

SALT AND NOTHINGNESS: A Mantra from Jesus through Sartre towards Reduced Inequalities

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Abstract: In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus unravelled the essence of humankind through the metaphor of 'salt', and centuries later, Jean-Paul Sartre named 'nothingness' as the reality of the human being. This article, by drawing parallels between 'salt' and 'nothingness', argues that, though from radically different schools of thought, Jesus and Sartre, in effect, are making the same point that all human beings, irrespective of race, sex, ethnicity, or social status, hold within them the undeniable potential to question and negate the status quo to bring about a sustainable change in the world. Adopting 'salt and nothingness' as a single *mantra* could effectively conceive development plans and actions to curb extreme inequalities, thereby fostering a sustainable society. By exposing the relevance of Jesus' word in today's world, the article emphasises the need to bridge the gap between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' so that religious values can be effectively incorporated into achieving United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, especially towards Reduced Inequalities (SDG-10).

Keywords: Economics of Enough, Jesus and Sartre, Jesus and Sustainability, Reduced Inequalities, Religion and Development Religion and Sustainability, Sacred and Secular, Sustainability Mantra

1. Introduction

Over 2000 years ago, atop a mount, Jesus is believed to have said, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). Almost 2000 years later,

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Jean-Paul Sartre said, "Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world" (*Being and Nothingness* 24). And in 2015, the United Nations (UN) said to the world that reducing inequalities within and among countries and ensuring that no one is left behind are integral to achieving sustainable development (SDG 10). Though uttered millennia apart, what is intriguing about these seemingly unrelated statements is that, what Jesus said about humankind from a religious standpoint, and what Sartre said about the human being from a secular foundation are, in essence, strikingly similar and that the two statements can be adopted as a *mantra* to achieve the sustainability goal set by the UN through fostering a dialogue between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. Jesus' 'salt' metaphor can be and has been interpreted in many ways to make it meaningful and relevant in different contexts.

This article aims to look at 'salt' from a new perspective, arguing that through the metaphor of 'salt', Jesus envisioned humans to have the opportunity to be equals in all respects, defying the chasms of social, economic, racial, and gender segregation. Sartre, a staunch proponent of individual freedom who famously said "hell is other people" (*No Exit* 45), might sound like someone whose ideas would be counterproductive to a society which demands equality. But, his notion of 'nothingness', which, for him, is at the heart of the human being, reflects what Jesus said in his 'salt' metaphor, perhaps through a different philosophical device, but with the same effect.

The article initially attempts to analyse the Christian metaphor of 'salt' and the Sartrean notion of 'nothingness' on their own grounds and tries to draw parallels in their views of the fundamental truth of human beings. The article further argues that Jesus and Sartre aspire to design a humankind that cohabits in equality that goes beyond all hierarchies and divides created by humans. The article then goes on to show how the Christian-Sartrean conception of humankind can be a replicable model today for sustainable human development to create a prosperous and responsible society, especially by reducing inequalities (SDG 10). For that, it is important that we envision and live in a society

rooted in the economics of enough and the ethics of care together with the economics of care and the ethics of enough for sustainable prosperity and peace for people and the planet (Nandhikkara, "Economics of Enough," 274).

2. Who is 'the Salt of the Earth'?

Bible scholars and evangelists have interpreted the metaphor of the 'salt' over the centuries in various ways. Being a statement uttered in one of the first addresses during Jesus' ministry, it held the very potent seeds of his message to the world. When Jesus said, "you are the salt of the earth," the 'you' in this statement was not intended for a specific individual human, for Jesus placed the community above the individual, making 'salt' not a unique attribute of a particular individual, but of the entire humankind. In the Greek Bible, the 'you' in this context is plural, meaning Jesus was not calling any singular individual 'salt of the earth' but addressed them all as a group (Brown, online). Christian theologians and evangelists generally interpret that the followers of Jesus belong to this group. Jesus, in his sermons and teachings, included the downtrodden and the outcasts of society by giving them the hope and scope to be of importance in the grand scheme of things. Such a person excluding the majority of people or calling a certain category 'salt of the earth' does not sound in character, as it clearly gives preference to a privileged group of people. As Paul Minear understands, "...on the mountain the narrator recognised the presence not only of those who would remain central to the drama until the end of the Gospel but also of those who would first hear a reading of the Gospel the disciples, the crowds, Jesus, and those who would prove to be the adversaries of all three" (33). Thus 'you' of the "you are the salt of the earth" included or had the breadth to include the entire humankind in Jesus' eyes. Moreover, he did not say "you are the salt of Galilee" or "you are the salt of Israel," Jesus was talking about them belonging to the entire earth, thus inadvertently saying that 'you' is entire humanity.

