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Ecologization of Christian Faith: Living the Love Commandment in an Ecozonic Age

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Abstract:

The main argument of the article is that an ecological understanding of God and human beings provides the necessary motivation to link ecological concerns with faith. Accordingly, this essay will begin with an environmentally based reading of the love commandment, with a view to establishing that the concern for the environment is integral to the love commandment. In the second section on creation and ecology, the author applies the broader understanding of the love commandment to the environmental issues and indicates how environmental concerns become an essential part of living the Christian faith in a world facing ecological degradation. Here, basing himself on the teaching of the Church on ecology, the author discusses the relationship between God and creation and between human beings and creation to show that relationships are mediated through the environment and, therefore, the health of the environment is a necessary condition for the maintenance of an authentic relational life. The final section will focus on some of the environmental ethical principles enunciated by the church that point to the ways in which Christians ought to live the love commandment in an ecozonic age.

Keywords:

Love Commandment, human person, creation and ecology, relationship, ecological ethics.

Introduction

The keen awareness that the universe is an interdependent and interconnected system constituting a web of relationships as well as the consciousness that human beings possess the capacity to control and radically alter the basic chemistry and biology of the planet earth signify the emergence of what Thomas Berry calls, the 'Ecozonic Age'.¹ Thanks to the efforts of the United Nations Environment Program, the environmental activists, scientists, the various governmental and non-governmental environmental organizations, ecotheologians and ecosophers, and, the different churches and religions, humanity has become aware, as never before in history, of the positive and negative impact of human engagement with the environment. It is now within the power of human beings either to destroy the earth or to follow the path of healing the planet.

Though this general knowledge and awareness does not necessitate a detailed analysis of the ecological crisis facing us, it is expedient to delineate its salient features, especially the major problems, the primary causes and the main consequences. The scientific studies in various fields related to the environment have succeeded in accurately assessing and convincingly showing us the problems of ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, the global warming, and the rapid degeneration of the earth's atmosphere and biosphere through the poisoning of air, water and soil. These problems result from the indiscriminate exploitation of the non-renewable natural resources, destruction of the tropical rainforests, mining activities, uncontrolled use of chemicals, pesticides and herbicides, and local and regional conflicts and wars. In short, the unprecedented ecological crisis is the outcome of the unsustainable pattern of development followed globally. The consequences are legion. Diseases from the consumption of contaminated food and from exposure to the harmful rays of the sun, growing poverty due to salination and desertification of productive land, topsoil erosion, drought and floods, scarcity of water, migration of the poverty stricken rural people to the urban centres that lack the infrastructure to receive them, unpredictable climate changes, massive extinction of life forms, acid rains, depletion of marine stock, and scarcity of

the non-renewable energy sources are some of the consequences facing the world.

The knowledge of the environmental problems, causes and consequences is not necessarily accompanied by appropriate action to halt any further degeneration of the environment.² There is a general apathy and unwillingness to change the attitudes and lifestyle that are demanded by the situation. The response of the international community to the ecological crisis is inadequate especially due to the greed and selfishness of the affluent and the survival needs of the poor. That is why Pope John Paul II aptly characterizes the ecological crisis primarily as a moral problem.³

The growing ecological consciousness has its repercussions on the thinking of the churches. The Catholic Church has developed an impressive body of teaching that seeks to address the ecological problems.⁴ The Church's teaching on ecology addresses environmental problems from the scriptural, theological, ethical, spiritual and social perspectives and offers guidelines, proposes action-plans in conformity with the moral and ethical norms, invites governments, multinational corporations, and industrialists to commit themselves to safeguarding the environment, and, exhorts the faithful and the people of good will to cooperate in addressing the ecological issues. The documents of the Church also contain a plea to systematic theologians, scripture scholars, scientists, moral theologians and others to undertake serious research to deepen the understanding of the various facets of environmental problems and to help arrest the degeneration of the environment.

