

AN OUTLINE FOR ECO-THEOLOGY

V. F. Vineeth

1. Introduction

My Lord, my God,
You are the Word, Eternal and Ineffable,
You created the world, the earth and the Heavens,
The whole universe (Jn. 1:3),
As your own dwelling place.
Not one thing was made without you (Jn. 1:3),
You made them all for you,
For all of us, your own image in Human flesh (Gen. 1:26)
In the fullness of time, you became a human being,
And full of grace and truth, lived among us (Jn. 1:14)

Our loving Father, now we pray for your grace and blessing, that we, your, beloved children, may live with you in this house of God, you have created on earth which you place in this vast universe, your wonderful gift for all your children.

2. The Theology of the House of God

The universe was originally conceived as the house of God, for the Word to dwell in and of course for all those who bear his image. This prayer above, I hope, could be a scriptural as well as a theological basis for what we call "Eco-Theology."

Literally eco-theology means: a theology which is very much concerned about, or conceives the universe as the House of God: i.e., A theology of the house of God. The concept is of a single house comprising the whole universe/creation of which God Himself is the Father and Mother and we all are His children. All his children of this holy house, living on this small planet earth, are expected to accept and acknowledge the Father lovingly and respectfully, observe the divine rhythm and harmony. He, the Father and the Creator, has established all through this

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house of the universe. Naturally we develop a theology of this House. Deeply seen, it seems to me that eco-theology is the theology of the kingdom of God on earth, where God, is the loving Father and the benevolent king, and all his children live in harmony and unity of heart, not exploiting the wealth of the Father at the expense of other children, not only of this generation but also the generations to come. Sustainable development is welcome; but this should be done not in violence against the harmony God has placed in human hearts and their relationship to one another, to their abode on earth, and in relationship to the atmosphere, to the globes, such as sun, moon, stars and the universe at large. All are interrelated and interdependent. No one can amass all or what is possible in any way, for oneself at the cruel neglect of the other. This is the inner core of eco-theology or spirituality and it should be joyfully celebrated than discussed. In reality this is the picture of the so-called paradise in the Bible.¹ In paradise there was the unbroken flow of divine rhythm the source of which was God himself, and this divine rhythm permeated every nook and corner of the paradise, promising peace and prosperity to all, to humans, animals, birds, trees, forests, to all plants and creatures.

3. The Divine Rhythm of the Universe: Indian Perspective

All religious scriptures of the world generally stand for an eco-friendly atmosphere for life and are against violence to one another. The harmony which has been originated from the primordial being (*sat*)² whose word is truth (*satya*) is the basis of all rhythm and harmony in our life. Buddhist's principles of *ahimsa* and *karuna* (non-violence and compassion) do not need any comment. According to Islam, we humans are only care-takers of this wonderful universe, not owners, much less dictators or rulers. I am now highlighting a few texts from Hindu scriptures which are very transparent and conducive to our point.

Reminding us very strongly the prologue of John's Gospel, a text from *Taittiriya Brahmana* reads as follows:

The Word, imperishable, is the Firstborn of Truth, mother of the Veda and hub of immortality. May she come to us in happiness in the sacrifice! May she, our protecting Goddess, be easy of entreaty!³

¹Genesis 1:29-31; 2:8-17.

²*Sad eva aga asit, evam ekadvadiyam: Chandogya Upanisad*, VI.2.1.

³Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari – An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977, 88.

Interpreting this text, the famous indologist Raimundo Panikkar says: The Truth, whose Firstborn is the Word, is not a mere static truth or a sheer moral truthfulness; it is the dynamic order of the entire reality, the primordial activity out of which everything comes to be; it is *rta*.⁴

The text says truth (*satya*) is the primordial utterance (word) of the claim of *sat* (being). When the human being participates in this word, uttered to him by God (the *sat*, *ekam evam*, *advitiam*), he/she really becomes the image of the divine. As the Word is the source of all rhythm in the universe, this abiding image, is the source and inner controller (*antaryamin*) of harmony in our life. This is the basis of eco-theology or eco-spirituality. This is well confirmed by another text from *Atharvaveda*:

Abiding by cosmic order he (the Word) fixed as his seat

The mighty firmaments of Heaven and Earth.⁵

The word creates the cosmic order and abides by that. Naturally all that has been created is happy about the reigning order and rhythm in the universe of mankind. The Upanishads elucidates it later, praising the reigning rhythm and harmony in all creation, beginning with the elements.

