

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF ECOLOGICAL VIRTUES IN *LAUDATO SI*

Saji Mathew Kanayankal*

Abstract: Because of the natural nexus between women and nature, the interconnection between ecological crisis and gender discrimination is a subject matter of many studies and analysis. This paper aims to facilitate a discussion on gender equality through the prism of ecological virtues elucidated in the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (LS), in which the Pope calls for a 'holistic ethic' and 'ecological integrity' that insists the dignity of human as well as non-human world. He further makes a pledge for a new dialogue for 'the shaping of the future of our planet, wherein we have to enter into conversation that would include every one' (LS 14), including non-human creatures and ecosystems (LS 118, 140). It further invites us to review and renew the current misguided anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigm with a broader vision of common good wherein the intrinsic value of nature is recognized and respected paying special care and attention to small and little beings including women, children and indigenous people. The type of ecological conversion prompts us to be driven by a desire to become better, more compassionate people, rather than by a feeling that we ought to do our bit for the environment and the oppressed people.

Keywords: Care, Ecological Conversion, Equality, Inter-connectedness, Integral Ecology, Justice, Respect, Virtue

*Dr Saji Mathew Kanayankal CST holds a doctorate in Theological Ethics with specialization in Environmental Studies from the Catholic University Leuven, Belgium. At present he is the provincial superior of St. Joseph's Province of the Little Flower Congregation, Kerala, India. He also engages in teaching and guidance in various educational institutions and seminaries, writes articles in periodicals and books, and presents papers in seminars and symposiums. *Beyond Human Dominion: Ecotheology of Creation and Sabbath* is his published book. He is also one of the section editors of *Jeevadhara*, the theological journal.

1. Introduction

Equality and justice are not only the fundamental rights of every human being as human rights but they are also mandatory for a just society and for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. When we speak of gender equality it is meant that human beings may enjoy the same rights and opportunities in all sectors of the society irrespective of their gender.¹ The needs and aspirations of men, women and all human beings are to be equally valued and favoured. In the contemporary context, the question on gender equality and its relation with ecological crisis take special significance for it challenges many of our traditional views and asks us to renew it in order to look the social structure with a new understanding. This paper aims to facilitate the discussion on gender equality through the prism of ecological virtues elucidated in the encyclical of Pope Francis, '*Laudato Si*'.² After analysing some of the key concepts that links between gender discrimination and ecological crisis, I shall focus on the different ecological virtues in *Laudato Si* and its significance in the formation of equal and just society.

2. Ethos behind Gender Discrimination and Ecological Crisis

The cries of both women and earth interlock in the one and same logic of oppression and are connected and interconnected, and the vast literature and studies regarding the interconnection between gender discrimination and ecological crisis invite us to see both within the same frame.³ Bringing out the similarities between

¹Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2 <www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> (10.08.2016).

²References from *Laudato Si* (LS) is from its official English version <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html>.

³The literature on the relationship between gender equality and ecological crisis is vast. For a recent analysis, see, Saji Mathew Kanayankal CST, "Healing the Wounds: Gender Discrimination, Ecological Crisis and Shifting Paradigms," *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, ed., Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 360-375.

both, the difference studies also highlight the philosophical, cultural, social, political and religious background that led to the present crisis in environment and society. The different analyses that underscore the relationship between ecological crisis and gender discrimination testify that the problem is a result of mutually reinforcing ideologies of racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, naturalism, and so on. Beginning from the dualistic vision on reality and mechanic world view of the ancient Greek to the contemporary postmodern denial of self, the different anthropocentric philosophical treaties deteriorated the integrity of human being as well as the comprehensiveness of nature. While dualistic philosophy compartmentalised the 'whole' into parts and separated women, earth, and non-human beings as 'the other', the advancement of a rationalistic worldview of modernity and its emphasis on autonomous self and confidence on rational objectivity underlined the superiority of men. With the 'no meaningful frame,' the post modernity strips humanity off all intrinsic value, arguing that "we cannot have objective access to reality, because there is no neutral context from which to think."⁴ In these discriminative structures, as Leonardo Boff observes, the logic of 'being over' operates than the logic of 'being with.'⁵

Apart from the philosophical frame, the development of science and technology followed by the industrial revolution accelerated the ecological crisis. As it is observed,⁶ the western scientific mindset has most forcefully created a wedge between women and nature. Often nature is aligned with women and culture with men. The scientific evolution, industrial revolution and liberal/neoliberal economic systems propagated by capitalism prompted to see and interpret everything on the basis

⁴Jim Leffel, "Engineering Life: Defining : "Humanity" in a Post-modern Age," *XENOS Christian Fellow Ship*, <<http://www.xenos.org/essays/engineering-life-defining-humanity-postmodern-age>> (20.8.2016).