This shows the awareness of the Church that the enormity of ecological problems is such that the restoration of the health of the environment has become the responsibility of everyone. Therefore, the church is eager to remind the believers in particular that the obligation to care for the environment arises from their faith in the creator God and is an integral dimension of their faith. Hence, Pope John Paul II, in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace on January 1, 1990, has forcefully stated:

Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their

faith. ... The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator, from their recognition of the effects of original and personal sin, and from the certainty of having been redeemed by Christ. Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation...⁵

According to the pope, for Christians caring for creation is no more an option. It is a duty that inheres in the very faith they profess.

This essay is an attempt to motivate and assist Christians to understand and live their faith in ways that would facilitate the healing of the planet. The main argument of the paper is that an ecological understanding of God and human beings provides the necessary motivation to link ecological concerns with the faith. The theoretical framework for the argument is based on the love commandment which demarcates the essential quality of being a Christian in the world. Accordingly, this essay will begin with an environmentally based reading of the love commandment with a view to establishing that the concern for the environment is integral to the love commandment. In this connection I shall point out the need to broaden the scope of the great commandment and also make an attempt in that direction by presenting an ecologically founded understanding of human persons and God. In the second section on creation and ecology, I shall apply the broader understanding of the love commandment to the environmental issues and indicate how the environmental concerns become an essential part of living the Christian faith in a world facing ecological degeneration. Here, basing myself on the teaching of the Church on ecology, I discuss the relationship between God and creation and between human beings and creation to show that relationships are mediated through the environment and, therefore, the health of the environment is a necessary condition for the maintenance of an authentic relational life. The final section will focus on some of the environmental ethical principles enunciated by the Church that point to the ways in which Christians ought to live the love commandment in an ecozonic age. I conclude the essay by pointing out the significance of the teaching of the Church on ecology for the ecologization of the Christian faith,

that is, for living a life based on the love commandment understood in its broader sense.

An Ecological Reading of the Love Commandment

The great commandment to love God and to love one's neighbour (Mk 12:29-31) succinctly captures and conveys the core of the Christian life of faith as expressed in the central proclamation of Jesus, namely, the Kingdom of God.⁶ Since the love commandment provides the theoretical framework for linking faith and ecology, I shall briefly examine it from an ecological perspective. Does the love commandment call for the inclusion of ecological concern as an essential part of Christian living? Whether and to what extent one can integrate ecology into the faith will depend on the answer to this question. For, if faith connotes a specific way of living in the world and if the specificity of the Christian faith is expressed in the great commandment, then the love commandment ought to contain a nonnegotiable demand to care for the environment as part of the life of faith. This calls for an examination whether the love commandment stipulates such an obligation to the environment as part of the Christian faith.

Though the love commandment is often perceived to be containing two distinct commandments, the scripture scholars hold the opinion that it does not imply two separate commandments: one to love God *and* the other to love one's neighbour. Rather it refers to loving God *by* loving one's neighbour.⁷ That is to say, the love command envisages an inextricable connection between the two dimensions of this single commandment. One cannot love God without loving one's neighbour. From this perspective, the living of the Christian faith entails a radical trust in and an uncompromising acceptance of a way of life characterized by the love of neighbour as an expression of one's love of God (1 Jn 4: 7ff, esp. vv 20-21).

However, the great commandment has not always been understood this way. It suffered a gradual reduction in its status due to a narrow spiritualistic interpretation of the love of God and the love of one's neighbour. The Christian tradition has always and rightly emphasized the importance of the corporal works of mercy as an essential dimension of loving others. Obviously works of

charity are necessary from the point of view of attending to and relieving the urgent and immediate needs of the people, especially the poor and the needy. But the same tradition does not offer an excuse for limiting the scope of the love commandment to an exclusive focus on a disembodied love of God and an equally disembodied love of neighbour, nor does it give a license to neglect the concerns affecting the larger spheres of human existence. Restricting the scope of the love commandment to merely corporal works of mercy does violence to the long term interests of the neighbour and, by extension, to the full and authentic living of the Christian faith as it circumvents the larger dimensions of the great commandment. Unfortunately this has happened to the interpretation of the great commandment.