This earth is (like) honey for all creatures, and all creatures, are (like) honey to the earth. This shining, immortal person who is in the earth, and with reference to oneself, this shining immortal person who is in the body, he indeed is just the Self (*atma*). This is immortal, this Brahman. This is all.⁶

Incidentally in the Vedic Sanskrit the word Brahman also meant 'word' or 'utterance.' The Upanishad then continues the same text with regard to all elements and many other realities of human life, such as law, truth, etc. Regarding Law and Truth, with reference to the individual self the text says, 'this shining immortal person who lives as 'law abidingness' and 'truthfulness' respectively. All elements, globes and humankind are referred to as honey to one another, and the shining immortal person, who is immortal, who is Brahman abides in all of them. This chapter ends with 13 verses.⁷ The last two are the following:

This (individual) self is honey to all beings and all beings are honey for this self. The shining immortal person who is in this (individual

⁴Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 100.

⁵*Adharva Veda*, IV.1.

⁶*Brahadaranyaka Up.* II.5.1.

⁷*Brah. Up.* II.5.1-13.

self) is just this (Absolute) Self, this is immortal, this is Brahman, this is all.⁸

This Self (Absolute), verily is the Lord of all being, the king of all beings. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so, in this Self, all beings, all gods, all worlds, all breathing creatures, all these selves are held together.⁹

This is the eternal wheel of Divine rhythm and harmony. If this order of spokes around the centre, individuals around the one hub (God) is maintained, we will always live in a world of eco-friendliness, environmental solidarity and divine prosperity. But unfortunately the rhythm was tarnished. The result is chaos, disorder, global warming, melting of icebergs (mountains), rise of sea waters, threat of extinction to people living in small islands, etc.

4. Fall of Humankind and Loss of Divine Rhythm: Rise of *Ahamkara*

4.1. The Indian Prelude and the Paradise-Story of Sin

India does not give us a story of sin committed by men or women as narrated in the book of Genesis. India gives us a clue to understand what happened to our first parents in the paradise. I am taking this clue from Samkhya philosophy which deals with the evolution of *prakrti*, the chaotic original stuff in its *amorpha* (preformed state), ready to be evolved at the reflection of the so-called *purusa* (consciousness) which are two opposite poles of consciousness in the *samkhyan* dualism. As *purusa* reflects on *prakrti*, it automatically wakes up to orderliness and start evolving. The first evolves of this fusion of *purusa* and *prakrti*, consciousness and matter, is *buddhi* or cosmic consciousness. Cosmos, which until this moment was simply a lump of chaotic clay or formless matter, suddenly begins to evolve with a new consciousness of order and rhythm. Yes, *purusa*'s 'gene' i.e., consciousness has entered into matter, ready for further evolution, heading for the creation of a perfect human being as an embodiment of a unit of divine consciousness from *purusa*. But before the further steps are realized a by-product entered into *buddhi* and in the second stage of evolution *buddhi* (cosmic consciousness) has changed into *ahamkara*, the ego-consciousness or I-centred action (*aham-kar*).

Gift of consciousness in matter is both a risk and real wonder. What a strange combination! Matter is devoid of consciousness and is destined to be finite by nature. Consciousness, on the other hand, because it

⁸*Brahd. Up.* II.5.14.

⁹*Brahd. Up.* II.5.15.

participates in divine consciousness, has a virtual infinity, ready to rise to divine likeness and image. This combination is wonderful, because in the heart of matter now there is the 'pulsation' of a breath of life, not only vegetative or sensitive, but also spiritual and thus becomes the house of God, *Oikos tou thei, Domus Dei*, which of course is placed in the larger cosmic house God has designed for the humans. This is the marvellous wonder. The risk factor is the rise of *Ahamkara*, the temptation to assert itself over against the donor of the very consciousness the human being has received. All the lower grade of creation, which God had already prepared for the humans, did not have this temptation, because consciousness, a drop of divinity, was not there. This drop of divinity is the image of God, the so-called soul, spirit, participating in the nature of God, who is also by nature Spirit, i.e., pure and unbounded consciousness, as expressed in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1).