⁵Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Philip Berryman, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, xii.

⁶Aruna Gnanadasan, "Towards a Ecofeminist Eco-theology for India," in *A Reader in Feminist Theology*, ed., Prasanna Kumari, Madras: Gurukul Publication, 1993, 98.

of mere material reality and on cost-benefit framework. With the help of scientific achievement of industrialisation, the monopolist competitive marketing methods of capitalism manipulated the indigenous people, animals and plants. The resources of the earth, especially of the third world, were exploited for mere profit, ignoring its distinctive value. While focusing on the comfort and prosperity of human beings, its long lasting effects, which now totally affect the whole global scenario, have not been calculated. When individuals, motivated only by their own self-interest, strive for their progress and welfare, others – living beings as well as nature – are commodified and objectified.⁷ Though there are some genuine attempts to overcome the sufferings of human beings, mostly authentic wellbeing is disregarded. The real motivation behind many of new inventions and its propagations, especially in the field of biotechnology, is the maximisation of profit.⁸ The over emphasis on the effect of human evolutionary development has prompted to ignore the weak, because survival was the right of only the fittest. The technological ontology reduces "things to *pragmata*, items that exist for the purpose of our own betterment and enjoyment."⁹ The latest development in Genetically Modified crops and articulation of many new generation bio-products remind us the racial discrimination and eradication of the unfit of the Nazi regime.

Theology was also not free from the dualistic vision. The hierarchical division between heaven and earth, soul and body, male and female, spiritual and material realms and the anthropocentric interpretation of creation stories in Bible also led to various kinds of discrimination and exploitations. The earth is created to be 'subdued' and men have the right to have 'dominion' over the entire creatures. Since man as 'the crown' is placed at the top of creation, women as well as other beings such as animals,

⁷Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008, 44.

⁸Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 90-92.

⁹Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003, 69.

plants and non-animate beings are viewed to serve men for his use. The patriarchal frame of those interpretations made to consider the genders other than male and being other than men are inferior or having less worth.¹⁰

3. Ecological Conversion: The Shift to Ecological Virtues

According to Pope Francis, ecological crisis is the result of "the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity" which should be regained only through the healing of "fundamental human relationships" (LS, 119). Therefore, he appeals for a new dialogue, that would discuss about "the shaping the future of our planet" wherein "everyone" would be part of the dialogue (LS, 14). In *Laudato Si*, Pope calls for a 'holistic ethic' and 'ecological integrity' that insists the dignity of human as well as non-human world.

In most of the discussions on gender justice, we can see an appeal for fundamental changes in our attitude and behavioural pattern and a paradigmatic transformation from the current exploitative structures. In fact, it is a plea to end all kinds of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, cultural background and health status. It is obvious that in order to achieve a just society we need a "structural and transformational changes to the current neoliberal, extractives and exclusive development model that perpetuates inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries and between men and women."¹¹ Instead of the present exploitive and imposing way, the new models would suggest certain

¹⁰Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed., Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995, 25-35 accuses the Judeo-Christian tradition as the basic cause for the environmental crisis. This article is originally published in *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7.

¹¹International Alliance of Women, "Gender, Economic, Social and Ecological Justice for Sustainable Development – A Feminist Declaration for Post 2015," <<http://womenalliance.org/gender-economic-social-and-ecological-justice-for-sustainable-development-a-feminist-declaration-for-post-2015>> (26.07.2016).

principles that are firmly rooted in principles of human rights and environmental sustainability that creatively address the questions of inequalities between people and states, which would ultimately lead to sustainable society wherein peace, equality, autonomy of peoples, and the preservation of the planet would be realized. It visualizes a transformational shift that protects the fundamental human dignity and eradicates unequal and unfair burdens on women and the poor. In order to reach such a goal, economic and ecological justice that would end the commodification of nature, recognizing its intrinsic value is to be executed.