An Ecological Understanding of Human Persons

To regain the view of the deeper dimensions of the love commandment it is necessary to develop a holistic or ecological understanding of human persons as well as of God. For, at the root of the narrow interpretation of the great commandment is a partial and abstract understanding of human persons. The interpretation presupposes an anthropology based on a body-soul dualism that accords primacy to the soul as a spiritual entity and neglects the material dimension. This anthropology is inadequate as it leads to a dualistic construal of human beings and, thereby, to the reduction of human beings to an abstraction. And when it happens, it fails to offer any room for including human concern for the environment as an essential tenet of the Christian life.

This calls for broadening the scope of the love commandment. It requires an adequate anthropology based on an integral vision of human person as a body-soul unity.⁸ A holistic understanding of human persons conceives them as embodied beings who exist as part of nature. That is to say, it visualizes human beings essentially as ecological beings. Their existence is embedded in nature and their destiny is intimately intertwined with the destiny of the universe.

An integral understanding of human beings construes the 'neighbour' in the love commandment not as an abstract entity but

rather as an embodied, ecological being. Hence, loving one's neighbour involves, at the same time, loving nature which is the precondition for and the substratum of the neighbour's existence. More than an anthropological necessity and an environmental convenience, the widening of the scope of the love commandment is both a Christian anthropological imperative and is founded on and required by the Christian understanding of God as Creator.

An Ecological Understanding of God

To accord a wider interpretation to the love commandment it is also necessary to broaden the Christian concept of God. The Christian understanding of God is based on the concrete historical self-communication of God in creation and redemption. That is to say, Christians do not profess faith in an abstract, disembodied God. Instead the expression of faith in the creed affirms faith in God who is the Creator of heaven and earth. The entire created order owes its existence to God who enfleshes God's self in creation, and, in an eminent way, in Jesus the incarnate Word of God. The Christian God is one who is present in the world and who has become a part of its history through the life-giving presence of the Spirit.⁹ In Christianity, the distant, disembodied, transcendent and dispassionate God of Platonism gives way to an involved, incarnate, immanent, and passionate God approximating the *advaitic* vision of reality. For the Christians, however, the created world is distinct from the Creator God. At the same time, the mystery of the Incarnation has drawn the universe into the Trinitarian mystery. Thus, loving God as demanded in the love commandment implies loving God's creation that has been graciously drawn into the mystery of the Trinity.

Seen from this vantage point, the wider perspective on the love commandment drawn from an ecological understanding of the human persons as well as an ecological understanding of God signifies the environmental mediation of all human relationships and, thereby, lays the foundation for living the Christian faith in a credible way in an ecozonic age. It powerfully conveys the fact that existence is relational and it situates Christian existence in the context of relationality. The relational dimension of our existence encompasses the divine-human relationship, the human-human relationship and,

the human-environment relationship. This multi-relationality is mediated through the environment. This is because human beings are essentially embodied and ecological beings and, therefore, the environmental mediation of all relationships is a constitutive dimension of being human.

Creation and Ecology

Our effort so far has been to widen the scope of the love commandment through an ecological understanding of human persons and an ecological theology of God. This has important existential implications for a life of faith that seeks to integrate ecological concerns into its ambit. Presently, I shall try to concretely connect and apply the broader vision of the love commandment to the contemporary environmental issues. In doing this I shall closely follow the Church's teaching on ecology. The Catholic Church's teaching on ecology has its theological foundation in the faith vision of God, creation and human beings as enshrined in the scriptures, especially in the creation narratives.

However, it is important to remind ourselves that the predilection for the fall-redemption motif in the Bible has been instrumental in relegating the creation motif to the background of Christian consciousness, both literally and figuratively. According to Anne Clifford, "Because of the virtually exclusive emphasis on human redemption, the meaning of the nonhuman creation was ignored. This neglect of creation overlooks the fact that God's work of creation provides the cosmic purpose behind God's redemptive activity".¹⁰ As a consequence, theology itself became lopsided in its emphasis on an anthropocentric approach to reality. It is necessary, therefore, to retrieve and bring creation to the foreground of Christian theological discourse in order to bridge the gulf that separates creation and redemption as well as to see its implications for living one's faith based on a broader understanding of the love commandment in an ecologically devastated world. Understandably, the teaching of the Church on the ecological issues begins by pointing out the significance of creation for addressing the environmental questions from a Christian perspective.¹¹

