

*Editorial*

**HUMAN BEINGS-IN-SOLIDARITY-WITH-NATURE-AND-GRACE: COSMOTHEANDRIC PERSPECTIVES ON ECOLOGY**

In our days, even when we live and enjoy the benefits of science and technology, there is a growing awareness that the quality of life is progressively declining and the world peace and even the very existence of life on earth are threatened by lifestyles that lead to the plundering of natural resources for the benefit of the individual, society and humanity in general at the exclusion and exploitation of the rest of the reality, living and non-living. We can no longer remain indifferent to the environmental problems such as, climate change, desertification, 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. We cannot afford to forget the simple truth that we live, move and have our being in a network of relations with matter, microbes, plants, animals and other human beings and greater truth that the network of relations is constitutive of our forms of life. Though as human beings we have our unique identity, we form part of the universe with the rest of the world, who are not strangers or enemies but neighbours and partners without whom human life is impossible.

We live in a scientific age and we are prone to look at everything from a secular point of view, influenced largely by empirical sciences. Science dominates our lives through technological progress to such an extent that people are tempted to relegate all forms of knowledge other than those of the empirical sciences to the realm of fantasy. It is a fact, however, that scientific solutions are not enough for solving ecological crises, though we cannot solve them without science either; science is as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution. Science is to be complemented by all branches of knowledge; for, ecological crisis is not just a scientific issue to be left only to scientific investigations for solutions. It is a moral issue which needs response from ethical and religious perspectives. Both humanities and sciences should take into account the fundamental nature of ecology and accept the fact that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we had in the past. We need integrated and holistic visions involving the knowledge of the sciences, wisdom of the humanities and directives of religions. Though

human beings are rooted in nature, they are also formed by the community and oriented to God. Ecology is to be seen from cosmic, human and divine perspectives. The current issue of the *Journal of Dharma* is an album of Eco-Perspectives, integrating scientific, philosophical and religious perspectives.

The first article, “In Support of a Sustainable Green Earth: A Paradigm Shift from *Homo Faber* towards *Homo Custos*” by Mathew Chandrankunnel argues that the environmental catastrophe is the result of a faulty vision of humanity as a dominating *homo faber* and it is to be replaced with the mindfulness of *homo custos*. He establishes his thesis basing himself contemporary physics, philosophy and Christian theology. He follows the history of thought from Plato and analyses the interplay of science, philosophy and religion. The enormous growth of science and technology resulted in the overall development and comfort of human living, though it had destructive effects on environment and life in general. *Techne* is to be guided by *Poesis*; a life facilitating mechanism needs to be complemented by a meaning giving dynamism. Devaluation of aesthetics, ethics and religion as matters of taste leads to ‘a crisis in terms of the lack of truth leading to a crisis in faith ultimately paving for an all out crisis in the culture leading to meaninglessness and hopelessness.’ Professor Chandrankunnel presents a persuasive case for the urgent need to regain a holistic vision integrating the cosmic, the human and the sacred.

Orla O’Reilly Hazra places a pointing finger at the Cartesian Cosmology as the reason for the disjunction of matter and spirit and the present ecological disasters in her article, “Awakening the Cartesian Dreamer: Universal Values in Solidarity with an Evolutionary Universe.” She shows the interconnection between cosmology and educational philosophy and employs a methodology of Symposium, “Awakening the Dreamer: Changing the Dream” developed by the Pachamama Alliance with its four questions: 1. Where are we? 2. How did we get here? 3. What is possible now? 4. Where do we go from here? These four questions serve two functions within the process of conversion: 1. as containers for information regarding cosmology, educational philosophy and life practice, and 2. as the structure for facilitating the re-centring of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power. The 13.7 billion year Universe Story shows that we are bound together and do not live in a static mechanistic cosmos as understood by the Enlightenment scientists and philosophers. We live in an ongoing cosmogenesis. The purpose of the symposium and the article is ‘to foster an environmentally sustainable,

socially just and spiritually fulfilling human presence on the planet.’ What we need today is Earth stewardship and Hazra concludes her essay with the examples of Green Mountain Monastery in Vermont, US, and Tarumitra, Patna, India, where this vision is being lived and fostered.