4.2. The Serpent and Human Consciousness

The serpent which entered into the paradise could be seen as a symbol of human consciousness, which can recoil into itself and rise up with or against God. In the Indian Kundalini Yoga the human consciousness is compared to a serpent which has to go through seven stages of consciousness (*cakras*) and ends up in the eighth which is the ultimate and perfect stage. But it may stop anywhere and block the progress. The lower levels are very much matter and brain-bound and are at the risk of 'temptation' to over assert itself. The result would be total failure in achieving the goal. In the biblical story the result was the expulsion of the first parents from the paradise.

In fact, it seems to me, no expulsion ever took place, nor was there a paradise separate from the earth. This earth, which was flourishing in divine favour and heavenly harmony was the paradise before sin, and with sin, when the basic rhythm was distorted, this very earth turned to be the miserable abode of humankind, producing 'thorns and thistles' (Genesis 3:18), everywhere. The paradise changed to be our present earth. Supposing the paradise was our present Afghanistan, where we find rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the tower of Babel etc., the eco-friendly paradise and all its vicinity changed to be desert-lands on the face of the earth. Hence, suffering began, and human beings had to earn their daily food with sweat of their brows (Genesis 3:19). What is suffering if not the awareness of disorder? Hard labour became necessary to produce vegetation on earth, because of the curse of distorting the divine rhythm fell on earth, reaching

out to its farther dimensions of atmosphere and the cosmos. Mankind naturally turned to God with repentance and offering to please him. He performed sacrifice.

5. Sacrifice to Restore the Lost Divine Rhythm of the Universe

Yajna was a new invention. How to restore the rhythm of the universe? The idea was to offer the distorted earth together with the universe, that God be reconciled with us and thus the lost rhythm be restored. Raimundo Panikkar says: "If one had to choose a single word to express the quintessence of the vedic revelation, the word *yajna*, sacrifice, would perhaps be the most adequate."¹⁰ Yajna, sacrifice, is an act of repentance and reparation, an act of reconciliation of the universe based on the original divine rhythm. For this, certain preferred objects, flowers, plants, animals or birds were selected and sacrificed or offered to God as a symbol of the offering of the whole universe back to God, praying that He should once again reign over this home of God given to us, his children. *Ayam yujno bhavanasya nabhi* (This sacrifice is the navel of the universe) (*RgVeda* 1.64.35) is a famous vedic text.

The culture of sacrifice is seen both in India and Israel. India considered Fire as the High Priest, the offerer of sacrifice. *RgVeda* begins with a hymn to fire, the offerer of sacrifice:

I magnify God, the Divine Fire, the priest, minister of sacrifice, the offerer of oblation, supreme giver of treasure (*RgVeda* 1.1.1).

When *Rgveda* laid great emphasis on fire as God and the offerer of sacrifice, Israel's attention was more drawn to the victim of sacrifice. In the book of Exodus we read all the details prescribed with regard to this victim of sacrifice and sacrifice was to be performed as a prelude to their own liberation (Exodus 12:1-13).

When Jesus came, he offered a sacrifice in which priest and victim, the offerer and what is offered, in the sacrifice became one and the same. This means that what is offered is not an object or a creature (animal or bird) from the world, but the very self of the offerer. This is because the cause of the destruction of the divine rhythm in the world and the universe at large is not any of the creatures being sacrificed, but the boosted Ego or the ahamkara of the offerer or of all who are represented by him, namely by the human being.