In this encyclical Pope Francis asks us to go beyond the temporal realm and see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth (LS, 109). According to him, we should not see ecological crisis as a single phenomenon rather it is interrelated with the different dimensions of human beings' engagement in society. Therefore, "ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources," rather we must open for "a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm" (LS, 111). In this context he invites us to an 'ecological conversion', through which the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. This conversion calls for a number of attitudes, which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness (LS, 220). This conversion is not just any kind of external act or practice of certain rituals or implementing certain programmes in the label of ecology; rather, in philosophical terminology it is "'a framing of Catholic teaching on ecology within a virtue ethics paradigm."¹² Instead of previous models of duty based approaches of stewardship terminology, virtue ethics

¹²Henry Longbottom SJ, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si*," in *Thinking Faith*, <<http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/duty-free-virtue-ethics-laudato-si%E2%80%99>> (30.08.2016).

is primarily concerned with the role of a person's character in bringing about the 'goal' of flourishing, that Francis insists upon an ecological spirituality, not only for the sake of the environment, but, above all, for what it means for us.¹³ He reminds us that true freedom, peace, and joy come through conversion of heart, not only in big matters, but also in small ways, when we give up our obsession with consumption, and learn the lesson that 'less is more'. As he points out rightly, only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment (LS, 211).

3. Ecological Virtues in *Laudato Si*

In general, virtue is described as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good"¹⁴ and a virtuous person "longs for good in all aspects of his or her life and acts so as to achieve it."¹⁵ While recognising and respecting the 'intrinsic value of the other creatures' virtuous persons considers them not just objects for human flourishing rather they look beyond human well-being that promote both human and non human flourishing.¹⁶ Virtue ethics is considered not "just the actions of the agent, but the agent himself or herself."¹⁷ Here the focus is on what sort of person one is, rather than what sorts of action one should perform, the fundamental goodness rather than laws, rights, beneficence or duties. Instead of focusing on the legal duties or social responsibilities, the virtue ethics tries to regulate or motivate individual persons and communities to cultivate good attitudes,

¹³Longbottom, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si*".

¹⁴Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1803.

¹⁵Kevin J. O'nil C.Ss.R and Peter Black C.Ss.R, *The Essential Moral Handbook: A Guide to Catholic Living*, Bangalore: Asian Trade Cooperation, 2006, 32.

¹⁶Rhodel N. National, "Virtue Ecology: An Ecological Praxis in the Philippine Context", *Doing Asian Theological Ethics in a Cross Cultural and an Interreligious Context*, eds., Yiu Sing Lucas Chan, James F. Keenan and Shaji Kochuthara, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 217.

¹⁷Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature*, 6.

dispositions and character traits because as one of the leading proponent of secular environmental virtue ethics Ronald Sandler claims, "that any attempts to improve society, including our interaction with the non-human world, will amount to mere moonshine if its citizens lack the character and commitment to make them work."¹⁸

The virtue paradigm in *Laudato Si* is a kind of 'alternative worldview' "a distinctive way of looking at things" (LS, 111). In fact it is a profoundly existential and philosophical query. As it is observed, the encyclical "is turning to an ethics of virtue or character in which our virtues (or good habits) have the capacity to transform who we are, both in terms of our inner dispositions and our outward actions."¹⁹ This virtue centred approach in *Laudato Si* provides the philosophical infrastructure to enable the transition towards a more effective response to the ecological crisis,²⁰ which would lead to extend their meaning to apply to our vision and behaviour that would change our life style so as to wipe out various kinds of inequalities and exploitations in the society. The following are some of the important ecological virtues articulated in *Laudato Si*.

3.1. Integral Ecology

According to Francis, we cannot and should not separate crises in various spheres of humanity, as environmental and social but rather with one complex crisis, which is both social and environmental.²¹ Since the "different aspects of the planet –

¹⁸Ronald L. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 2; cited in, Longbottom, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si*".

¹⁹David E. DeCosse and Brian Patrick Green, "Ethics and Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*": A Teaching Module, Sancta Clara University, <<https://www.scu.edu/media/ethics-center/environmental-ethics/encyclical-instructors.pdf>> (25.07.2016).

