogue with the unfamiliar, in the common search for truth and in shared responsibility for shaping the world and the preservation of creation."¹⁰ In the opening presentation Chandrasekar Venkatamaran began by looking at the Hindu tradition of creation. Starting with the Vedas, he said that Purusha or Shakti constitutes the foundations of the universe. Purusha can be considered in three ways: as a potential presence in the non-revealed, as the revealed or as a combination of both. In Hinduism the supreme manifests itself as the universe and is both infinite consciousness and infinite strength. This Hindu view of creation puts greater emphasis on the spiritual rather than the material dimension of reality. Essential to an understanding of Hinduism is that the revelation manifest in creation is considered to be a reality which has always existed. Consequently, creation is not seen as something fundamentally new but as the revelation of the real.

The next contribution dealt with Buddhist creation myths and the problem of evil. The speaker made it clear that Buddhism counters the belief in divine creation with the concept of karmic creation and portrays a world which consists of a realm of hell, a realm of spirits, a realm of animals, a realm of humans and a realm of heaven and owes its existence to the karmic energies of beings from a prior world.

Omneya Ayad then examined the creation myth in the Sufi tradition of Islam. She described the beginning of creation as an act of love. This has to do with the fact that in the course of their lives human beings must "follow the path of love" in order to find their way back to God:

To have one's heart filled with divine love teaches us the value of sympathy and empathy towards our fellow human beings who as revelations are reflections of the divine attributes. Only then is the beginning of the story of creation bound up with its end in a never-ending cycle of divine love.

Saji Mathew Kanayankal talked about the significance of the biblical stories of creation for the present-day ecological movement and showed that the biblical texts on creation have the narrative and dramatic form of ancient myths and should not be considered as historical records. They are supra-historical or meta-historical narratives which throw light on the notion the Israelites had of God,

¹⁰Hermann Schalück, "Missionarische Spiritualität und globale Welt. Mission im Zeichen von Interkulturalität, Pluralismus und Dialog," in Thomas Arnold and Michael Meyer, *Seht, da ist der Mensch. Und Gott? Herausforderungen missionarischer Spiritualität*, Ostfildern, 2019, 154.

creation and mankind. Kanayankal pointed out that the biblical stories of creation are ultimately statements on the relationship between God, man and the cosmos, in which the created universe and all forms of being do not derive their value from their usefulness or some externally attributed worth. On the contrary, they have an intrinsic value and are consequently not a resource to be exploited for the benefit of mankind. Even though man is accorded a unique place in the universe, he is not allowed to exploit nature. Christian traditions of creation and their concept of God, man, creation and the cosmos are an invitation

to develop an ethos of ecological responsibility and to celebrate an association with, and participation in, the ecological community in the broader sense, within which it is possible to acquire a sense of responsibility for the sacredness of creation and generate respect for the value of every form of being.

The final presentation in this section by Hector D'Souza SJ entitled "Creation Stories of Indigenous Peoples—A North-East Indian Perspective" dealt with the creation myths encountered among the 240 tribal cultures in North-East India. He noted that the indigenous communities live in close touch with nature and in harmony with creation and express in their myths a world view or philosophy of life which—like science and proverbs—provide meaningful answers in the form of stories. These myths harbour a truth whose validity extends beyond the literal meaning of the word. D'Souza was careful to make distinctions, however, and, mindful of the current conflicts in Indian society, drew attention to the ambivalence of myths: "We need myths in order to pray, establish relationships and survive. But we also use them to sow division and promote intolerance in respect of belief, confession, skin colour and caste."

Spiritualities of Creation in Dialogue

The contributions in the second section of the conference addressed the spiritualities of creation in the various religious traditions. In her presentation on the "Spirituality of Creation in Hinduism," Nanditha Krishna began by explaining that in Hinduism the Vedas, the Upanishads and epic and Puranic literature have different conceptions and descriptions of the creator and creation, although they share the fundamental conviction that God and creation are identical. "Nature is seen as being rooted in the transcendental creator, and the various types of natural phenomena that exist are regarded as the multiple reflections of divine properties." This gives rise to the notion that forms of existence in the world are "outflows"

of the transcendental unity of God, from which they originate and to which they will return. In Hinduism, the close connection between creation and creator is accompanied by esteem for the natural world and an awareness of the significance of the environment as well as the need for careful management of natural resources. Ultimately, nature is a revelation of the divine, which is stated for example in the Bhagavad Gita when Krishna says: "I am the earth, I am the water, I am the air." In Hinduism, therefore, the identification of creation with the creator entails the obligation to treat all of creation and especially all living things with care and respect.