Kasi A. Rayappa insists that ‘cosmology is a vast treasure trove of relationships including past, present and future biotic and abiotic elements of the evolutionary universe,’ in his persuasive article “Anthropology versus Cosmology: A Schism in Cosmogenesis.” Human beings belong to a cosmic family where there are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters in many shapes and sizes; there are no outsiders, strangers or enemies. Quoting from the Chief Seattle’s “Letter to All People,” he affirms that ‘earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth... Man did not weave the web of life and he is merely a strand in it.’ Viewing the natural world through these ecological perspectives, he discusses sacred balance, succession, interdependence, carrying capacity of the earth, competitive elimination, cosmic roots, cosmic democracy, climax ecosystem, climate change, kingdom of life and self-sacrifice. Interpreting the Book of Job from the Bible, he shows the profound human struggle between anthropology and cosmology, between anthropocentric interests and cosmocentric realities to argue that it is neither nature nor the human that is the principal marvel but the awesome God. The Cosmos is a theocentric community existing for the praise and service of God. The splendour of the universe reveals God’s artistry, imagination and providence. Drawing from St Francis of Assisi he concludes that love and care for nature is a ‘spiritual drive,’ leading to a life of interconnectedness and transcendence; it is inner spirituality, connectedness to all creatures, preservation and conservation that enable human beings to connect with all-in-God and God-in-all.

“The One, the Other and the Whole: Eco-Theology according to Leonardo Boff,” by Julio Eduardo dos Santos Ribeiro Simões presents Eco-Theology as a development of Liberation Theology drawing his arguments from the changed socio-political context of Brazil and the writings of Leonard Boff, one of the pioneers of Liberation Theology. Eco-Theology moves the focus of its attention from liberating the oppressed ones, as in Liberation Theology, to free the man-in-the-world, who has a *bios*, inside the world, the *locus* where the life takes place. He advocates the interplay of internal and external ecology: ‘we should dive deep inside ourselves to identify our tendencies and ideas and put them in their right place as pieces of the complex being every human is.’

Jomon Mularikkal presents “An Ecological Paradigm after Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II.” In his view, ‘communion’ is the corner stone of the ecclesiology of the Vatican II and argues that ‘reading from the signs of the time,’ it has to expand its horizons to include ecology not forgetting that Theocentrism is the cornerstone of any ecclesial ecology. 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. Mularikkal reiterates Pope John Paul II’s Peace Day Message in 1990: “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation.” The ecclesiological shift from the “Church-as-conqueror-of-the-world” to the “Church-in-solidarity-with-the-world” invites us for a conversion from “human beings-as-conqueror-of-the-world” to the “human beings-in-solidarity-with-the-world.” 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. Going a step further he argues that the complexity, diversity and interconnection that characterize the world mirror the Trinitarian reality and dynamism, because everything that exists is the handwork of the Trinitarian God.

According to Vincent Sekhar, the contemporary ecological crisis is the result of a spiritual and attitudinal crisis and, hence, scientific solutions are not sufficient. Drawing from his teaching experience, he advocates using religious resources to inspire and instruct students on spiritual aspects of ecology and environment. Quoting extensively from religious texts, he shows in his article, “Earth, My Mother! Thou Art the Sacred Vessel!” that human beings are part of the whole beautiful and sacred creation and their vocation is taking care of the creation and not dominating and subjugating the rest of the creation.

Acharya Shrivatsa Goswami presents his reflection on “Krishna Rasalila for Environment” with the hope that Krishna stories may help substantially for the environment protection as he firmly believes that we need to take religious routes for better solutions to our environment problems. In the last couple of centuries, we have tried the scientific route but the result is more of environmental disasters than resolution of the problems. We can no longer mortgage our concerns about the environment to sciences.

