

AN ECOLOGICAL PARADIGM

After Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II

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1. Introduction

The agrarian world kept their desire to plant their feet firmly on mother earth. There was a sense of rootedness and connectedness to the earth as a created reality.¹ The importance of the earth is not only because it provides human needs, but also because “the earth carries the psychic structure as well as the physical form of every living being upon the planet.”² Mountains and huge rocks balance the earth. But economic growth and technological advancements play a serious role in disturbing earth and soil. By the emergence of large earth movers and transportation facilities the face of the earth is fast changing. Ancient Church buildings and other institutions on the hilltops gave an impression that we are the caretakers of the Nature. But today instead of taking care of the earth, we empty the earth by selling the soil and constructing unbearable huge buildings. In this context the Church has a vital role to recapture the image as the “blessing to the nations” (Genesis 22:18). While the Catholic Church is celebrating the 50th year of the opening of Second Vatican Council, the communion ecclesiology of the Council could shed light on our earth concerns providing a new ecological paradigm.

The concept of communion (*koinonia*), which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Council (*Lumen Gentium* [hereafter LG] 4,8,15,18,21,24-25; *Dei Verbum* [hereafter DV] 10; *Gaudium et Spes* [hereafter GS] 3; *Unitatis Redintegratio* [hereafter UR] 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22), is very suitable for expressing the core of the mystery of the Church, and can be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology, from an

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¹Gerald Rangebok Khongjee, “The Khasi Heritage of Rootedness and Connectedness to Earth,” *Oriens Journal* 3 (2012), 128-129.

²Thomas Berry, “The Dream of the Earth: Our Way into the Future,” *Cross Currents* 37, 2 (Summer/Fall 1987), 200.

ecological point of view.³ A deeper appreciation of the fact that the Church is a communion is, indeed, a task of special importance, which provides ample scope for theological reflection on the mystery of the Church, “whose nature is such that it always admits new and deeper exploring.”⁴

This paper considers the increasing crisis of our environment and our own common vocation to care for the earth. It is already some years since Pope John Paul II invited us to recognize this crisis and the corresponding challenge: “Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. A new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge... The ecological crisis is a moral issue.”⁵ Increasingly we are aware of the critical ecological devastation which faces our planetary home.

In this context, I would like to highlight the ecclesiological framework for environmental praxis. The central idea in the ecclesiology of Vatican II is “communion.” Churches have to become real fellowships today. There are various levels of ecclesial communion: local/intra-communitarian, inter-communitarian, universal, etc. The church is called to be a network of communions – a communion of communions. At the communion is never a finished product; it is a project that should remain dynamic and open to the other levels and oriented to the universal and eschatological communion. Communion implies and calls for participation.⁶ The call to communion requires defending the integrity of creation, sharing the world’s resources with one another and with other creatures and with the future generations (communion of goods). We have to preserve the earth which is our home and of those who will come after us.⁷

³Synod of Bishops, Second Extraordinary Assembly (1985), cited in Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “The Church as Communion: Some Aspects of the Church as Communion,” *Catholic International* 3 (September 1992), 761.

⁴Paul VI, “Opening Address of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council,” cited in Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “The Church as Communion,” 761.

⁵John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” Message of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990.

⁶Kuncheria Pathil, “Vatican II: Call for Renewal in the Church,” *Jeevadhara* 42, 250 (2012), 271.

⁷Amado L. Picardal, “Environmental Praxis of Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Ecclesiological Perspective,” *Hapag* 8, 1 (2011), 66.

2. Self-Understanding of Church as Communion in Vatican II

Vatican II was one of the most momentous events in the history of the Church in the second millennium. The council marked a decisive and authoritative entry of the Catholic Church into the modern ecumenical movement. The manner in which the Church moves forward in its ecumenical engagement continues to be shaped, for better or worse, by the manner in which we receive and interpret the theological groundwork laid at Vatican II for its engagement in the common search for ecclesial unity.⁸ In this section I would like to explain how Vatican II documents generously widened its vision of ‘communion’ – a development from *Lumen Gentium* to *Gaudium et Spes*, from dogmatic perspective to pastoral perspective and church’s view from *ad intra* to *ad extra*. Tanner says, “*Gaudium et Spes* emerged only gradually from the womb of the council.”⁹ I propose to offer a brief retrospective of the ecclesiology of communion since the Council, followed by a few indications for further development, with a view to concluding with the global significance of this ecclesiology for the Church’s mission in the third millennium.