We humans are responsible for the loss of harmony in the universe, for the emission of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, for the pollution of

¹⁰Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 347.

the air, and consequently for the climate change and global warming. We should come to the negotiating table with an open heart to reduce, at least relatively, the emission of any polluting stuff into the air around us and the atmosphere above us. This means readiness to sacrifice the boosting of our own ego beyond certain limits. The *ahamkara*, understood as the enlarging of one's own ego, by unchecked trends of industrialization in the name of advance and progress, exploiting nature, by cutting trees for sale of woods, destroying sand beds on either sides of the running rivers, and any such action led by lucrative motivation of a private individual or group, at the expense of the just claim for a clean nature by all the people around is the person or villain (wrong-doer) responsible for the destruction of the ecological balance. All these demand the shedding of our selfishly motivated ego on the altar of sacrifice. This will take us to the next section: the contemporary awakening of Eco-theology or spirituality, environmental sanity, safety and so on.

6. Secular Awakening of Ecology and Environmental Sanity

In the contemporary world, what we see is that many of our national and political leaders have taken the issue of a sound ecological balance and environmental sanity as an agenda for their collective deliberations. Of course NGOs and activists have voiced this theme much before. Two great steps are:

1. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), founded on June 1972 at Stockholm with Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. UNEP has six regional offices and various country offices. UNEP Coordinates United Nations environmental activities implementing sound policies and practices.

2. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Rio de Janeiro, from June 3-14, 1992, reaffirmed the declaration made at Stockholm on June 16, 1972. A global plan of action to promote sustainable development was adopted and a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of states were accepted and in the conference. The first 10 and the last one are given below:

Principle 1: Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

Principle 2: States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and

developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control, do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

Principle 3: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.

Principle 4: In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

Principle 5: All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.

Principle 6: The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.

Principle 7: States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

Principle 8: To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

Principle 9: States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.

Principle 10: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information

concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

Principle 27: States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfilment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development

The UN General Assembly convened a special session on the environment in 1997 to review and appraise the implementation of agenda and principles. In the following year the Kyoto protocol was agreed upon to meet the challenge of climate change. A follow up of the Earth-summit of 1992 was convened in 2002 and The Earth Charter was declared.

These are ideals proposed and are for the moment only in our mind level. When it comes to the real execution of the same, the rich nations, whom it more carbon to the atmosphere and thus pollute our common environment are often reluctant to fall in line with the proposals. This is a matter of selfishness over against a care of universal friendliness and harmony of nature for all.

The real question is the question of interdependence between the humans and nature. Do the human beings in the world really love the 'Nature' (*Prakriti*) around them or do they look at nature only to use or exploit to their advantage (i.e., momentary). The question is of the nature of relationship: Is it of love or utility? If it is of love we will preserve nature in its purity, beauty and friendliness. If it is of utility we will manipulate nature to our temporary and silly advantages, which in long run, will be extremely damaging. But a better attitude is just to learn to love nature, love trees, innocent creatures, be at home with all of them. Try to realize here a 'mini-paradise' in our own way. It is wonderful to see in many houses not too far away from our cities, how villagers live with cows under the same roof.

Nature follows the Eternal Law written in them by God: the Law of Universal Rhythm and Harmony. The human beings should rise up to that standard of discerning, appreciating and delicately protecting this divine rhythm, God has placed in nature. The human being is endowed with the gift of self-awareness, which we call consciousness. This is certainly a gift

and a call to participate in the consciousness of God. But this can also be a threat to the cosmic rhythm, because of an individual self centeredness, as human consciousness, can be misused of one's own selfish growth, violating the rhythm of universal harmony. Effectively this is what we all sin. We are destroying our won beauty, simplicity, transparency and naturally the all pervading rhythms of the universe. After the first sin, the paradise became this permanent earth producing 'thorns and thistles' (Genesis 3.18) symbolizing the loss of rhythm and harmony.

7. Ecology and the Problem of Climate Justice

Eco-theology, related to eco-justice and eco-ethics, is a vexing problem of our time. The problem in short is this: who are the polluters and who are the victims? The saddest fact is that the crucial and first victims are those who have not contributed anything substantial to the pollution of the environment and the resultant global warming, melting of ice, rising of the sea water. Poor people living in the smallest islands are the first victims.