The most common interpretations talk about 'salt' as having properties of preservation, purifying, seasoning, and fertilising,

among others (Garlington 731) which were the uses of salt in Biblical times. But the teachings of Jesus are not to be deciphered by putting them merely in the historical context but are to be extrapolated through time to understand the far-reaching messages ingrained in them for humanity. In that sense, 'salt' holds a larger and more fundamental significance to humankind. Irrespective of the version, all interpretations have one thing in common. Salt brings about a change in the world. And like salt, humans bring about a change in the world. "Salt is thus a metaphor for exercising a beneficial influence on the world ..." (Turner 155). And in order to bring a change somewhere or in something, one has to be unlike anything already present. To add flavour to food, salt has to be unlike anything already present in the food. Hence, to bring about a change in the world, humans cannot be like anything in the world. Humanity is to be like no other thing in the world; humanity is to be like no thing in the world. Humanity is to be a nothing. By being nothing, humanity can bring about any new change in the world. Thus, humans, as 'the salt of the earth,' as a nothingness, hold the potential to change the world.

The salt 'of the earth' suggests that the salt belongs to earth, and in the same way, humans have a belongingness to the world. Just as salt is irrelevant without the earth with which it mixes, humanity can be an agent of change only if there is a world. Humans belong with the world, and the world with humans, forming an intimate symbiotic relationship.

At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continued, "But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matt. 5:13). By now, it is clear that Jesus was not talking about salt and its saltiness in the literal sense but about humans and their qualities. Jesus, through this question, was hinting toward a secret potential that humans held within them. Just as salt needs to hold its saltiness and its potential to flavour in order to be salt, humans ought to retain the potential to bring about change in the world in order to be humans. The only way in which humans will lose this potential is through ignorance, being unaware of this intrinsic potential, or when humans forget what they are meant to bring to

this world. Thus, it is, in a way, a human responsibility to hold on to this potential. This responsibility to change the world that humankind possesses is a much-needed quality for the present and future times. But before delving into its details, the focus needs to be shifted to the Sartrean statement.

3. What is Nothingness of the Human Being?

Jean-Paul Sartre published his seminal work *Being and Nothingness* at a time when humanity was going through one of the most tumultuous times in written history. Sartre, in this complex work, was trying to describe the existential reality of the human being. One of the most pivotal statements in the book is, "Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world" (24). For Sartre, the individual human differs from the things in the world in that the latter is perfect, complete, unconscious, and forever in itself. The being-in-itself is. The human being, which Sartre calls being-for-itself, is consciousness and exists through the nihilation of the world of beings-in-itself. Unlike the things in the world, the human being is aware of its incompleteness, its imperfection, that it is unlike anything in the world, it is like no thing around, it is a nothing. "Every thing that can be determined as a this rather than a that ('it is this and not that') – or indeed as a this rather than the whole world ('it is this and not everything') – can be universally predicated with a 'not'" (Leung 478). "What makes a being a determinate being – what makes it this rather than that or those – is negation" (Gardner 62). Thus, the human being introduces nothingness into the world. Being a nothingness, being unlike anything around it, the human being has infinite freedom to actuate oneself into anything; one can become whatever one wants to become. Hence, through the freedom rendered by nothingness, human beings can bring change into this world of unchanging, fixed, complete beings.