2.1. Dynamism of Vatican II

The dynamism of Vatican II was undertaken with two key terms, namely, *Resourcement* which means return to the ‘sources (the Bible and the Fathers of the Church) and *aggiornamento* which means actualization in the terms of today or bringing the Church up to date. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* stated that “at all times, the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4).

If we seriously consider environmental issues as requiring a response in faith, we must see it arising from our tradition. That tradition includes our views of the environment as shaped by Scripture, spirituality, liturgy, ethics and social teaching, and our lives as lived in faith.¹⁰

In his opening speech, Pope John XXIII spoke of the important duty as being not only to guard the precious treasure of tradition,

⁸Catherine E. Clifford, “Reform and the Development of Doctrine: An Ecumenical Endeavor,” *The Jurist* 71 (2011), 39-40.

⁹Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica*, New York: Paulist Press, 2005, 3.

¹⁰Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer, ed., “Introduction” in *And God Saw That It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*, Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996, 8.

as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us... The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in nature.¹¹

Today, given the accumulating scientific evidence and increasing public political concern about environmental and ecological issues, these matters clearly are a “sign of the times.” While science has the role of helping to determine the extent of these problems, religion’s role is to help believers and others address these concerns in the context of faith and with moral urgency.¹²

2.2. Communion according to Vatican II and the Post-Conciliar Documents

Though the documents of the Second Vatican Council made use of the word “communion” or related expressions like “hierarchic communion” and “ecclesiastical communion,” the Council did not define the term communion. *Lumen Gentium* 7 teaches that the Eucharist brings us into communion with Him and with one another. *Koinonia* or Communion is an internal, invisible, sacramental and supernatural unity. Thus the Church is “a new brotherly community” (GS 32); it is “a fellowship of life, charity, and truth,” (LG 9, 26). The Council goes on to say that there exists a profound communion among all the baptized; every baptized has the same Lord, the same Spirit, same grace, faith, hope, love, same responsibility and the same task (LG 32; 58). The Council uses the term communion in the context of unity (LG 15; 33, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 2).¹³

The model of the Church as communion was stressed in the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985. It was an occasion for evaluating the Council twenty years after. The Synod says:

The ecclesiology of communion is a central and fundamental idea in the documents of the Council. *Koinonia*/communion, based on sacred Scripture, was held in great honour in the ancient Church and

¹¹John XXIII, “Opening Speech to the Council” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot, New York: America Press, 1966, 715.

¹²Christiansen and Grazer, “Introduction,” 9.

¹³K. J. Thomas, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, Bangalore: St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute Publications, 73.

is so held in the Eastern churches right up to our time. Since Vatican II much has been done to make the Church, as communion, more clearly understood and more concretely translated into living reality (Final Report II, C, 1).¹⁴

We are called to be a communion of Churches not only for the sake of the renewal and unity of the Church of Jesus Christ, but also to participate in God’s transformation of the world.

2.3. Communion in the Model of Trinity

Communion ecclesiology represents an attempt to move beyond the merely juridical and institutional understandings by emphasizing the mystical, sacramental and historical dimensions of the Church. It focuses on relationships. Communion ecclesiology gives expression to a participatory worldview in which person, cosmos, and creator are integrally and inextricably related. *Gaudium et Spes* interprets the Triune God’s mission as being revealed in the “horizon of the world” (GS 24).

Theocentrism is the cornerstone of an ecclesial ecology. Trinitarian view of creation is engraved in Trinitarian ecclesiology. As God relates to nature, creation acquires an otherness of its existence. The theology of “otherness” of nature, in the context of Trinitarian ecclesiology, places creation into ecclesiological *koinonia* with humankind and God. Because God is a mystery and He calls human beings to participate in His mystery, humanity is also called to discover the mystery of nature. Humanity might discover new natural resources needed to maintain contemporary consumerism. An exclusive anthropocentric view of the world makes humanity responsible for the current ecological problem. The deformed relationship of humanity with nature brings us to the problem of ecology. Accountability is essential for the recovery of nature to its original place.