Similarly large scale deforestation for the sake of industrial development has a double damaging result. First of all they deprive the people living in the forests, their means of only reliable livelihood. Secondly, the onslaught of industry naturally destroys the entire eco-friendly and healthy atmosphere of the place where the nature-friendly people live. How to balance between sustainable development and maintenance of ecological sanity and purity of the atmosphere? Dr. Christoph Stückelberger says:

Climate change shows, as never in the past, how much all human beings depend on each other. It is more than the global village metaphor; it is the concrete experience of global *interdependence* and interconnectedness which is an opportunity for increased *solidarity* and mutual responsibility. The ethical golden rule (do to others what you want them to do for you) becomes even more evident.¹¹

In all these matters the greed of the rich and powerful for their own self-boosting enterprises find its way and the need of the poor to whom probably the area originally belonged, was often neglected. Thanks to the new laws enacted by the respective governments, such as the forest land is primarily for the forest-people, is a certain, just barrier against the

¹¹Christoph Stueckelberger, *We All Are Guests on Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011, 45.

exploitation of the poor and the voiceless. Because of the contemporary awareness building in these matters, the situation is certainly changing.

8. Ashrams and the Spirit of Eco-Theology and Spirituality

All ashrams, Hindu or Christian, stand for a lecture of love for nature and silence. Silence and love for nature go together. There is a notable difference between natural sounds and artificial sounds. One who meditates in the heart of nature, or in the forest, does not feel distracted by the lovely sound of the birds chirping in the woods and the soothing noise of running waters. When I was walking through a forest area in Singapore (a nation which keeps its forests as gold), I found a small message written on the side of the pathway: "Forest is a living organism which gives shade even to those who come to cut down its trees" (Lord Buddha).

In the famous work *Shakuntalam* by Kalidasa, the precincts of a sacred grove at Kanva Maharshi's ashram are described by King Dushyanta as follows:

The roots of yon trees are bathed in the waters of canals which quivers as the wind plays upon them; the glowing lustre of the fresh leaves is partially obscured by the smoke that rises from (oblations of) clarified butter; and here in front, these young fawns are leisurely grazing without fear on the garden-lawns where the sprouts of Darbha-grass have been cut away.¹²

This means that nature and silence go together and both are potential means to feel the hidden presence of God. It is nature that silently speaks about the presence of the missing Beloved to the mystic, the lover of God. Thus, St. John of the Cross, the Carmelite mystic, asks the creatures:

O woods and thickets
 Planted by the hand of my Beloved!
 O green meadow,
 Coated, bright, with flowers,
 Tell me, has He passed by you?
 The nature responds to the query:
 Pouring out a thousand graces,
 He passed these groves in haste;
 And having looked at them,
 With His image alone,

¹²Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, in *Works of Kalidasa: Dramas*, ed. C. R. Devadhan, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1966, 1:13.

Clothed them in beauty.¹³

We see that ashrams are usually founded on riverbanks or on mountaintops or in the slopes or valleys combining both of them. Shivananda Ashram and many other Hindu ashrams, including a Christian ashram, are seen on either banks of the river Ganges. The Benedictine ashram on Kurisumala, among the Vagamon Mountains in Kerala is famous, especially among Christians.

This scenic beauty as well as the serene atmosphere brings along with them a sense of silence and inspiring feeling of the presence of the divine in the midst. In the book *Swapna Vasavadatta*, a visitor, watching the nature and surroundings of a place, comes to the conclusion that this must be an ashram campus. He exclaims:

The herds of deer graze without fear or hesitation, a yard full of trees bowing down with ripe fruits and plants with colourful flowers untouched. Doves and sparrows fly fearless all over among thick tree lines. This, of course, is not a field but an ashram. Also, holy odour of incense emerging from the fire of sacrifice rises to the sky. This is certainly an ashram campus.¹⁴

The description says that ashram is a place in the heart of nature, covered with trees and flowery meadows where innocent animals are free to run around and greet people. Equally seen are the birds of the air for which the ashramites give shelter and food.¹⁵

All ashrams try to cultivate a spirit of detachment and austerity in direct contrast to the spirit of *ahamkara* and ego-centred activity, as we have seen above. The core spirituality is inner freedom. To possess inner freedom, we have to cut the threads of all desires which bind us to anything other than God. At the same time, all creatures remind us of God's love, beauty, and concern for us. The *Bhagavad Gita*, in chapter 2, speaks largely about the virtue of detached activity for the sake of the Lord. Therefore, the ashramites practice self-control to rise above all desires and to realize God within. *Tapas* or austerity is the hallmark of a true ashramite. The word '*tapas*' means inner ardour which burns from

¹³John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 4-5 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1996.