The Church tries to link faith with the ecological concern through a specific reading of the creation account in the early chapters of the book of Genesis (Gen 1-3). In the process, the Church highlights some of the theological and anthropological truths expressed in the creation account that are important for Christian living. These truths concern the intimate relationship between God and creation including human beings, on the one hand, and the relationship between humans and creation including human beings, on the other. We shall briefly look at, first, the God-creation relationship and, then, the human-world relationship as elucidated in the Church's teaching on ecology. This will help lay the foundation for an environmental ethic that would be, in reality, the living of the love commandment in its wider sense.

God-Creation Relationship

The Christian life of faith is largely influenced and shaped by the understanding of God. For instance, the Trinitarian vision of God as a communion of love has great a impact on the way Christians perceive themselves, their relation to others, and the manner in which they organize themselves into a community called the Church. Even though human weaknesses always stand as a stumbling block to living up to the demands entailed in the vision of God, they have never posed any serious problems for affirming the ideals and challenges that derive from the Christian understanding of God as a communion of love.

In the same way, if Christians conceive God as one who sidelines creation in favour of the humans and their salvation/ redemption, then the possibility is that they would also neglect creation. Conversely, if our God were understood to be one who has not abandoned creation but is constantly present to it and who holds it together in existence, then this vision would influence our attitude toward creation. It is, therefore, an imperative to construct an ecologized understanding of God to bring in ecology as an essential dimension of the Christian faith.

Being keenly aware of this fact, the Catholic Church incorporates an ecological understanding of God into its teaching on ecology. It is achieved by emphasizing the various facets of the relationship

between God and creation. In the light of the Scriptures, the Church presents God, firstly, as the source of all that exists and, therefore, creation as dependent on God for its being and existence.¹² While maintaining a distinction between God and creation, the Church also stresses the dependent nature of creation and, thereby, avoids the dualism that separates creation from God.

Secondly, the Church's teaching on ecology emphasizes the goodness of creation.¹³ It takes its clue from the recurring refrain, "and God saw that it was good" as found in the first creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4a), for impressing upon our consciousness the delight that God takes in the creative activity as well as God's evaluation of creation as intrinsically good. Thirdly, this evaluation by God provides the Church with the necessary ground for its teaching on the integrity of creation.¹⁴ For, the source of the goodness is God and it is God who declares creation as good. The continuance of the goodness of creation depends on its integrity and, therefore, God desires the integrity of creation for its own sake.

The three principles elucidated as central to the relationship between God and creation, namely, God creates and sustains creation, God evaluates and declares creation as intrinsically good, and, God desires the integrity of creation, furnish a vision of an ecologized view of God – a God who is involved in creation the knowledge and worship of whom are intimately linked with and inseparable from creation. God's involvement with and continuous presence in creation provides the Church the necessary foundation for a sacramental view of creation¹⁵ that visualizes the respect and deference towards creation as an integral dimension of reverencing God.

Human-World Relationship

The relationship that God has with creation provides building blocks and an orientation for an ecologized anthropology. According to the creation account, human beings derive their existence from the Creator God. Created in the image and likeness of God, human beings stand not only in a dialogical relationship with God, but also participate in God's relationship with the creation. They are given a share in God's dominion over the world.¹⁶ The narrative, while

denying divinity to humans as well as absolute dominion over creation, describes human beings as the responsible caretakers of creation. They exercise this responsibility as dependent creatures and show it by continuing the creative and sustaining activity of God, by participating in God's delight in creation while perceiving its goodness and by maintaining the integrity of creation.