This individual freedom coming from the nothingness can prove detrimental to the freedom of the community as the principle of placing the self above the other always hinders the progress of the society, which is exaggerated by the idea that this being is a for-itself which means a being which has itself as its

concern. But, being-for-itself cannot be a stand-alone entity detached from everything in the world, as this detachment would render it inert, static, and unchanging, which makes it exactly like the in-itself. The being-for-itself becomes a subject, not in isolation, but when it is in the world, in the midst of not just beings-in-itself, but of other beings-for-itself. For the Sartrean subject, its interaction with other subject/s is conflict-ridden, for 'the Look' of the other is intimidating and threatens to disintegrate its subjectivity, and the other also feels the same about the subject. But this conflicting interaction, this frictional relationship with the other cannot be escaped by the subject because this being in the world with other subjects, this being-for-others, is the existential reality of the human being. Thus, "Sartre's 'nothingness' refers not to a being but to a relation – to the ontological relation of not: that the for-itself is not the in-itself, a relation which only the for-itself (and not the in-itself) is aware or indeed conscious of" (Leung 486). Being-for-others is an integral structure of the human being which is undeniable; however, conflict or crisis-ridden it is. The being of the human individual can find meaning from its nothingness and freedom and the possibility to change the world only while amongst other human beings in the world. The limitless freedom of the individual could be dangerous and harmful for others and society. But for Sartre, every choice that is made in freedom comes with responsibility for the choice and all its consequences, thereby making freedom and choice a gravely responsible notion thereby protecting the welfare of others.

4. Jesus Had 'Nothing' to Do with Sartre

If belief system or faith were to be considered, there are no two personalities more dichotomous than Jesus and Sartre, with the former who accepted God as his Father and the latter who denounced God's very existence. Yet, the two statements uttered by these two individuals point to the same core principle in more ways than one would imagine. Today, when science and rationality are looked at as divorced from religion, the plea is to look at the content, the emphasis being on content, in religious

texts and religious philosophy, as this is the scientific and rational way to approach a text. Einstein's belief system has never been a point of concern when analysing his theories! Aaron Alexander Zubia, in his article on the critique of Joseph. S. Catalano's book *The Saint and the Atheist: Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Paul Sartre* wrote, "The distinction between theist and atheist is irrelevant in today's world. Believers and nonbelievers alike, he thinks, are bound together by a common faith: faith in human freedom" (The Wall Street Journal, online). Therefore, a comparison between 'salt' and 'nothingness' beyond the theist-atheist framework, with a focus just on its content, would help understand the commonalities that unite these two notions without biases.

Saltiness makes humans stand apart from everything else in the world, while nothingness differentiates conscious human beings from the world of objects. Salt changes the entire composition of the substrate into which it is introduced; likewise, to be salt of the earth is to challenge and defy the prevalent paradigm or the status quo of the world into which they are born. "We're intended to spread throughout the world and enhance it...drawing out the blessings of whatever is good, and providing a contrast by being distinct and different" (Wilson, online). In the same way, the Sartrean consciousness secretes nothingness into the world by a process of constant negation or nihilation of everything around, thus showing that the human being's nothingness emerges through questioning everything in the world. By being the salt, by being the agent of change, humankind holds within themselves the potential to transcend the past and present, and hurl the world into the future, a future of many possibilities. The consciousness, which is aware of its own lack, is in an incessant aspiration to overcome this lack and by virtue of its power of nothingness projects itself into the future, making the human being a project for the future, a future of infinite possibilities.

While Jesus' saltiness is a quality possessed by the entire humanity, Sartrean nothingness emanates from the individual human being or being-for-itself. Though this might sound like a point of contrast, nothingness finds relevance only when the

human being is a being-for-others, only in the presence of other human beings, making nothingness the shared reality of all humankind. Sartre's philosophy puts the human being at the centre of all moral actions. As Marcos Norris observed,

Sartre describes the existential subject as a 'legislator' who chooses what humanity as a whole should be. Under this view, the subject's decisions are not regarded as arbitrary representations totally lacking the metaphysical force of law, but as self-originating instances of being-in-itself-for-itself, legally binding ontic realities that force the legislator to recognise 'his own full and profound responsibility (Norris 105).