Considering the spirituality of creation in Buddhism, Junghee Min examined the Buddhist view of the universe and creation and the response it elicits in Buddhist rituals. She looked at the specific function the Buddhist world view can fulfil and whether a new interpretation is required for a suitable approach to the ecological crisis. She classified climate change as a question of justice and ethics. This presents a special challenge to Buddhism, because the ecological crisis is caused by the prevailing mode of thinking which—in contrast to Buddhist teaching—lacks an awareness of the connection and interdependence of human beings and other species. Junghee Min consequently saw the ecological problem as part of a spiritual and collective crisis and outlined Buddhist cosmology and perspectives on creation before going on to deal with nature protection rituals. Among those she introduced was the tree ordination ceremony, for example, which has been practised in Northern Thailand since 1975. Buddhist monks who wish to prevent deforestation wrap a saffron robe of the kind they wear themselves around the trees and take monastic vows in front of them so that people recognise the sanctity of the trees and stop felling them to make profit from the sale of the wood.

In his contribution on "The Spirituality of Creation in Islam" Faizur Rahman categorised the creation myths in Islam as metaphysical attempts to understand the world by means of parables and to justify the belief in a creator: "Creation myths are an expression of the spiritual world view of a particular religion." Rahman outlined the importance of spirituality in Islam and presented a number of creation stories from the Koran. Here he distinguished between texts dealing with the origins of the universe and those focusing on the emergence and continuation of life on earth. He pointed to convergences between traditions related in the Koran and scientific findings on the emergence of the cosmos, classifying Islam as a religion in which the search for scientific

knowledge is depicted as “a kind of holy pilgrimage or religious rite,” the purpose of which is to interpret the spirituality of creation from an Islamic perspective.

In his paper devoted to “A Christian Perspective on the Spirituality of Creation” the Malayan theologian, Clarence Devadass, explored relations between the Church Fathers and creation in order to make it clear that questions about creation have been raised by Christian theologians from the very beginning. He pointed out that *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, opens with a reflection on the common origins of all human beings, who share a common destiny. With regard to the Church Fathers, he said they saw a close connection between prayer, asceticism, the world and eschatology in the context of relations with Christ. He conceded that the transition from pantheism to monotheism had been accompanied by an estrangement of indigenous cultures from their natural habitat. He was consequently at pains to stress the significance of a spirituality of creation which is dedicated to the search for a life in fullness and endeavours to act justly, love tenderly and “walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). This ethical maxim is rooted in the belief that creation is a divine gift from God which he keeps in existence. Devadass drew attention here to the ethical understanding in the Old Testament that land and cattle which are at their owners’ disposal should be regarded as beings with an intrinsic value and a unique purpose and that the sacred status of nature should be restored. A restitution of this kind must rest on the understanding that the fate of the cosmos is inseparably bound up with that of mankind itself.

Considering the spirituality of creation from an indigenous perspective, Goldy M. George concentrated on the culture of the Ganda people in the Eastern Central Indian states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It transpired that the spirituality of the Dalits is bound up with the earth as the innermost centre of life and that their totem relations give expression to a spiritual bond. This entails assuming responsibility for establishing a relationship with animate and inanimate elements, plants, animals, birds and other species. George admitted that the Ganda people’s understanding of life was “piecemeal” in philosophical terms, but he classified it as “organic, creative and communicative” and not as “inorganic, destructive and divisive.” To that extent he regarded their philosophy as an alternative both to the Brahmanical school and modern philosophy, since their egalitarian and eco-centric approach represents a

contribution to the development of a spirituality and philosophy of life.

Justice of Creation in Dialogue

In the third section of the continental conference the speakers turned their attention to questions of creation ethics. In the first presentation Tattwarupanandaji Maharaj approached creation ethics from a Hindu standpoint. He asserted that “ethics is nothing other than God himself” and that every kind of behaviour and every lifestyle should help to reveal the fundamental principle within ourselves. The Hindu understanding of creation ethics is thus tantamount to living in accordance with cosmic law.

