

AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on analysing, in short, the Ecological Crisis at Present. At first, it introduces and explains the term crisis in relation to ecology and then it will further narrate to what extent this crisis has hit humanity. At this juncture, one could very well argue that the Ecological Crisis is a fruit that humanity is now reaping as a result of what it has been sowing for so many years. After having clarified the term crisis, the paper further discusses the response that is being made to tackle this crisis. The response can be found in two levels or two dimensions.

1. The Society or the State
2. The Religion or the Church

How the above two realms have responded to this great ecological crisis of the present is argued in detail in two different sections. While the state implemented various rules and regulations in order to handle the situation, the Church issued various documents in order to conscientize its faithful and make an adequate and quick response to the great threat that has befallen on the humanity.

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Introduction

A PODCAST series titled “*Echoing Faith Today*” was launched in July 2020 to mark the publication of the *Directory for Catechesis* from the *Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization*.¹ Now, it is our turn to start echoing and re-echoing the threat that humanity has posed to Mother Earth. It is indeed alarming to note that global warming has turned out to be very dangerous to the earth, and the signs of the times indicate that we are quickly marching towards the verge of extinction.

Two decades ago, the issue of environmental degradation and its effects were discussed in terms of possibilities for the future. Last decade, a survey was conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), which proved that not only has the problem arrived, but that it has already begun to take its toll. Now we are already reaping the harvest of the seeds that we had sown in the womb of Mother Earth for the past few decades in the name of industrialisation, modernity or progress.

The rational exploitation and protection of the natural environment and its resources have become one of the central contemporary issues that arise in the context of the relations of mankind to the totality of reality in which man lives and, most importantly, with which man interacts.²

Environmental problems are pretty serious in India because of the interacting effects of increasing population density, industrialisation and urbanisation, and poor environmental management practices. Unless stringent regulatory measures are taken, environmental systems will be irreversibly degraded. Lack of political commitment, lack of a comprehensive environmental policy and its implementation, poor levels of awareness, functional fragmentation of the public administrative system, poor mass media concern and the presence of

¹ Franz Peter Tebartz and Jem Sullivan, “Perspectives on the Ministry of Catechist: Transcription of an “*Echoing Faith Today*” Podcast Conversation with Bishop Franz Peter Tebartz-van Elst, May 11, 2021,” *International Journal of Evangelization and Catechetics* 2, 2 (Fall 2021) 269–274, at 269.

² Grygiel P. Wojciech, “An Ecological Perspective in Evolutionary Theology,” *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 56, 4 (2020) 277–292, at 277.

poverty are some of the major factors contributing to the severity of this problem. Environmental problems in India are highly complex and management procedures have to be developed to achieve coordination between various functional departments. For this, political leaders have to be convinced of the need to initiate environmental protection measures.

Though it may all seem like a very grim picture, all is not lost yet. Every member of society needs to realise that there is a need for change. This change is not one from the outside; rather, it is a call to change our own attitude and behaviour. If we can begin caring for and preserving nature right from our homes, then our streets and our societies will have worked towards a lot of good in environmental protection. Let us not forget that we are an intrinsic part of the environment, and the damage or protection that we cause in it, in whatever smallest proportion, is damage, detriment and progress that we bring upon ourselves.

1 Ecological Crisis

As the monsters of wildfires, hurricanes and Arctic heat waves, storms, floods, earthquakes, famine, drought, hailstorms, attacks by wild beasts, and all sorts of sickness have brought global warming far too close for comfort for most humans, hard-to-grasp “hyperobjects” may seem passé.³ Earth becomes warmer, natural resources diminish, soil and waters are polluted, disappear in a fast rhythm and a lot of plants and animals - these are warning signs of major evil made by our civilisation caught in a development that ignores all basic conditions of existence. It’s not enough to take action to notice the “epidemic.”⁴

The above effects prove that the ecological crisis is already set in. The last 50 years of development has caused this ecological crisis. As a result, today the whole human race is becoming prey to the ecological imbalance and disfigurement of the cosmos. There is a need for greater urgency to preserve and nurture Mother Earth. Therefore, today’s ecological crisis is deeply rooted in excessive economic development,

³ Heidi Hart, “Timothy Morton (2021). All Art Is Ecological”, *Journal of Ecohumanism* 1, 1 (2022) 77–80, at 77.

⁴ Mirela Mazilu, “The Ecological Component of the Lasting Development,” *Journal of Geographical Institute of “Jovan Cvijić” SASA* 1, 57 (2007) 95–100, at 95.

unprejudiced exploitation of nature, even in sacrificing it for good and human well-being.⁵

Everything in this world is interconnected. There is a link between all things that exist. The 3rd rule of Newton suggests, “for every action in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction.”⁶ This effect could be seen in nature, in our actions, and in everything that we do.