²⁰Longbottom SJ, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si*".

²¹Mathew J. Ramage, "Integral Ecology and the Ecological Virtues in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*", <<http://www.hprweb.com/2015/11/>
Journal of Dharma 41, 4 (October-December 2016)

physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated" (LS 138), strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating all dimensions of human being. In fact, it is a critique on the current technocratic-neoliberal visions that see and analyse reality through the prism of science, technology and market, forgetting the richer dimensions of humanity and cosmos. When politics and philosophy reject the idea of creator and consider the rich contributions of religion and theology as irrelevant or mere 'subculture' the full development of humanity is ignored (LS, 62).

Integral ecology is the innovative term that Pope Francis uses to include the totality of human consciousness which is an open invitation to live "joyfully and authentically" (LS, 1). It is a call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, and which clearly respects its human and social dimensions (LS, 137) that would "seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems" (LS, 139). In his discussion of integral ecology, Francis incorporates environmental, economic and social ecologies in the same segment (LS, 138-142). According to him, "nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (LS, 139). Since we are a part of it and humanity has its specific relevance we cannot diminish the role of human being in ecological discussions (LS, 124). Apart from the rich religious traditions, the idea of integral ecology incorporates the dynamism of the patrimonies of various art, literature, philosophy and social structures, especially of local and indigenous people (LS, 143-145). They can help us to see the inherent dignity and wonder of creation, which would translate these perceptions into patterns of behaviour, into 'ecological virtues.' As Ramage points out, "Francis is not simply using environmental issues as a means to talk about thorny social problems, but since we are inextricably connected with the rest of nature, to talk about how to treat the

integral-ecology-and-the-ecological-virtues-in-pope-franciss-laudato-si/> (26.07.2016).

environment is also to talk about ourselves."²² His thoughts of integral ecology challenges many contemporary ethos on ecology, theology, sociology and politics. For him, "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS, 49).

3.2. Common Good

According to Francis, "integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics." The common good is "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment" (LS, 156). *Laudato Si* visualises respect for the human person endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development as the underlying principle of common good. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas" (LS, 143). Moreover, common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice (LS, 157). The very concept of common good itself prompt us to broaden our questions on justice to the future generations as well (LS, 159). We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity, which for him, "is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice" (LS, 159).

3.3. Interconnectedness

Another striking vision that facilitates our discussion on ecological virtues and gender equality is the concept of interconnectedness. The forgetfulness of humanity on this interconnectedness is the moral failure of human being and the fundamental cause of present crisis. Francis provides the

²²Ramage, "Integral Ecology and the Ecological Virtues in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*".

theological doctrine of creation as the foundation for this interconnectedness (LS, 66). The basic ethical principle that inspires to accept the interconnectedness of all existing beings is the belief in the creatorship of God, for, if God is the creator of all creatures, all beings in the created world are related with each other *ipso facto*. The interconnectedness and the reciprocal affiliation are the direct outcome of the act of creation, which places every created being in the web of mutual dependence on each other towards a community of interconnected living things. This mutual dependence affirms the interconnectedness and interdependence of every species and every member of every species by the complex web of interrelationships.²³

According to Francis, the perspective of the doctrine of creation, this interconnectedness is a sign of God's wisdom. Echoing St. Francis and St. Bonaventure, he sees all creatures as our brothers and sisters. "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (LS, 92). However, in invoking this turn of phrase from the Franciscan tradition, Francis is, by no means, denying the uniqueness of human and his/her place in the cosmos.

In order to explain the interconnectedness, Francis also underlines the principle of the intrinsic value of non-human creatures and ecosystems. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves, or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it (LS, 139). Moreover, when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. Indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures sooner or later affects the treatment we make out to other human beings. Thus Francis proposes integral ecology as a counter to the technocratic paradigm, a holistic

²³The Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," in *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, ed., Norman C. Habel, The Earth Bible 1, Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000, 44.

perspective on reality which seeks not only to promote human flourishing, but also the flourishing of the natural world.