Rey-Sheng Her addressed creation ethics from a Buddhist perspective, his remarks being rooted in the Tzu Chi philosophy of the environment, which regards the cosmos as a large universe and the human body as a small universe, both of which must be in balance with each other in accordance with the principles of the four elements (earth, water, fire and wind). He said this view fitted into an intellectual tradition with the old Chinese saints who called for respect for nature. Rey-Sheng Her emphasised that heaven and earth are no longer in balance and that the imbalance within the large universe is connected with an imbalance in the small universe. The imbalance in the large universe can thus be seen as the expression of a spiritual crisis: “Life must be healthy; there has to be reconciliation with the four elements. It doesn’t matter whether the body of a person or all kinds of beings on earth are affected. How can we reconcile ourselves with the earth or with the body? We ought to begin with the heart.” Rey-Sheng Her moved on from this philosophy to introduce the Tzu Chi Foundation which began a Buddhist recycling campaign in 1991 that eventually led to the establishment of nine thousand recycling centres in Taiwan. The 280,000 volunteers active in these recycling centres help to ensure the recycling of materials in the country. In the meantime the recycling campaign has spread to various provinces in mainland China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Haiti, Indonesia and a number of countries in South America. Rey-Sheng Her regarded these recycling centres not just as places of action that do justice to creation, but also as places of physical health and spiritual healing. He therefore referred to them as “a new kind of Buddhist temple” which serves religious functions inside, since they foster the virtues of altruism, cooperation, solidarity, humility and a simple life. In both the recycling centres and in the ecological projects Rey-Sheng Her sees concrete

approaches in line with the Buddhist teaching that all forms of being relate to one another, that all feeling creatures are equal and that all living things are interdependent.

Dealing with the ethics of creation from an Islamic perspective, Tabassum Hameed asserted that the ethics of Islamic environmental thinking have their origins in the main sources of Islam—the teachings of the Koran, the Sunnah and the Hadith as well as the Sharia. She explained that the universe as God’s creation has both a spiritual and a physical dimension and that people must treat relations with the non-human world as a form of peaceful coexistence. As regards Islamic environmental thinking she distinguished between an ethical compendium, which is founded in particular on the Koran and which he defines as “knowledge of creation,” and the realm of practical action, which can be defined as the handling of natural resources. The environmental crisis has shown, she said, that human has forgotten his/her true role as God’s trustee and no longer preserves nature as a secret symbol and valuable asset with which he/she has been entrusted. Hameed regards environmental ethics or *Fiqh-al-Biah* as an Islamic response. It represents an endeavour to satisfy the needs of the masses and prevent them from coming to any harm by advocating the principles of unity, trusteeship and responsibility. The principle of unity (*Tawhid*) provides human beings with a view of life which asserts that everything comes from God. This, in turn, entails the obligation not to damage or destroy anything or anybody in God’s creation. The principle of trusteeship (*Khaliah*) calls, on the one hand, for universal fraternity and social equality while, on the other hand, rejecting any absolute property rights. Ultimately, Allah owns everything and human is obliged to deal in an appropriate manner with the divine property at his disposal. The principle of responsibility (*al-Akhira*) calls on human beings to review their deeds and intentions in the light of their own transience and expectations of the beyond. Tabassum Hameed stressed that the environment has an intrinsic value in Islam and that human has a religious duty not to harm the environment: “As active and conscious representatives of God we must extend our friendship and kindness equally to everything, to nature and to all that it contains.”

In his contribution entitled “From Environmental Justice to Ecological Justice—On the Path to an Ecological Hermeneutics” Daniel Franklin Pilario took a critical look from a Christian point of view at the concepts of environmental justice and ecological justice. Developing an outline concept of “ecological justice,” he pointed out

that the term broadens the discourse by extending the perspective on all created beings within the earth community, whereas the term environmental justice defines the non-human members of the earth community not from within themselves but on the basis of their relationship with humankind. Pilario was critical of the “trustee” model, which is associated with the concept of environmental justice. The theologian from Manila showed that, while this model recognises that the earth is God’s gift to everyone, it separates God from the earth and thus contradicts the understanding of God’s immanence. He preferred the term ecological justice, he said, because it was broader and included human’s relationship with the earth community and (some) non-human forms of being. Pilario cited five principles which influence the discourse on ecological justice and are important for the interpretation of the Bible and for theological reflection: the principle of intrinsic value, the principle of interconnectedness, the principle of voice and resistance, and the principle of mutual care. He detected these five principles—in rudimentary fashion at least—in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’* and urged that “these ethical and ecological principles should be anchored in our central narratives such as the Bible” in order to overcome the prevalent anthropocentric reading of the Bible and corresponding theological interpretations.