To go a little deeper into the understanding of the term ecological crisis, it is primarily connected to the consequences of the industrial revolution and demographic problems.

- a) The term crisis is connected with the actual man, his biological reproduction and consumption.
- b) The term “crisis” is connected to his way of production, which assumes spilling and exhaustion of resources.
- c) The term is related to the pollution of nature and the destruction of the biosphere as the basic conditions of life on Earth.

So it is proven that crisis means “a crisis of the whole civilisation” which doesn’t bring into question only industrial society, but also the social organisation based on industrialisation. Exactly, that means that no solution to the contemporary “ecological crisis” is possible if radical changes do not occur in human society because the “ecological crisis” is actually a product of the crisis of the way of production, in other words, man’s relation towards nature as a condition of securing living existence. The Ecological crisis is – a crisis of culture.⁷

In the 1990’s, there were reports about how pollution in the West drifted down to the Antarctic and caused a hole in the ozone layer which then shifted over Australia and caused an increase in skin cancer among people. The burning of forests by the timber mafia in Indonesia caused thick smoke to drift all the way to Malaysia and Sri Lanka,

⁵ Adrian Ignat, “The Ecological Crisis – A Huge Challenge,” *International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education* 3 (2019) 80–85, at 85.

⁶ <https://www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/newtons-laws-of-motion/#:~:text=Newton's%20Third%20Law%3A%20Action%20%26%20Reaction&text=His%20third%20law%20states%20that,words%2C%20forces%20result%20from%20interactions>, Accessed on 9 January, 2024.

⁷ Irina Kovačević, “Ecological Crisis and Sustainable Development”, *Defendologija* 34 (2013) 37–49, at 45.

where people suffered from respiratory diseases and the land received acid rain.

The destruction of the World Trade Centres in America caused a war in Afghanistan and later a war in Iraq, which then caused the American people to feel an increased sense of threat and insecurity which led Bush to win the elections in USA despite being condemned by world leaders and indirectly by the United Nations. You throw a stone from your building terrace and you'll hit something – a human, animal, insect or micro-organism. Today's ecological crisis is deeply rooted in excessive economic development, unprejudiced exploitation of nature, even in sacrificing it for good and human well-being.⁸

Human beings have a right to life and happiness. Since they have a special dignity, they must take into account the effects of environmental degradation, the current development model and the throwaway culture on the lives of people today. Pope Francis warns against the uncontrolled and excessive growth of cities, as cement, asphalt, glass and metal deprive people of physical contact with nature; against the omnipresence of the media and the digital world, which does not favour the development of a capacity for wise living, profound thinking and generous love; against the imbalance in the distribution of the population over the territory of the earth and, finally, against the globalisation of indifference, which creates political and social boundaries and barriers and results in the isolation of many social groups.⁹

To sum up, in the words of Timothy Morton, who leaves a sad note about the future of ecology in his book titled *All Art is Ecological*, he says "The ecological society to come, then, must be a bit haphazard, broken, lame, twisted, ironic, silly, sad."¹⁰

1.1 Societal Response

India's remarkable economic growth in the post liberalisation era has brought benefits to millions of people, but this growth continues to be clouded by severe environmental problems.¹¹ In the face of the growing crisis of the modern world in various fields of life, part of

⁸ Ignat, "The Ecological Crisis – A Huge Challenge," 85.

⁹ Michał Borda and Roman Ceglaek, "Ökologische Erziehung In der Enzyklika Laudato Si': Katechetische Implikationen," *Forum Teologiczne* 18 (2017) 213-227, at 218.

¹⁰ Timothy Morton, *All Art Is Ecological*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2021, 17.

¹¹ <https://www.teriin.org/environment>, Accessed on 9 January, 2024.

which is the environmental crisis, more and more often we hear statements of social or political leaders showing the negative effects of invasive operations on human nature.¹²

The State's responsibility with regard to environmental protection has been laid down under Article 48-A of our Constitution, which reads as follows: The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

The constitutional provisions are backed by a number of laws – acts, rules, and notifications. The EPA (Environment Protection Act), 1986 came into force soon after the Bhopal Gas Tragedy and is considered an umbrella legislation as it fills many gaps in the existing laws. Thereafter, a large number of laws came into existence as problems began arising, for example, the Handling and Management of Hazardous Waste Rules in 1989 – The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) (Amendment) in 2002.