2.4. Ecclesial Communion

During the opening speech at the council Pope John XXIII emphasised, and this point is too often forgotten in our day, that the restoration of unity among the Christian churches was to be one of the principal goals of the council (*UR* 1).¹⁵ The Catholic Church’s engagement in official theological dialogues since the Second Vatican Council (including at least sixteen bi-lateral or multi-lateral dialogues at the international level, and the numerous commissions that are operative at various national and

¹⁴Xavier Rynne, *John Paul’s Extraordinary Synod*, Delaware, 1986, 122.

¹⁵Clifford, “Reform and the Development of Doctrine,” 39-40.

regional levels) is a principal means of continuing this effort to critically examine and work towards the reformulation of church teaching, in a way that will lead us to a shared and ecumenically receivable account of the common Christian faith.¹⁶

Ecclesial communion should never lead to domination or alienation. The acceptance of the concept of communion, and the communion of churches, and an ecumenical openness to the heritage of different churches will lead to a better understanding which will enable every believer to understand well, and appreciate, the catholicity of the Church, that is its unity in diversity. The task of the Church is the realization of communion at all levels of her Christian life, so that she will truly witness to Christ in the whole world.

2.5. World-Bound Mission

A critical contribution of the Second Vatican Council is its solution to the debate on the relationship between “sacred” and “secular.” *Gaudium et Spes* helped overcome this dilemma by a shift from “Church-as-conqueror-of-the-world” to “Church-in-solidarity-with-the-world.” The theological foundations of this breakthrough are laid in the concept of God’s universal salvific will as enshrined in *Lumen Gentium*. The world is the heart-throb of Christian mission, and its “joy and hope, grief and anguish” (GS 1) play hermeneutical roles in that mission’s direction. The Church’s solidarity with humankind and its successes implies that the world offers a *locus* for the Church’s authentic existence and that “worldly” things will have ultimate meaning in evangelical values. Christians will disfigure God’s order of creation if they abandon their temporal commitments. Proclamation of Jesus’ message is to be realized in the ambit of responsibility for the world.¹⁷

God’s mission is directly related to the world and the church is an instrument privileged to participate in God’s mission of redemption and the recreation of humanity and the cosmos. We must conceive an ecclesiology in the light of the social *perichoretic* (mutual indwelling) character of God the Trinity – the church in the likeness of God. Increasing poverty, corruption and exploitation, diminishing moral and social values, destruction of ecology due to increasing globalization, modernization and industrialization are now part and parcel of our context. Therefore

¹⁶Clifford, “Reform and the Development of Doctrine,” 41.

¹⁷Antony Kalliath, “Mission as a Liberative Dialogue for Harmony of Life: Interrogating Missiology in a Futuristic Perspective,” *Ishvani* 24, 3 (2006) 275-276.

preservation of creation is a relevant aspect of the Church’s mission for the realization of wider communion.

3. Towards an Ecological Paradigm

Theology is not static. It evolves and assumes new shape from time to time, likewise the understanding of communion also widened. The Ecumenical Movement began to widen from the motif and endeavour of uniting the churches or inter-church co-operation to a large vision and reality of the larger humanity, to the idea of whole cosmos. The ‘whole inhabited earth’ is one of the many households of faith. The earth is inhabited by people of different races, languages, religions and cultures, and they all belong to one human community. This outlook is a step forward towards wider ecumenism. Christians are constantly challenged to respond to the issues of peace and goodwill on earth, co-operation and co-existence of faiths, communal harmony and all other similar concerns of making the whole humankind a household of God, a true *oikoumene* as wide and vast as the earth itself is. When we achieve this there will be justice, peace and integrity in the world.¹⁸

The Church as communion must be involved in a renewed social apostolate. This means that the Church as community must be involved in addressing the concrete problems and concerns of humanity – poverty, war, environmental degradation, injustice, violation of human rights, etc. This mission involves struggling against sin and evil in society as well as within each person. It should be understood in terms of working for the kingdom of God - a kingdom of justice, and love.