In conclusion Virginius Xaxa commented on environmental ethics from the perspective of indigenous peoples. He pointed out that the indigenous tribes make a living by hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, etc., their primary objective being to survive rather than to accumulate. Xaxa said the relationship between human beings and the environment is influenced by tribal traditions, which means that people must fulfil their obligations to the natural environment. The totemism of the indigenous peoples illustrates the intensity of these obligations and of relations between the members themselves and with nature. The importance of land for tribal cultures derives not only from the fact that people living in the present need to make a living, but also because people have received the land from their forefathers. The land thus links the present generation with past generations. The resources available to one generation must only be exploited to the extent that is necessary. Virginius Xaxa described this “restraint” inherent in the indigenous cultures as the source of harmony between the community and the environment which rests on a balance between nature and culture, a concept of equality in respect of social structures, collective management, adaptation in the course of history, a principle of consensus in decision making, a

philosophy of ethical living and the participation of the community in music, dance and culture.

***Laudato si'* as a Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue**

In the next section the contributors examined the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* from an Asian point of view. In his paper entitled "*Laudato si'*. On Care for our Common Home—An Appeal for Integral Ethics and Spirituality" Shaji George Kochuthara first introduced the encyclical letter before going on to deal with its key creation theology aspects. In doing so he made it clear that the encyclical contradicts the traditional interpretation of "dominium" and urges that the relationship between humankind and creation should be defined on the basis of the biblical traditions, in which human is entrusted with cultivating, guarding, protecting, supervising and conserving the land. Kochuthara also drew attention to the problem of anthropocentrism addressed in the encyclical. It calls for this problem to be resolved so that man can live in harmony with creation. Recalling the term "integral ecology" used by Pope Francis, which takes up the dictum issued by the International Theological Commission in 2009, the Indian theologian explained that what is ultimately at stake is the interconnectedness of everything, which makes it the root of environmental ecology, economic ecology, social ecology, cultural ecology and everyday ecology. Moreover, he said, the term "integral ecology" encompasses the principle of the common good as well as solidarity with future generations.

In his short paper on "A Matter of the Heart—*Laudato si'* in the Philippines" Daniel Franklin Pilario looked at the role of the heart, aesthetic conversion and the victims of ecological disasters as the teachers of ecological spirituality. He began his remarks by citing the Dalai Lama, thereby underlining the core inter-faith message of the social and environmental encyclical *Laudato si'*.

In the paper that followed on "*Laudato si'*. On Care for Our Common Home in Malaysia" Clarence Devadass described the current ecological crisis in Malaysia, reviewed the reception of *Laudato si'* in the country, outlined the challenge posed by an ecological turnaround and illustrated the ways in which the Church has contributed to the reception of the environmental encyclical and encouraged change. As regards the reception of the encyclical in Malaysia, he pointed out that its publication had led to a greater moral awareness among individual Christians in respect of a faith-based ecological consciousness, that a culture of change can be

observed in the everyday activities of the Church and that *Laudato si'* has paved the way for greater ecumenical and inter-faith engagement.

Winding up this section, Saji Mathew Kanayankal looked at *Laudato si'* as a message of hope in the midst of the crisis, dealt with the main thoughts contained in the encyclical and illustrated how the effects of the ecological encyclical and the irresistible appeal of its message can be seen as a ray of hope in the current ecological crisis.

***Laudato si'* as a Challenge for Art**

In conclusion the Indian artist Jyoti Sahi, who lives in an art ashram he has founded near Bangalore, introduced the painting "The New Adam" which he had made especially for the conference. In it he depicts a dialogue between Christian biblical imagery and the iconography of the Indian subcontinent and portrays the resurrected Christ as the "new Adam" in the Garden of Eden. The resurrected Christ himself appears to be the tree of life, the roots of which reach down to the earth. Interestingly enough, it is women who symbolise the earth on which Christ reveals himself in the flame of his resurrected presence. The motif, which arose in conjunction with the series of conferences, exemplifies the inculturation of Christianity in Asia.¹¹

Encounter between Franciscan and Ignatian Spirituality

The conference on the spirituality and theology of creation in Bangalore was markedly Asian in that it was greatly influenced by dialogue and trust in harmony despite all contradictions. At the same time the conference had a distinctly missiological character, since mission at the outset of the third millennium—and particularly so in the Asian context—can only be conceptualised as the realisation of relations, as the experience of an enrichment attributable to the alterity of other regions and as dialogue. "The dialogue paradigm mirrors the way in which God himself approaches people. Hence the entire history of salvation can be seen as a dialogue of salvation between God and man, which begins with the Exodus and culminates in God's salvific acts."¹² The style of the Encyclical Letter

¹¹ Cf. Peter Neuner, "Die Hellenisierung des Christentums als Modell von Inkulturation," in *Stimmen der Zeit* 213 (1995) 6, 363–376, 372f.