And finally, just as salt ought to retain its saltiness to be salt, human beings need their nothingness to bring about changes in the world. The saltiness and nothingness are the moral responsibility and existential reality of human beings, defining their very existence. One argument that could be directed against finding commonalities between 'salt' and 'nothingness' is that it is very forced and superfluous to bring together an idea from the realm of the 'sacred' and another from the realm of the 'secular', one spiritual and abstract, while the other deals with hard existential reality, in effect it is like combining polar opposites. But the Hegelian dialectic of the antithesis and the thesis synthesising to form a new thesis is the best possible way to counter this argument.

5. In the Name of Development

Humans, with their power to change, have been changing themselves and the world in the name of development. And the world today is indeed a modern, technological, fast-moving, sophisticated global community with economic indicators constantly on the rise. This is the product of the secularist position, which took hold of the global development industry since 1960s, claiming that modernisation should lead to secularisation and that religions are outdated and would act against development and progress (Tomalin *et al.* 106-107). This sounded like the ideal path of development until the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was released, which looked

at development from radically new perspectives and placed sustainability at the epicentre of development policies. From this angle, the present development routes, besides adversely affecting climate, non-renewable energy, and biodiversity, have affected human life in the social, economic, and ethical realms. Development has been equated to quantitative growth; the more the growth, the better the development, leading to indiscriminate production and consumption and severe depletion of resources. In the process of such development, one of the pronounced changes that has occurred in the human attitude is an exaggerated focus on the individual over the community leading to stark inequalities in various walks of human life. "At the global level, it is not surprising that there are concerns between the interaction of finance and development, especially where financial exclusion and income inequality are persistent" (Demir *et al.* 87). This economic inequality that favours individualism and sectarianism has ramifications in aggravating inequalities touching other dimensions, dividing people into rich and poor, powerful and powerless, educated and uneducated, happy and unhappy. Such a pattern of development with the advantages being enjoyed by a very small minority and the disadvantages being endured by the vast majority is insensitive, unsustainable and leads to a societal collapse in the long run.

"According to Oxfam, 26 people now own the same wealth as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, down from 43 people in 2018, with men owning 50 percent more of the total wealth than women" (Lawson *et al.* 6). This individual-preference over society has also created within the individual a sense of superiority over the fellow humans and an indifference and aloofness towards society. This attitude of 'each for oneself' creates alienation from humankind as a family, and the individual seeks personal gain and development, disregarding the moral responsibility to the other. "The global top 1 percent of earners captured 27 percent of real income growth between 1980 and 2016, more than twice the amount of the bottom 50 percent" (World Inequality Lab). The numbers are even worse in emerging economies. "In India pre-existing economic inequality has

worsened since 1980 as individuals in the top 0.001% of the economic distribution in the nation have experienced 30 times more growth in what they own than have individuals in the bottom 50%" (Bruton *et al.* 2). Such an economic gluttony leads to a sense of 'never having enough' even at the cost of the majority who suffer from extremely unequal distribution of resources.

The inequalities in a society do not confine within the economic disparities, nor does an economically growing society imply a society where the population's happiness is also growing, for glaring inequalities exist in other spheres of human life. While India is the fifth largest economy in terms of GDP, it is ironic to note that it is in 136th position out of 146 countries, according to United Nations' World Happiness Report 2022. "Evidence from individual-country studies, both empirical and experimental, on the potential inequality-reducing effects of financial inclusion is equally mixed" (Demir *et al.* 89). Intracultural discrimination based on caste and creed, intercultural segregation based on race and ethnicity, intercontinental hierarchy dividing nations into first, second, and third world countries, lead to violence, xenophobia, ethical vacuum, and crumbling down of value-based entities. Gender based discrimination is another major factor that aggravates inequalities in society. "Up to 30 per cent of income inequality is due to inequality within households, including between women and men" (UN.org Goals SDG 10). In the case of India, a mere 8.7% of the seats in State Legislative Assemblies are held by women. One in three women in India have experienced spousal violence." (SDG India Index 69).