In the context of alarming environmental problems like global warming, ozone depletion, lowering of water table, prevention of pollution, conservation of natural resources etc., the Vatican II’s vision of renewed Church can provide an ecclesiological basis for the environmental praxis of the Church. In view of ecological crisis, I would like to invite the attention to an ‘eco-awareness’ through biblical, theological and pastoral approaches.

3.1. ‘Subdue’ vs. ‘Care for’ and ‘Consumerism’ vs. ‘Mutual Enriching’

We need to look afresh the human-earth relationship. Re-interpret the place of human being in nature not as standing above nature or as the

¹⁸Anand Spencer, “Towards Wider Ecumenism: A Motivation from Biblical Insights,” *National Council Churches Review* 120, 7 (August 2000), 679.

centre of nature but as being part of nature.¹⁹ The biblical vision is simultaneously biocentric, anthropocentric and theocentric.²⁰ A new understanding of the land and land ethics is very vital.²¹ Attitude to creation should be an appreciation of the goodness of the physical creation, its biodiversity, wholeness of creation, and the stewardship of creation. Hierarchy in creation should be perceived as one of the responsibilities and humility of the higher to the lower. Concern for animals, inter-relationship between the people and the land (Genesis 1:26-31), Sabbath year (Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 15: 1-3; Leviticus 25:2-8) and jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-17, 29-31), cutting down of trees, limitation of grazing rights, agricultural festivals and other environmental laws in the Bible promotes a conservationist ideology.²² Theology may not contribute directly to ecological crisis, but it influences and shapes the attitude of humans towards nature, and our relationship with other segments of God's creation. Land, the use of nature metaphors, physical setting and landscape of the Bible, chosen objects of nature such as trees, and birds need further study and exploration, in view of an eco-theology.²³ Only those faithful to God's purposes would retain or inherit the blessings of life in the land. Numerous biblical passages and practices indicate concern for the wellbeing and preservation of nonhuman inhabitants of the land.²⁴ Biblical understanding of redemption focuses on the fact that there can be no redemption of humanity apart from the redemption of nature.²⁵

We need to understand anew the biblical command, "be fruitful and multiply" and "have dominion" (Genesis 9:1). In the Biblical Narrative, after the flood, God's covenant was with Noah, the living beings in the

¹⁹Theodore Hiebert, "Re-Imaging Nature: Shifts in Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 50 (January 1996), 36-46.

²⁰Holmes Rolston, "The Bible and Ecology," *Interpretation* 50 (January 1996), 16-26.

²¹Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Secunderabad: OM-Authentic India, 2006, 103-105.

²²Norman Solomon, "The Bible and the Preservation of the World" in *The Bible as Cultural Heritage*, eds. William Benken and Sean Freyne, London: SCM Press, 1995, 97-107.

²³Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53, 2 (July 1996), 293.

²⁴Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*, San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981, 267-81.

²⁵V. J. John, "Biblical and Theological Legitimacy on 'Theologies of Ecology'," *JTCA* 11 (2012), 49.

Ark and with the entire creation (Genesis 9:8-17).²⁶ There is an inherent relational interdependence of humans with the rest of creation in this covenant. The Noachic covenant is a symbol of the unbreakable bond between all creatures and their Creator. The perpetual sign of the covenant is God’s “bow in the clouds” (Genesis 9:13).²⁷

What the story of Noah and the flood illustrates is the recognition by the biblical authors that human offenses potentially imperil the rest of creation. Dominion, enacted by a representative of God in Noachic covenant partnership, clearly rules out anthropocentrism tolerant of the exploitation of nonhuman nature by human beings. As descendants of Noah, with every “bow in the clouds,” humans are invited to recall a covenant initiated by God, not only with humankind but also with the earth and all of its inhabitants. Because of the interconnectedness of all of creation articulated in this covenant, the dominion it implies can be named “ecological.”²⁸ There is no biblical basis for justifying the exploitation of the earth and its many forms of plant and animal life. Such behaviour breaks God’s covenant with creation and is a sin against the Creator.