3.4. Care for Creation

One of the most striking aspects of *Laudato Si* is a shift in its terminological usage regarding human approach to nature. Instead of the most prevailing term 'stewardship' it speaks about care for creation. As it is observed, this is no accident. Speaking after the publication of *Laudato Si*, Cardinal Turkson, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace who was closely involved in the preparation of the document, highlighted its focus on care for creation rather than on stewardship. Whereas talk of 'stewardship' implies a relationship based on duty, he said, the notion of 'care' taps into something deeper: "when one cares for something it is something one does with passion and love"²⁴ that "caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation."²⁵

3.5. Respect

Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. According to Francis, an inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human being and the world (LS, 116). Often, what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. He calls it in terms of 'practical relativism' and according to him this practical relativism typical of our age is "even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism" (LS, 122). A misguided anthropocentrism need not necessarily yield to "biocentrism", for that

²⁴Longbottom SJ, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in *Laudato Si*".

²⁵Steven Knepper, "Pope Francis and Humane Ecology," <<http://iasc-culture.org/THR/channels/THR/2015/07/pope-francis-and-humane-ecology/>> (15.08.2016).

would entail adding yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones. When human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative. As Francis tells; "A misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle" (LS, 122). With a misguided anthropocentric view, "human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognized and valued" (LS, 118).

The most important claim here is that value of each being is to be respected (LS, 69). Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognise that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes: "by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory". For him, respect is a nuanced term, which includes various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality (LS, 63). It further prompts him to speak of respecting various cultures "more specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people. Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment" (LS, 143).

3.6. Value of Littleness and Dignity of Creatures

According to R. R. Reno, "despite its alignment with modern science, the encyclical is actually one of the most anti-modern documents the church has produced since the Second Vatican Council."²⁶ Because in this encyclical Francis challenges and criticises the myths of modernity which is grounded in a

²⁶As quoted by Nicholas Collura, "The Liberation Methodology of *Laudato Si'*," *National Catholic Reporter*, Jan 21, 2015, <<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/liberation-methodology-laudato-si>> (15.8, 2016).

utilitarian mindset such as individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism and the unregulated market. A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety, which is the heritage of all humanity (LS, 144).

Francis calls us to be liberated from the treacheries of modernity and open to realize the value and worth of small and little beings in the universe. The cosmological inter-connectedness of all life prompts him to be open to the wider horizon of this cosmic reality. According to him, the worth of the systems of the earth is to be determined not on the basis of their usefulness but on their intrinsic value, independent of their usefulness. "Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system" (LS, 140). It is a challenge to the consumerist vision encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy which diminishes the "the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity" (LS, 144).

The innate goodness and value of each created being signifies that the goodness of creation does not consist of the assessment of human beings and it cannot be counted solely with reference to human desires and interests. John Hart argues that the intrinsic values of created beings are not anthropogenic and it remains beyond human acknowledgement and assignment. The simple fact that the creatures are created gives worth to them.²⁷ By acknowledging the inherent value of everything, human being would learn to respect every creature even the small and little ones. As Celia Deane-Drummond opines, "acknowledgement of the creatures of the earth as God's creatures is the first step in affirming their importance and worth."²⁸ As creatures of God, the

²⁷John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2000, 124.

²⁸Celia Deane-Drummond, "Living from the Sabbath: Developing an Ecological Theology in the Context of Biodiversity," *Interface* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 4.

value of a being is neither self generated nor independent, rather it is related to God; it is divinely endowed. Being the generous creator of everything, God has declared that whatever things he has created are good and thus he values each creation.

While valuing little things of the earth Francis also calls to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed (LS, 145). Non-human species and ecosystems do not have a voice to assert themselves in the corridors of power or courts of law. And yet this is not to say that they are simply passive to injustices committed against them. Rather, their strength lies in resilience. In the face of destruction, they refuse to yield.