The album of Eco-Perspectives presents a picture of human-being-in-solidarity-with-nature-grace rather than the details and gravity of the ecological crises. Human beings are rooted in nature, oriented to community and oriented to God. They are called to transform the nature, build up communities and work with grace. Environmental problems and ecological crises are due to wrong understanding of the human persons, of relations among persons and peoples, and of our relationship to all of creation and God. The problems are not primarily biological, scientific, technological or economical but philosophical, moral and theological. Environmental crisis knows no borders, however. It affects the rich and poor, believers and non-believers, developed and underdeveloped nations, other living beings and non-living beings. As the web of life is intra-connected so is also interconnected with the non-living which are again interconnected. The problems affecting one part of it inevitably affects the rest of beings. What distinguishes human beings from the rest of created beings is their ability to correct the situation knowingly and willingly. The harmony of the world is, thus, the responsibility of human beings and we need to work in solidarity with the rest.

From a Christian point of view, all that exist is created by God and God continues to care for all beings and they are true, good and holy. The Biblical narrative proclaims after each day's creation: 'and God saw that it was good.' If the cosmos is God's work any destruction of creation is a sin against the creator. According to the Bible, creation of human beings is very special as they are made in God's image and likeness and they are given dominion over all the earth, and over all living beings upon the earth. They are blessed: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' (Genesis 1:26-28). The expressions such as 'multiply and fill', 'subdue' and 'dominion' are often wrongly cited as basis of the ecological crisis. According to the Bible, however, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God so that they would continue and sustain the creation and rule over it 'in holiness and righteousness' (Wisdom 9:1-4) as stewards and custodians appointed by God. Any individual and collective overuse of the natural resources as result of faulty antropocentrism is against God's plan, according to the Bible. The world and all that is in it exist because God so decided; we shall not destroy it for our selfishness. The dominion that human persons have over the rest of creation is one of responsibility, of making it fruitful, of tender loving care with holiness and justice; it is a divine call and sacred trust.

The album of Eco-Perspectives also urges us to take a serious look at our lifestyles. The prevailing models of consumption and production are not only unsustainable from a social, environmental and economic point of view but also are immoral. We shall not give up lifestyles that promote consumerism, hedonism and instant gratification while remaining indifferent to the damage to fellow human beings, other living beings and the cosmos at large. Simplicity, moderation, and discipline, as well as the spirit of sacrifice and solidarity must form the basis of our ways of living. Unless we reorder our mindset and value system, we will never be able to solve the ecological problems created by human greed. Unless we bring reconciliation and healing to the nature we will not have harmony, peace and prosperity. In this regard, we need to re-examine and re-evaluate our goals, strategies and principles and develop new lifestyles in solidarity with nature and grace. We shall create a human economy that fits with ecological concerns that also serve human needs and builds community in solidarity and partnership with the rest of creation and the creator. Above all, the Eco-Perspectives call for a paradigm shift in our philosophy of life and values. This will entail a change from a focus on material goods to holistic wellbeing; from excess to sufficiency; from exclusion to inclusion; from competition to cooperation, etc.

Though we share the same cosmos, human world is different in characteristic ways from animal, vegetable or mineral worlds. We should not build a hierarchy out of these differences; we are neither superior, nor inferior nor equal to other beings. Our singularly unique position in terms of knowledge and freedom gives us our identity and responsibility. In many ways, we can do what a mineral cannot do, what a tree cannot do, what an animal cannot do. We need to put ourselves in harmony with nature and grace and work with nature and grace, instead of breaking their laws and frustrating divine plans. Our roles are that of conversation and collaboration, support and responsibility, never of destruction, domination and exploitation. As we are endowed with responsibility, we cannot just stand by and watch; we have to live and work in solidarity with nature and grace in conversation and collaboration. This is how human being ought to live, move and have our beings, if we learn from the album of Eco-Perspectives.

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