It imposes a duty on every citizen 'to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife. Reference to the environment has also been made in the Directive Principles of State Policy as well as the Fundamental Rights. The Department of Environment was established in India in 1980 to ensure a healthy environment for the country. This later became the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1985.

Environmental protection is a matter of global importance, which must become a national priority since it directly targets the living conditions and health of the country's population. But the realisation of economic interests as well as the capacities for sustainable development in society must be closely related to the protection of the environment.¹³ Both nationally and internationally, regulations have been adopted over time, including strict safety rules regarding the nuclear industry, the gravity of the damage and consequences that may occur through the development of activities in the nuclear field, and the difficulty and complexity of repairing the damage caused as a result of these activities.¹⁴

¹² Andrzej Proniewski, "Theological Issues in the Ecological Encyclical *Laudato Si'*", *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej* 16, 1 (2015) 49-61, at 50.

¹³ Lilia Sargu and Constantin Lupu, "Management of Ecological Risks," *Ecoforum* 7, 2 (2018) 1-7, at 7.

¹⁴ Lucreția Dogaru, "Objectification of Civil Liability for Ecological Damage: Sectoral Aspects," *Curentul Juridic* 2 (2020) 91-103, at 96.

There are tasks of managing the geophysical environment, where it is impossible not to take into account the impact of society as a whole on the appropriate service, i.e., in which the managerial influence comes from the society as a whole, and the specialised service plays the role of mediator for the society and the geophysical environment.¹⁵ The condition of the society's ecological awareness, their knowledge, attitudes, opinions, habits and resulting behaviours are not neutral to the protection of the natural environment. A man's daily life is in the direct proximity of nature and his actions often directly affect it.¹⁶

One's work must focus on creating and promoting a range of products, solutions and policies that reduce the adverse impacts on the environment. One has to develop innovative solutions for cleaning the air, promoting water use efficiency across sectors and conserving forests, while enhancing the livelihood of forest dependent communities. One must work towards solutions that reduce the generation of waste and promote its reuse and recycling to build a circular economy. One's enduring work with friendly microbes could treat vast acres of polluted land, and water and restore soil and plant health.¹⁷

Therefore, the solutions for a better world depend on the perspective of every society and every human understanding. Despite differences, everyone has agreed to the fact that we must be preoccupied by our world; without our involvement, our world will not be the same tomorrow as it is today. Unfortunately, today "no one religious tradition or philosophical perspective has the ideal solution to the environmental crisis."¹⁸

1.2 Ecclesial Response

The environmental problems that we face at the beginning of the 21st Century call on us to identify some causes that often go beyond our temporal and spatial boundaries. Through "*Christian spirituality*,"

¹⁵ Sefo Zerina, "Geoinformation Technologies in the Fight against Ecological Crime," *International Journal of Economics & Law* 11, 33 (2021) 275-285, at 283-284.

¹⁶ Monika Jaworska and Renata Prokeinova, "Ecological Awareness of Students in the Light of Surveys," *Metody Ilościowe w Badaniach Ekonomicznych* 18, 3 (2017) 440-450, at 441.

¹⁷ <https://www.teriin.org/environment>, Accessed on 9 January, 2024.

¹⁸ Ignat, "The Ecological Crisis - A Huge Challenge," 80.

a desired and sustained commitment to the whole world, a person can make one's approach viable in one's own life.¹⁹

There is no doubt that we face a crisis – both of the environment and of our faith. What does our faith tell us about the way the world is headed? Is there hope or only despair? Is this an apparent doomsday scenario or can we see some light in the haze of pollution? All of us are part of this web called the eco – system. It is good to delve into our rich magisterial treasury to get an understanding of what our role as Christians and elements of this web could be.

As the ecological crisis assumed dangerous proportions, the attention of the official Church turned to the question of the threat that various forms of environmental destruction pose to the survival of humanity and the earth.²⁰ Exploitation and protection of the environment also received proper attention in the teachings of the Catholic Church as evidenced by the writings of the following Popes: John XXIII (*Pacem in Terris*), Paul VI (*Octogesima Adveniens*, AAS 63 (1971), 416-417), John Paul II (*Catechesis Insegnamenti* 41 (2001) 1, 179). Benedict XVI (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See* AAS 99 (2007), 73) and Francis (*Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*).²¹

Pope John XXIII especially encouraged the Church with his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* from 1964, which initiated the approach of *Reading the Signs of the Times* as a method of discovering God's presence in the world so much loved by God.²²

The need to care for the state of the environment has already been mentioned by St. Pope John Paul II at the beginning of his papal pontificate, at the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* of March 4, 1979, admonishing the public that, the Creator wanted man to associate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian', and not as a ruthless exploiter and destroyer (*Redemptor Hominis*, 15).²³

¹⁹ Stephen R. L. Clark, "Is Nature God's Will?," *Animals on the Agenda*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998, 123-136, at 123.