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II refers to the environmental crisis that has ensued from the efforts to develop and exploit the earth’s resources (no. 16). The problem is that the command to “subdue the earth” (Genesis 1:28) has often been understood as the unbridled exploitation of the earth’s resources which has led to the environmental crisis. John Paul II clarifies what “kingship” and “subduing the earth” really means:

The essential meaning of this “kingship” and “dominion” of man over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter (no. 16).

Hans Küng also explains what “subdue the earth” means and links it with care for fellow humans and the environment:

“Subdue the earth” does not mean “exploit the earth,” but “cultivate it and look after it.” “Rule over” the animals means taking responsibility for them as being in the image of God... The “fill the earth and subdue it” of creation story (Genesis 1:28) cannot be understood as *carte blanche* for unscrupulous exploitation and

²⁶John, “Biblical and Theological Legitimacy on ‘Theologies of Ecology’,” 50.

²⁷Anne M. Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God” in *And God Saw That It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*, 27.

²⁸Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God,” 27.

destruction of nature and the environment... Believing in the creator God allows me to take my responsibility for fellow human beings and the environment.²⁹

What is most significant here is the emphasis on the care for the earth: the earth's environment has to be nurtured and cared for.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) too has repeatedly condemned the dominant ideology. The ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006 on the theme, "Caring for Life," made the following observation:

Remembering that all life is created by God that God continues to care for it, we affirm the sacredness of all life and receive God's gift of life that we share with all other creatures and all creation. Creation does not belong to us, but we belong to creation (Ps 104). The earth is not ours, but the common home for the entire web of life, the earth community. It is not us who sustain life, but God. There would be no life on earth without the energy of the sun, without air, water and soil. All our human activities must recognize and respect the logic and rules (ecology and economy) of God's greater household of life (*oikoumene*) in just and sustainable relationships that make for peace and the flourishing of communities.³⁰

A lifestyle centred on consumerism contributes to overproduction, dependence of fossil fuels, use of technology that destroys the environment, etc. John Paul II warned against the damage caused by consumerism on the environment and the need to adopt a simpler lifestyle as one of the solutions to the ecological crisis:

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause ... simplicity, moderation, and discipline, as well as the spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.³¹

Benedict XVI also emphasizes the need for a simple lifestyle as a response to the ecological crisis:

²⁹Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007, 116, 125.

³⁰Cited in Thomas Manjaly, ed., "Editorial" to *Oriens Journal* 3 (2012), 6.

³¹John Paul II, "Peace with the Creator, Peace with All Creation," 13.

It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view.³²

It means avoiding wasteful consumption, waste-management, developing a greener environment with cleaning-up, gardening, tree-planting, natural diet, etc. It also means constructing houses and building with natural ventilation, lighting and less dependent on electrical appliances. Thus we need to scale down and simplify our lifestyle and share our resources with the poor.³³

3.2. Church Pronouncements

In the context of serious ecological crisis faced by humanity and the urgency given to this issue by governments and civil society, the Church has also pronounced her views consistently. John Paul II, for example, repeatedly spoke on the necessity of the care for creation. His Message on the World Day Peace, 1 January 1990, drew attention to the moral and religious dimension of the environmental crisis. In 1991, he issued *Centessimus Annus* exhorting the faithful to “make important changes in established lifestyles, 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 resource”(no. 52).³⁴ On 17 January 2001, in a statement he referred to the ecological reality as a “catastrophe” and called for an ecological conversion for everyone. Of all the documents of the Magisterium dealing with ecology, according to Sean McDonagh “this is the only document that has a sense of the overwhelming nature of the problem” with the rest giving “no overall sense of the magnitude of the current ecological crisis facing the planet, humankind and every other creature living on the planet.”³⁵

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that “the environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards

³²Benedict XVI, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation: 2010 World Day of Peace Message,” 11.

³³Picardal, “Environmental Praxis of Basic Ecclesial Communities,” 79.

³⁴Gaspar, “To Spoke with All Boldness,” 22.

³⁵Sean McDonagh, “To Protect Creation” cited in Karl M. Gaspar, “To Spoke with All Boldness,” *Hapag* 8, 1 (2011), 22-23.

humanity as a whole” (CV 48). In his message on the World Peace Day, 1 January 2010, he asked:

Can we remain indifferent before the problem associated with such realities as, climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? (no. 4).