At this juncture it is necessary to explicate the ecological consequences of the disruption in the relationship between God and humans as described in the Yahwist creation account (Gen 2:4b-3:24) in order to place the environmental ethics in context. In its teaching on ecology, the church accentuates the impact of the human alienation from God upon creation. In consonance with the theology of God and the theology of the human persons, the Church interprets the story of the Fall from an ecological point of view.¹⁷ It emphasizes that the breaking of the divine-human relationship, results in a similar rupture in the human-world relationship as the earth turns inimical to human beings and as the human-human relationship falls into disarray. That is to say, human sinfulness affects the well-being of both the creation as well as the human persons. From this perspective, the Church perceives the contemporary ecological crisis as manifestations of the alienation of the human persons from their Creator God.

In the context of the alienated condition of humans and creation, the Church places the redemptive work of Jesus that encompasses not only humans but also the whole cosmos.¹⁸ This cosmic view of salvation is in perfect harmony with the ecologized understanding of God as well as with the ecologized notion of the human person. God who in the beginning of creation saw everything as good, also sees the final fulfilment of the whole creation as good. This is a move from a truncated eschatology that construes salvation in terms of the salvation of the souls. This departure has important consequences for living the Christian faith. An eschatological vision exclusively focused on the other-world will invariably lead to the neglect of this world. Whereas a cosmic vision of the final fulfilment of the entire cosmos as the redemptive finality of the Christ event as depicted in St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians (Col 1:15 ff), challenges Christians to seek their salvation in the world and with

the world. Measured with this yardstick, the neglect of creation would be tantamount to a refusal of the salvation offered by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

In this way the Church's teaching on ecology seeks to overcome the pernicious divide between creation and redemption. Its theology of God and theology of the human person together with its cosmic vision of final redemption propose a view of creation that links the creative activity of God in the beginning with the new re-creative activity of God in Jesus Christ for the final and definitive restoration of the whole creation in God. This unified vision of creation and redemption raises new challenges for living the Christian faith in the contemporary world.

Thus, a theology of God that emphasizes the loving relationship that God has with creation, proposes an ecologically embedded theological anthropology, according to which human beings are seen not only as standing in a special dialogical relationship with God but also, as an integral part of creation, actualizing this relationship by participating in the ongoing creative process to advance the well-being of creation. The authenticity of the God-humans relationship determines the nature of the humans-world relationship. In this way, the Church's teaching on ecology illumines and affirms the ecological mediation of all relationships. Here the correspondence between an ecologized Christian theology of God and a similar theology of the human person becomes obvious and its implications for living the Christian life challenging. The implications are enunciated in the environmental ethic of the Catholic Church.

Human-Human Relationship: Ecological Ethics

The scriptural perspective on the environment developed through an ecological interpretation of creation in conjunction with redemption provides the theological basis for an ecological ethics that links faith and ecological concerns. Though the ethical issues discussed show differences in emphasis depending on the concerns emerging from the specific location of the local churches, they cumulatively propose concrete ways of practicing the love commandment in a world facing ecological crisis.

It has been pointed out that the human-divine and the human-human relationships are mediated through creation. We have already elaborated and discussed the manner in which the human-divine relationship is mediated through creation. Presently we shall focus on how creation mediates the human-human relationship. The environmental ethics offered in the church's teaching on ecology accepts the environmental mediation and seeks to regulate the human-world relationship (ecological ethics) in order to ensure the quality of human-human relationship (social ethics). In this way, as we shall see, the church accords primary importance to social ecology¹⁹ in its environmental ethics.

The Church formulates the ecological ethics basing itself on and interpreting the general moral principles articulated in the Christian Tradition from an ecological perspective. Central to the church's ecological ethics is the principle of the dignity of the human person.²⁰ The source of human dignity is located in the fact that human beings bear the image and likeness of God. The enhancement of this God-given dignity calls for, among other things, a safe environment where people can live a healthy life free from the dangers of toxic waste, polluted air, water, and soil and the accompanying diseases. Since safety from the environmental hazards is in accordance with the dignity of the human person, the human engagement with the world ought to take into consideration the health and well-being of the people. Therefore, Pope John Paul II recommends that the right to a safe environment should be included in the charter of fundamental human rights.²¹

Closely linked to the principle of the dignity of the human person is the principle of respect for life²². It is also intrinsically linked with the respect for nature. For, the varied life forms on earth constitute an intricate web of life and, as God's creatures, they possess the right to life. All creatures in this web of life, including human beings, are dependent on the environment for survival. Any threat to the environment is a threat to life itself. This being the case, the eminent way to show one's respect for life is to safeguard the environment and to make it life-enhancing. However, the contemporary scenario of the massive extinction of species from the face of our planet due to the wanton destruction of the habitat

testify to the radical denial of the value of and respect for life. Besides, the thoughtless exploitation of the non-renewable resources entails a lack of respect for the life of future generations.