¹² Klaus Krämer, "Mission im Dialog. Grenzen des christlichen Zeugnisses in religiösen, kulturellen und sozialen Kontexten," in *Forum Weltkirche* 136 (2017) 6, 20–25, 24.

Laudato Si' is itself rooted in dialogue, being both inviting and inclusive. The pope wishes to engage in a conversation about the future of the planet which includes everyone (LS 14).

A missionary analysis of issues concerning the theology and spirituality of creation takes dialogue as its methodical point of departure and, in the age of globalisation, constitutes an invitation to engage in inter-faith and inter-cultural encounters. This method of proceeding “rests on the conviction that an encounter with the unfamiliar leads to a better understanding of one’s own beliefs and opens up new ground for all those involved.”¹³ Dialogue is not so much the objective as the path—and it can be trod without fear of risking or even losing one’s own identity. On the contrary, the exchange between representatives of different religions advocated by Pope Francis presents an opportunity for personal religious identity to grow and flourish. It was this blossoming of personal identity through encounters with otherness that the former Bishop of Aachen, Klaus Hemmerle, had in mind when he said: “Let me learn about you, the way you think and the way you talk, the questions you have and the person you are so that I can learn afresh the message that I have for you.”¹⁴ Hemmerle saw exchanges with others and exposure to the unfamiliar as an opportunity to grow one’s own identity and, by engaging with others, to gain a better understanding of oneself. This open-mindedness towards others and their differentness can be seen as a specific feature of Franciscan-influenced missionary spirituality. Hermann Schalück, who was once Superior General of the Franciscan Order, recently described Francis of Assisi as a “pioneer of inter-cultural encounters,” whose outstanding characteristic was that he reached out to others and transcended boundaries.¹⁵ “Trusting love and care instead of divisive clichés, a fundamental brotherly attitude and agreeable encounters and religious discussions arising from a familiarity with the culture of others.”¹⁶ To that extent the dialogue that was called for by Pope Francis and conducted in Bangalore reveals a Franciscan missionary spirituality which seeks an exchange with others, fosters relations and thereby experiences eco-

¹³Schalück, “Missionarische Spiritualität und globale Welt...,” 158.

¹⁴Klaus Hemmerle, *Spielräume Gottes und der Menschen: Beiträge zu Ansatz und Feldern kirchlichen Handelns. Ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Reinhard Göllner und Bernd Trocholepczy*, Freiburg, 1996, 329.

¹⁵Schalück, “Missionarische Spiritualität und globale Welt...,” 159.

¹⁶Nikolaus Kuster, *Franziskus. Rebell und Heiliger*, Freiburg, 2009, 184.

social dialogue as a locus theologicus and encounters as occasions to experience God.¹⁷

Together with traces of Franciscan missionary spirituality, the influence of the Ignatian mysticism of creation can be seen in both the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* and the conference in Bangalore. In the "Contemplation to Attain the Love of God" the Ignatian spiritual exercises focus on the "blessings of creation" and invite reflection on "how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in man bestowing understanding."¹⁸ This perspective certainly correlates with the understanding of creation in Asian religions in that they regard creation, in particular, as a place of divine revelation and therefore attribute to nature a value which transcends their relations with other people and their "usefulness" for individual livelihood. Drawing attention to the character of Ignatian creation mysticism in *Laudato si'*, Martin Maier says:

This view runs through the whole of *Laudato si'*. Nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence (LS 85, 87, 88). God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature (LS 80). [...] God is present in the smallest and the greatest. If God is present in all things, then everything is interconnected.

During the Asian continental conference in Bangalore on the theology and spirituality of creation the openness and richness of Franciscan spirituality merged with that of Ignatian spirituality. This gave rise to a missionary space in which the myths, spiritualities and theologies of creation in the different religious traditions in Asia encountered and occasionally touched each other. And, as we know, wherever there is close contact something new comes into being.

¹⁷ Markus Vogt, "Der ökosoziale Dialog als locus theologicus," in *Lebendige Seelsorge* 70 (2019) 1, 16–20.

¹⁸Ex 235.