While the secularist development models through industrialisation and technological revolution have raised economic indicators to robust levels, they ignore the humanitarian aspect of it; they ignore the "holistic human development dimension" (Haynes 1). If the whole point of a development process is the overall benefit of humans, then a model which disregards human dignity and the promotion of social justice has already failed as they are the priorities for any individual (Atiemo 251).

The inequalities and dichotomies reflected in the above-mentioned socio-economic indicators result from development plans that focus only on the external and disregard the internal world of humans. It is here that religion becomes relevant with its humanitarian, ethical, and spiritual layers that would add a new dimension to developmental ideologies. Abamfo Atiemo argues that the religious dimension "does not contradict scientific interpretations of the world; rather, spiritual power may be another means to a material end that scientific means alone cannot achieve" (256-257). With the newfound perspective of development introduced by the Agenda 2030, a responsible and sustainable development format would benefit from the insights of the 'sacred' as it gives utmost importance to the inclusion of all and the holistic well-being of humankind. The caste system, the church hierarchies, and violent frictions within and among religious communities could be argued as counterproductive to the principles of inclusion and humanitarianism. But, again, the plea is to look beyond the religious rituals and practices and analyse the content contained within the religious texts, which has the potential to inspire and transform individuals and communities, "as the core assumption underpinning the SDGs is that all countries and societies undergo profound transformations" (Ohlmann *et al.* 3). Religion, beliefs and ideas can promote change, but religion, beliefs and ideas can also block change. However, the fact that religion is ambiguous just proves that it is important: it can either be conducive to development or block development, but it is never irrelevant to development (Thomsen 28). Thus, religion cannot be ignored when conceiving and implementing development policies and plans, especially in the present and future timelines, with sustainability at the heart of development.

6. A 'Sacred' Mantra for Sustainability

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly designed Agenda 2030, a 15-year "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" (UN Resolution) known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is an aggregation

of 17 interconnected global goals. To form the foundations through which these goals are achieved, five pillars are identified in the Agenda 2030 viz People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership, out of which the third pillar, named Prosperity is the focus of this article. Among the different aspects the Prosperity pillar is concerned with, the article focuses on Reduced Inequalities (SDG-10). The SDG-10 aims at poverty reduction, foster sustainable development, and an overarching commitment to leaving no one behind, thus extending its scope to SDG-1 (No Poverty) and SDG-5 (Gender Equality) as well (UNRISD Overcoming Inequalities). From the ten targets which come under SDG-10, two are of special importance, namely, “By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (SDG-10.2)” and “Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard (SDG-10.3).”

However, it is our responsibility as nations, communities, and individuals to strive towards reaching the SDGs. “As moral agents, human beings are caretakers of the Earth and all who are living in this common home, in collaboration and solidarity with all” (Nandhikkara 402). Now, in 2022, that we are past the chronological midpoint, to reach Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) by 2030, we need effective strategies that can stand the test of time to take inspiration from. There is to be a perspectival change in the approach towards tackling inequalities right from the top governmental and policymakers level to the grassroot level of laypersons in society, as only an integrated effort can bring about sustainable changes in the world. A transformation in our attitude from ‘I am superior, and you are inferior’ to a sense of ‘we are equals, and everything in this world is for us to share equitably and responsibly’ is to happen.

To rewrite the age-old and calloused narrative of discrimination and indiscriminate growth in the human mind is possible only through an institution which has withstood the test