Through the encyclical the dignity of creatures is rediscovered which would function as a catalyst for the further development of the theology of body. As Christopher J. Thompson observes, "the recovery of the 'joyful mystery of creation' and the dignity of each creature will hopefully supply the much-needed catalyst for the further development of the theology of the body – to blossom into a full – fledged theology of embodiment." This new vision would further enable us to develop a full-fledged theology of embodiment,

a theology of the body from the skin outward, of an enfleshed, organic creature among organic creatures, in which the body is not merely the medium by which the person expresses a gift of self, but is the welcoming threshold through which one receives the originative gift of being in all its splendour. Aligned with the trajectory of *Humanae vitae*, Pope Francis' defense of *omnis vita* is a classic instance of doctrinal development.²⁹

In order to value goodness of the created beings, argues Stephen J. Pope, "we must attend to boundaries, accept our limits, engage in self-restraint, respect natural finitude, and strive to

²⁹Christopher J. Thomson, "The Treasure of *Laudato Si*," in *Clear Thinking Contemporary Issues Principles* <<http://www.getprinciples.com/the-treasure-of-laudato-si/>> (26.08.2016).

conform to, or least cooperate with, the natural pattern of interdependence within which we are immersed."³⁰ Therefore, human beings cannot see anything in the order of creation as useless or expendable or the created world and the multitude of beings in it as just 'a resource' for their benefit alone. Instead, the earth and its various creatures are to be valued in its own inherent stance. In our understanding of ethics we give due importance to this fundamental relatedness, for the "basic pattern of ethics is the right ordering of things in relation to each other as each is related to the other for the sake of the purpose of the whole."³¹ Any kind of violation and degradation of nature that diminish the integrity of creation and threaten the fundamental relationship with the creator and creation will be ultimately an offence against the creator.

3.7. Ecological Asceticism

Laudato Si is ultimately a hopeful encyclical. Francis acknowledges the human capacity for evil, but he also insists on the human capacity for doing good: "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning" (LS, 205). Francis calls on us to change our patterns of consumption by "avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transportation or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices" (LS, 211). As Jana Bennett explains, it is a call to asceticism. But it is a call to a joyful asceticism, "a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle,"³² one that substitutes care for and communion with God, others, and nature for rampant

³⁰Stephen J. Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics, New Studies in Christian Ethics* 28, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 205.

³¹James A. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective: Ethics and Theology*, vol. 2, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 45.

³²Knepper, "Pope Francis and Humane Ecology".

consumption. An ecological asceticism "always begins with deep respect for the material creation, including the human body, and builds upon the view that we are not masters and possessors of this creation, but are called to turn it into a vehicle of communion, always taking into account and respecting its possibilities as well as its limitations."³³ One of the reasons the document affirms a sense of hope is because of its underlying conviction that people really can change by adopting habits that affect both the contemplative and active aspects of their lives.

4. Conclusion

In the above discussions I have highlighted the most significant ecological virtues articulated in *Laudato Si*. Ecological virtues "focus on the building up of human character structure to incorporate the virtues that will lead us to value and preserve the environment for its own sake and for the sake of becoming better and more joyful persons."³⁴

First and foremost the ecological virtues in *Laudato Si* invite us to be much more realistic about our being in the universe. The integral vision that foresees in *Laudato Si* helps us to view reality outside oneself in a more comprehensive way. The joyful and authentic living invites one to be free from all kinds of discrimination. The integrity is also a way of accepting the value and dynamism of various art, literature, philosophy and social structures, especially of local and indigenous people. It is simply an opening to the genius and the inherent dignity of the other. This integral vision helps one to acquire prudence, which provides the rationale for acting on other living and non-living beings in appropriate ways. Though it does not define good, it facilitates to right choices in accordance with the orientation towards good. Thus the prudent individual considers what is

³³Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, "Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution," *Sourozh: A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought*, no. 67 (February 1997), 24.

³⁴Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah*, Oxford: University Press, 2015, 257.

good for one's self by being prudent about what is good for all. In the process of taking counsel from informed sources the human discerns what is needed to sustain one's life, the life of one's neighbour, and to the society as a whole.