He puts forward that “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyles and prevailing models of consumption and production” (no. 11) as well as be engaged in individual and community action to save the planet.³⁶

The Church engages the ecological crisis mainly to preserve humanity; since human ecology must be prioritized over natural ecology, emphasis should be made in defending humankind from human being’s self-destructive forces. The Church is often criticized for its anthropocentrism and lack of openness to the emerging ecological worldview promoted by the new cosmological and ecosystem perspectives, which deepen the understanding of human and nature relationship. Unless we build upon a more connected view of relationship between God, humanity and creation, we cannot make our cosmos sustainable.

3.3. Trinitarian God as the Centre of Ecological Theology

Since ecology constitutes a complex set of relationships that values everything without neglecting anything, we need to have an understanding of God as the ground for our ecological action. Leonardo Boff stresses that the Christian view of God as Trinity with its uniqueness and divinity as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, and yet being equal and united in the bond of life, love and ethical relationship should become the basis for the love, communion and relation among the creation.³⁷ Denis Edwards argues that the Trinitarian God of mutual love and fecundity as the centre of an ecological theology.³⁸ The complexity, diversity and interconnection that characterize the world, is considered as mirroring the Trinitarian reality and dynamism. We are “one life and communion distinctly fulfilled, being

³⁶Karl M. Gasper, “To Spoke with All Boldness,” *Hapag* 8, 1 (2011), 22.

³⁷Leonardo Boff, “Ecology and Theology: Christian Pan-in-theism,” *Voices from the Third World* 16 (1993), 115.

³⁸Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998, 91-132.

one and many in analogy with the mystery of the triune God.”³⁹ The Holy Spirit inhabits the cosmos and the human heart as the Son became incarnate in Jesus’ humanity. The Spirit is present in human life as the risen Christ himself is and bidding us to live in the ecological mystery and in perfect communion with the Trinity.⁴⁰

The creation centred spiritual tradition with its Trinitarian emphasis is most suitable in an ecological context. The presence of the Spirit in creation calls us to acknowledge that God is present in all and all is in God (Acts 17:28). Leonardo Boff affirms:

Pan-in-theism allows us to embrace the universe with great love because we embrace the God-Trinity himself. From this expression is born a new integrating holistic spirituality, capable of uniting heaven and earth... The world is not merely a bridge to God; it is the place of veneration and it is the house of the encounter with God.⁴¹

Like the Trinity, may all our actions be a source of harmony, just like the way God put order in the midst of chaos at the creation of the universe.

3.4. Peaceful Environmental Praxis

To be converted to a sense of kinship with and responsibility for the creatures of Earth, and for the land, atmosphere, seas and rivers that support them, can be a joyful and liberating experience.⁴² Sallie McFague calls ‘life abundant’ as the experience of conversion from the model of individualism and consumption to the simplicity.⁴³ Her ideas of God as reality, the world as God’s body, and humans as the hands of God are radical to her idea of Christians who should live to be more community oriented and less as idealizing individuality. All should hear her wake up call to sustainability and care of the earth as a theological mandate.

In the struggle to defend the integrity of creation the means used must be peaceful, non-violent and creative. Although there will be times when extra-legal means are employed, the principle of active non-violence must govern every praxis. This also means avoiding any alliance with groups who use violent means and discouraging them from doing so. In their struggle to defend the environment, Church must be prepared to

³⁹Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 116.

⁴⁰Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 117.

⁴¹Boff, “Ecology and Theology,” 117-118.

⁴²Denis Edwards, “Eucharist and Ecology,” *Sedos* 41, 7-8 (July-August 2009), 177.

⁴³Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000, 209-210.

follow the way of the cross – to avoid harming others and to be prepared to suffer and die. They must continually reach out to those who oppose them and reconcile with them.⁴⁴

Here I would like to mention some tasks proposed by Huang Po Ho, Dean of The Programme for theology and Cultures in Asia for our further reflections:

- To acknowledge that ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis, unless we reorder our mindset and value system, we will never be able to solve the ecological problem created by human greed. Unless we bring reconciliation and healing to the nature we will not be at peace spiritually.