of time; and religion is one such impactful institution. "Approximately 84% of the world's population are affiliated with a religion" (Pew Research Centre). "There is certainly no lack of good arguments that religious education—could play an important role in transitioning towards sustainability" (Altmeyer 58). A powerful *mantra* of religious origin has the potent possibility of influencing society, and such a *mantra* was uttered when Jesus said to humankind, "You are the salt of the earth." If we truly recognise the salt within us, it could be the most effective way to address inequalities, thereby fostering sustainability. All humans, irrespective of race, caste, status, nationality, or gender, have saltiness within themselves, the potential to change the world. "Biblical evidence for the equal standing of men and women in the life of the church is inescapable. It pervades every "one another" passage and virtually every command and encouragement in the Bible..." (Payne, online). And the moment one recognises not only one's own, but also the saltiness of all humankind is when this would become a world of equals. More importantly, salt can make change not as a single grain but as a collective, thereby implying that humans are to stand as one global community to impact change in the world. Salt, through its saltiness, is not intending to flavour itself, but the medium into which it is placed; and in the same way, as salt, we do not stand to enrich ourselves, but others, all other humans, the world of which we are salt. And if we truly absorb this facet of our being salt, then economic inequalities in the form of extreme poverty and extreme wealth will be eradicated as the more fortunate will stand to enrich the less fortunate. The same can be applied to the stratification in the name of power were invoking the saltiness within, the powerful will stand in solidarity to empower the powerless, leading to a community of empowered fraternity. "(A study by) Schwartz and Huisman found that religiosity of adherents to Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths correlated positively with benevolence, tradition, conformity and security values, and negatively with power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction" (Ives and Kidwell 1357). Too much salt is also a deterrent, and one needs to gauge

when it is enough salt. This policy of 'enough is enough' would stop growth for growth's sake and lead to responsible production and consumption without exploiting unnecessary resources. The realisation that human saltiness is not only our reality but also our responsibility can be utilised to bring about stark changes in our unsustainable consumption and production patterns, exploitation of natural resources, alarmingly increasing levels of food wastage, and ineffective electronic waste disposal. This alone can curb climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution to a certain extent, thereby helping achieve SDG 12 (Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns). Though the statement that Jesus uttered is a seemingly simple one in its syntax, it can be effectively applied at all levels of human society, right from the game runners like the governments, corporations, and bureaucrats to those like activists, advocates, and laypeople. Religion can thus unravel hitherto unforeseen humanitarian and moral dimensions in the development endeavours that strengthen the sustainability feature in the entire process, touching several SDGs.

Just as we saw how religious content adds novel dimensions to sustainable development attempts, it is undeniable that the secularist models have been successful in their own ways, as is evident from the fact that scientific and technological disciplines follow a rigorously secular approach to new knowledge creation and implementation in their respective fields. And now, the attempt should be to find ways to combine the 'sacred' and the 'secular' to design unique development models, thereby overcoming the pitfalls of the current methods and practices. One way of doing this is to explore and discover compatible ideas from both realms and get them into a dialogue to find common grounds to collaborate.

This article provides one such possibility by engaging the Christian idea of 'salt' and the secular Sartrean notion of 'nothingness' in a dialogue to explore sustainable development possibilities. We saw how 'salt' and 'nothingness' are at the heart of human reality and existence for Jesus and Sartre respectively. But, while Jesus always talked about the entire humankind, Sartre

focused on the human individual. But, the staunch individualist in Sartre did not conceive of a human being who would selfishly act for self-prosperity at the cost of others. "...if he (Sartre) believed that the selfish advancement of the few at whatever cost to the poor is simply the necessary order of things...then his atheism would be substantive. But the opposite is true – all of Sartre's philosophy is centred in the reality and force of human freedom to create a world within which all can live meaningful lives" (Catalano 4). Catalano's claim might sound contradictory to a Sartre, who said that "'hell is the other people" (*No Exit* 45). But, Sartre considers this human attitude towards the other as an act in 'bad faith', a kind of self-deception, an ignorance when the individual confuses one's limitations for one's possibilities and vice versa. When the individual is in 'good faith', one transcends this attitude and becomes a subject in the world of other subjects, exerting one's freedom and taking full responsibility for it and all its consequences. Thus, it is clear that there are striking commonalities between the notions of 'salt' and 'nothingness' if interpreted in the dimension of human potential to responsibly bring about sustainable developments in the world. The comparative analysis also showed how the 'sacred' could be read in a 'secular' way and vice versa, opening new communication channels between the two.