The integral vision on reality helps one to accept every human being with dignity and worth, irrespective of their gender, cast or position. Men and women are to be considered equally and one may not try to subjugate the other nor does one see the other (gender) as inferior which would help us to live 'joyfully and authentically'. For Francis, nature cannot be radically separated from us because of our constant interaction and interconnection with it. If nature is such an inseparable reality, how deep should be the internal link between men and women. Visualising the other gender as inferior is against the integral vision, and the patriarchal hierarchically dominated society need to undergo a radical transformation in its views, structures and articulation. Woman is not to be excluded or to be seen as a second grade citizen, rather she should be considered equally and respected with her own dignity and the value of womanhood is to be highlighted in the public square. In a broader sense, this vision of integrity is connected with the notion of common good. The notion of 'common good' in *Laudato Si* underlines certain important values such as patience, self-discipline and generosity in whose practise the unequal and unjust discrimination based on gender will be totally eradicated from the sphere of society. The underlying principle of common good in *Laudato Si* is the notion of 'solidarity'- solidarity especially with the victims of unjust age old systems including patriarchy.

The ecological virtues call for the need of a just society. Because the community's temporal good is to have sufficient means through which its members can sustain their lives, the person would be inclined by the virtue of justice to relate the living and inanimate constituents of Earth in ways that ensure their availability to meet the needs of all humans despite their race, colour, or gender in that community. The common good of human community would be jeopardized by the degradation of ecosystems or discrimination to people on any kind.

In the vision of *Laudato Si*, interconnectedness and mutual dependence are two important outcomes of God's creation. According to the book of Genesis, human kind in General, not man alone is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26). Man and woman are in themselves integral human beings, even though they are marked by sexual differences. As Jewish Talmud says, 'man without woman weakens the image of God in the world'. Being created in the image and likeness of God, sexual differentiation also takes part in the divine dynamism of creation whereby the entire creation receives structure and direction. By means of the sexual differentiation in creation, the entire human beings are commissioned to be the ones responsible for preserving and unfolding the dynamism of 'being different'. Keeping the identity, each human being is invited to respect the other with his/her own identity and differentiation and when one shares 'being human' unconditionally human being can experience the equality. In this perspective, any kind of discrimination based on gender is totally unacceptable. For Pope Francis, even the creatures in the earth are to be considered as brothers and sisters. The fraternity excludes nothing on earth. Then how much more one should respect his/her fellow human beings!

Among the various virtues Francis developed in *Laudato Si*, 'respect' can be considered as the most significant virtue with regarding our discussion on gender equality. For Francis, respect towards the other should be the most fundamental attitude of human beings and he uses 'respect' as a nuanced term which points to a reverential and courteous attitude towards various cultural riches of different people, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. In order to value the dignity of human being one should respect the other, irrespective of his gender or colour or culture. This idea of respect further prompts us to see every one through the prism of God's own eye wherein both male and female are created and valued equally. Here, the virtue of respect is not seen merely an external act or certain peripheral deeds rather it invokes one to develop certain attitude based on theological and moral principles. The sexual difference is not only a somatic or biological fact, but also it has a suggestive

meaning, which invites us to deepen our outlook on the fundamental vision on being human. Though the sexual body confronts one with the essential boundary of his/her existence, it simply reveals that everything is not like me or there exists also the other, the strange one, the one who cannot be reduced to my being or self. Here one learns that she/he is not the only source of meaning. On the one hand, though one confronts with the very existence of his/her self, on the other hand she/he opens towards the other. This opening helps one to respect the uniqueness of the other in spite of his/her limitations and differences. It further underlines that in order to have a fruitful and meaningful dialogue, one should know the 'other' and only when the other 'reveals' his/her self that one will get to know the other for one does not find him/herself as the starting point of the other. This fundamental anthropological insight should definitely lead one to the roads of conversation and dialogue, wherein one discovers something new, vibrant and innovative. As it is observed, authentic dialogue requires a duality, which further looks for difference. In order to have an authentic and meaningful coexistence, one opens towards the other with respect him/her.

Ultimately, the encyclical invites us to regain the theology of creation. The acceptance of the sovereignty of God helps us to formulate a sound ethical vision, both in our interspecific and intraspecific stance, for in this view, the horizon, within which one 'sees and values all things,' is God. From a theocentric perspective our moral responsibilities and moral behaviours are neither the production of human rationality alone nor the questions of the relationship between one another; rather, it is seen and interpreted in relation to God. The ecological virtues in *Laudato Si'* calls us to embrace the nature driven by a desire to become better, more compassionate people, rather than by a feeling that we ought to do our bit for the environment and the oppressed people. Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize living beings irrespective of their gender, colour or race.