¹⁴Bhasa, *Swapna Vasavadatta*, Act I.12, Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1946, 85.

¹⁵Such a description of the ashram campus is further confirmed by *Abhijnana-Sakuntalam* by Kalidasa, as mentioned above (See Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:13).

within and rises up from the heart of the seeker with a burning zeal to give up everything and seek the way of the Lord alone. In *Abhijnana Sakunthalam*, King Dushyanta says:

Holy men, preeminent in the virtue of quietism, conceal within their bosom a searching flame which like sun crystals which are grateful to the touch, they emit when assailed by foreign lustre.¹⁶

Saying this, King Dushyanta extols the fire of austerity (*tapas*) burning in the heart of the ashramites. This fire makes them capable of rising above everything and remains detached from anything, leading a life of self-control, transcendence, and inner freedom. We also see King Dushyanta extolling Kanva Maharshi as "chaste, gentle, pure and holy in the world's regard. Even virtue may swerve from its course, but he would never swerve from his vow."¹⁷

9. Conclusion

To relish the beauty of creation in its true nature, we have to look at nature through the eyes of faith. Then only the ineffable mysteries hidden in nature will be unveiled to our soul, transcending the level of mind. Science and scientific discoveries are certainly most welcome and will never contradict faith in depth, "for earthly matters and the concern of faith derive from the same God."¹⁸ The ecological vision of this emerging theology can be summarized as follows:

1. The idea of divine immanence in the whole cosmos;
2. A relational, ecological rather than a hierarchical understanding of God, humans, and the created world;
3. A radically reinterpreted view of human dominion over nature in terms of partnership with nature; and
4. A commitment of justice for all creatures, not just humans, highlighting the needs of the impoverished masses and endangered species around the globe.

In the Oriental tradition the Canonical prayers of the Liturgical Seasons end up with the season of the Dedication of the Church. The hymns and prayers of the Season often describe this universe as the house of God. Several times we see that the prayers have direct reference to this earth and universe as house of God. Of course this house is understood as the church of God. But church is not just building and administration. It is

¹⁶Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:49.

¹⁷Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:vii (Introduction).

¹⁸Vatican II, "The Church Today," §36.

primarily a centre for celebration in the house of God where God our Father and we his children meet in his home on earth, bring offering gathered from the earth, representing the whole earth, that all the earth and heavens magnify the Lord along with the melody of *magnificat* which our souls sing with Mary our Mother (Luke 1:46-55).

Coming to the liturgical prayer of the season, as mentioned above, the first hymn of the season, namely the Sunday Ramsa's first hymn (*onisad'kdam*) sings:

Lord, Almighty One,
I knock at the door
of your earthly home.
Keeping the word that You gave:
"My Name shall be ever there,"
Keep this house of holiness;
Hear your servants' petitions;
Have mercy on us, Your people.

And again in the concluding hymn:
Heav'n and earth and all therein
are filled with Your glory, Lord;
Angels and al heav'nly ones
Worship, praise and adore You.
Holy Church and all creatures
stand in worship before You;
We, your humble servants, Lord,
enter Your house and give praise.

Time and again references are made to God's dwelling with us in this house of God which is the Church. Yes, the Church is the house of God and this house, in its wider dimension comprises the whole humanity and the universe. The Eucharistic celebration is the mystery (*raza*) in which the re-integration of the universe with the divine rhythm, achieved by Christ our Lord, is celebrated. The Eastern liturgies in the Church and the longstanding cultures of ashrams in India have always stood for an eco-friendly ambience and atmosphere. So let us be happy and promise the Lord to ever remain God-friendly and eco-friendly.