²⁰ Peter C. Phan, "Pope John Paul II and the Ecological Crisis," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 60, 1 (1994) 59-69, at 59.

²¹ Wojciech, "An Ecological Perspective in Evolutionary Theology," 277-278.

²² Paul B. Steffen, "Ecological Conversion and Eco-Spirituality," *Nurt SVD* 1 (2019) 267- 284, at 268.

²³ J. Dolega and J. Czartoszewski, *Edukacja Ekologiczna w Rodzinie*, Olecko: Episteme, 2009, 163-164.

The Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II on the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* deals with the aspect of development in the modern world. The document calls us to consider the nature of every being, whether animate or inanimate, animal plant or human, as being one that is interconnected with an ordered system that we call the cosmos (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 87, 34).

As there is a need for development and progress on the one hand, it is also our duty to ensure that the need to respect the cycles of nature and its resources – renewable or otherwise- are kept in mind (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 26). While extensively addressing environmental concerns the document calls for respect for all creation as well as an awareness that we cannot simply exploit nature. The limits of natural resources and the effects of industrialization on the environment are also described. A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialisation. These considerations alert our conscience to the moral dimension of development.

Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus* again states that care for the environment is a challenge to all of humanity. In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the human environment, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. Therefore, it is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces. This may mean making important changes in established life-styles, in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individual and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources (*Centesimus Annus*, 38, 40, 52).

It is therefore a matter of a universal duty based on the principle of the common good (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 284). Besides these, there are many other writings, especially those of Pope John Paul II, that deal with the issue of being concerned about nature.

Laudato Si' by Pope Francis explicates that humans have wrongfully interpreted God's call in Genesis to have "dominion" over the earth as permission to exploit the earth, leading to sinful ecological destruction. The type of environmental degradation which has caused the current

ecological crisis is undoubtedly the result of human sinfulness, at least in part.²⁴

Pope Francis explains that humanity has disappointed God's expectations (*Laudato Si'*, 61) and that it is therefore necessary to re-proclaim God's Gospel of creation to people in order to discover the richness that religion can offer for an integral ecology and a full development of humanity. Despite their different approaches, science and religion can enter into a productive dialogue for both.

Catechesis, among other things, offers an opportunity for such a dialog. It is aimed at education in faith, but also includes measures aimed at the comprehensive development of mankind. Christians must care for nature and their weakest brothers and sisters, as well as for the order within creation, which is part of their duty towards nature and the Creator, as well as part of their faith. People of faith should better recognise their ecological obligations towards the natural environment (*Laudato Si'*, 61). For this reason, these commitments must become an important aspect of the ecological education imparted by the Church and mobilise Christians to develop a culture of care for their environment.²⁵

Further, Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* explains that Ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in Catechesis and elsewhere. Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life. Here, though, I would stress the great importance of the family, which is "the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life (*Laudato Si'*, 213).

Forming ecological awareness among children, young people, and adults is one of the most important challenges of the contemporary world. This process is of great importance as it leads to the formation

²⁴ Taylor J. Ott, "Destructive Activity in an Ecological Ethics of Co-creation," *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 56, 3 (2020) 73–100, at 97.

²⁵ Borda and Ceglarek, "Ökologische Erziehung In der Enzyklika *Laudato Si'*: Katechetische Implikationen," 218.

the pro-ecological behaviour, resulting in the proper attitudes of people to the environment.²⁶

Pope Francis in *Laudate Deum* reiterated that, “We as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (*Laudate Deum*, 42).

Conclusion

As Christians, one must try to respect the land or the earth. which has God as its centre. One must like St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, extol God in every creation, birds, flowers, valleys, mountains and everything else created by his unconditional love. If a person fails to see in Nature the countenance of God, one may not respect and praise the magnanimity of Nature.

I conclude with the words of Pope John Paul II: “It is my hope that the inspiration of Saint Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of ‘fraternity’ with all those good and beautiful things which almighty God has created. And may he remind us of our serious obligation to respect and watch over them with care, in the light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the human family.”²⁷

²⁶ Marcin Klimski, “Rozważania nad Świadomością Ekologiczną” (Remarks on Ecological Awareness), *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 1, 5 (2007) 519–524, at 524.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all the Creation*, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 01 January, 1990, 16, at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed on 17 January, 2024.