Thus, it is evident that the mutually compatible notions of 'salt' and 'nothingness' can be combined into a single *mantra* which, when conceived and implemented, will foster qualities of equality, equitable distribution of resources, a moral responsibility towards production and consumption, a sense of justice, value for relationships, and a sense of care for the fellow human beings and future generations. 'Salt and nothingness' brings together humanity under an ethical umbrella to be concerned about the well-being of everyone while being constantly reminded of one's power to bring about responsible changes. A political entity that governs a state should also aspire to unify and equalise to develop and sustain a peaceful and harmonious state instead of dividing and pitting people against each other for short-sighted political gains. And without changes

at the governmental and political level, any amount of action would fall inadequate. A powerful dialogue between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' could also pave the way for several realms to come together and have a multidisciplinary collaboration, for holistic development requires insights from all disciplines and perspectives. Thus, it is the need of the hour for the "academia and industry, market and media to join hands with political and religious organisations to make policies that are ethical so as to develop action plans" ("Religion and Development for People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace" online) to reduce inequalities to the minimum and build a prosperous and sustainable society.

7. Conclusion

There is no single way to actualise the SDGs; therefore governments, policymakers, and corporations should seek to integrate different ways to reach them. In realising SDG 10, one such effective way is introducing religion or religious philosophy into the milieu of development policies. "There is increasing evidence, (therefore), that within the development sector the adoption of a secular discourse—and the failure to openly engage with religious plurality—reflects a hegemonic impulse that generalises the particularities of a Western post-Christian frame of thinking" (Ager and Ager 103). In that sense, 'salt and nothingness' can be treated as a single *mantra* which can accommodate not only the 'sacred' but also the 'secular' domains as a philosophy to adopt and implement. The power of religion to go beyond the materialistic and touch the intangible and spiritual dimensions of humanity is an effective way to make the state's development efforts sustainable and meaningful.

Modernisation is an inevitability of time, and its many aspects have made human life more comfortable than at any other time in the past. "Even though sustainability and digitalisation are often referred to as big transformations, they run in parallel, not properly connected in practice and often in diametral ways" (Schneider and Betz 1). Incorporating the religious dimension into digitalisation would bridge this gap and make those parallel tracks coalesce into a unified trajectory. Religious messages are

not only confined to the realms of the spirit or preaching but also to action and change, which has been proven by Christian missionary activities in many countries where their interventions have influenced socio-economic indicators in a positive way. Extreme inequalities at the economic, social, and political levels of life are hazards of modernisation which Agenda 2030 aims to reduce in order to design a prosperous and sustainable society.

'Salt and nothingness' is flexible to be adopted at the policy level, at the action and implementation level, at the activist and advocacy level, and even at the individual level. At the policy level, governments and corporations are to adopt this *mantra* to design development plans which are ethical, beneficial for all, inclusive of all, and value the life and prosperity of everyone in the society, leaving no one behind. At the level of action and implementation, adopting this *mantra* ensures equitable distribution of resources and dissolution of isolated power centres, thereby levelling extreme economic inequalities. 'Salt and nothingness' at the level of activism and advocacy generates awareness among policymakers, leaders, bureaucrats, and laypersons to create a mindset shift towards a feeling of universal fraternity, a sense of duty towards sustainable development, and the importance of ethical considerations in wealth and power structures by instilling sensibility of enough and values of care. At the personal level, salt and nothingness instil within individuals a sense of community and belongingness, a sense of duty towards the other, and a sense of humility within the powerful and of self-worth within the powerless. At a time when sustainability is the word of the present and for the future, a two millennia-old utterance from Jesus, the reflections of which are seen centuries later in Sartre, becoming a *mantra* to reduce inequalities and achieve human prosperity, indeed shows the meaningful role of religion in sustainability. In the big picture of sustainable development efforts, the *mantra* of 'salt and nothingness' stands as a representative pointing at the wider scope and relevance of nurturing effective dialogues between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. The request to the researchers and academics is to bring up many such representations so that this interdisciplinary

dialogue grows and paves innovative tracks towards actionable sustainable development.

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