- To reconsider the meaning of human well-being in relation to the wider context of society and holistic harmony with the whole cosmos, and also the ethical responsibility of human being commissioned in this creation order.

- To re-examine the value and their utilities of developments in terms of economics and technologies with regards to the limitation of resources that the planetary earth can sustain.

- To reflect upon the human built system of capitalist economic operation that is globalized today to enhance human greed and competition, and eventually to exploit the mother earth extravagantly.

- To develop a new lifestyle with simplicity that is coherent with the nature's order that can enhance sustainability for human existence in harmony with the rest of creation.

- To continue working for a comprehensive theology in respect to God's creation, that can contribute not only to Christian community but also to all people of God for a common effort toward the real consummation of creation.⁴⁵

In doing so, we as Christians should be converted first to the renewal of our faith and devotion through a humble way to learn from our neighbours and neighbour species of creation. As hope-filled people, we stand in awe of Earth's goodness and its capacity to provide abundant life for all God's creation. We recognize our interconnection with Earth-with air, water, land, plants and other creatures. We recognize the dignity of the human person as an individual and as part of a community. We

⁴⁴Picardal, "Environmental Praxis of Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Ecclesiological Perspective," 73.

⁴⁵Huang Po Ho, "A Paradigm Shift in Theology; A Holistic Redemption to God's Creation," *JTCA* 11 (2012), 88-89.

embrace our power and responsibility to create a human economy that fits within Earth’s ecological boundaries, more authentically serves human needs and builds community. Above all, we need a paradigm shift in mindset and values. This will entail change from a focus on material goods to holistic wellbeing; from excess to sufficiency; from exclusion to inclusion; from competition to cooperation, etc.

4. Conclusion

Contemporary Catholic theology is mainly centred on Second Vatican Council teachings which are more biblical, patristic and updated to the contexts. Communion ecclesiology is the well accepted theology of the Church. Vatican II invites us to be engaged in today’s crucial issues. Its vision of a renewed Church does provide an adequate ecclesiological framework for the environmental praxis of the Church as communion. Trinitarian God is the model of both Communion and ecology. It enables us to lead a perichoretic social attitude in our life. In this paper I have attempted to work out the implications of this ecclesiological vision vis-à-vis the serious ecological crisis that humankind is facing. The task for the Church as communion is to own and understand fully this vision of a renewed Church and find concrete and creative ways to live it out at the grassroots level.

To strengthen the idea of perfect communion between God and creation, we must necessarily stress the ecclesial communion of all Christians in the celebration of the Eucharist. Since it is a celebration of the most important sacrament of all, the participants should bring the Eucharistic celebration to their homes and workplaces and carry the effects of the Eucharist in their day-to-day life. The integrity of creation should be protective and the intrinsic value of every creature should be respected.⁴⁶ The whole nature and products of nature are to be brought to the Eucharistic table to express our solidarity and communion with nature.

The destructive praxis of Christians in relationship to the natural world should be interrupted and replaced by a more liberating, transformative praxis. Concretely, this would include things like: driving cars less and using less electricity, recycling as much as possible and reducing trash output, minimizing consumption of meat, advocating for stronger environmental laws and business ethics, buying products that use less energy, and working for organizations that seek to put an end to

⁴⁶Prisco A. Cajés, “The Eucharist and the Ecological Crisis,” *Hapag* 8, 1 (2011), 110.

massive deforestation. Obviously, this list is far from complete, but it does offer some useful ideas for ways in which Christians can respond to God's call to care for creation and collaborate in God's work for justice.

In the end, if ecological concerns are to be of great moment in a society's life, they must be recognized in the area where questions of ultimate concern are raised and responded to. That is the area of Church where serious commitment is expected. Pope Benedict XVI declared "Year of Faith" from October 11, 2012 onwards. During the Year of Faith, Catholics are asked to study and reflect on the documents of Vatican II and the catechism so that they may deepen their knowledge of the faith. In the light of the documents of Vatican II, the Church should make this also an occasion to celebrate the "Year of Integrity of Creation" joining hands with other Christian groups, creating an atmosphere of communion and there will be grass root level changes in our attitude to the Nature.