In accordance with the principles of the dignity of the human person and the respect for life, the Church perceives the link between eco-justice and social justice.²³ The environmental blight affects everyone. However, the effects of the environmental degradation fall heavily on the poor, the powerless, the landless, the labourers, the tribals and women. In this context, environmental justice is seen as the precondition for ensuring social justice, especially for the weaker sections of society. Because human beings are an integral part of the natural world (ecological beings), their relationship with society is mediated through the environment; and because they are an integral part of society (social beings), their relationship with the environment is mediated through society. This establishes a close connection between social justice and eco-justice. One calls for the other. Therefore, the Church acknowledges that its option for the poor requires the Church to opt for the earth by committing itself to the promotion of eco-justice.²⁴

Another principle that promotes a strong environmental ethics is the principle of planetary common good.²⁵ As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and interrelated, the environmental problems transcend the boundaries of nations and they become global in nature. Consequently, the protection of the environmental health cannot be left to the initiative of individual nations. The community of nations needs to assume this global responsibility. The church's teaching on ecology emphatically points out that the planetary common good calls for solidarity among nations. Solidarity is yet another environmental ethical principle that emphasizes a conscious and willing acceptance of our interdependence.²⁶ It rules out the development of a few at the expense of the underdevelopment of others. The principle of solidarity calls for putting an end to the exploitation of the poorer nations by the rich and reminds the developed industrialized nations of their special obligation for the good of the developing nations. The Church considers solidarity one of the conditions for the health of the environment.

The Christian tradition has always emphasized the principle of the universal purpose of created things.²⁷ God intends the fruits of the earth for the sustenance of all. The departure from this intention of God leads toward excessive accumulation of wealth in the form of goods and landed property in the hands of a few. This deprives a majority of the world's population of the necessary wherewithal for their living a dignified life and forces them to adopt unsustainable ways. Hence, the health of the environment calls for an equitable distribution of the fruits of the earth. The principle of the universal purpose of the created things also highlights the fact that human beings are responsible stewards of creation and the proper exercise of this responsibility requires a system that, while preventing the accumulation of land and wealth in the hands of a few rich, facilitates an equitable sharing in the bounty of the earth.²⁸

The Church's teaching on ecology advances the principle of sustainable development or authentic development and underscores certain factors crucial to the health of the environment.²⁹ Human beings are endowed with intelligence and they are to use their capabilities for making the world a better place to live in. Human beings have made advance in science and technology and the fruits of scientific discoveries and technological inventions are at the service of human life and dignity. However, there is a flip side to the developmental ventures. Uncontrolled experimentations and thoughtless use of technology play havoc on the environment. Taking note of the contemporary development in science and technology, the church insists on authentic development that takes into account the sustainability of the earth, the good of the present and future generations as well as the good of the other life forms. The Church also reminds us that authentic development ought not to be identified with consumption.³⁰ Rather, it calls for curtailing consumption and making sacrifices for the good of others. This is possible only if there is a change of life-style and attitudes.³¹

One of the major threats to the well-being of peoples and the environment is war.³² The Iraq war has adequately impressed upon the human consciousness that humanity has to pay a heavy price for war in terms of the loss of life and the destruction of property as well as in terms of the destruction of the environment. Humanity is

also learning that war can no longer be a solution to the problems facing the world. The church is aware that in the contemporary times no war can be a just war and, therefore, it advocates the avoidance of regional conflicts and wars as integral to the effort to maintain the health of the planet.

These principles of environmental ethics proposed by the Catholic Church provide a general framework for enhancing the human-human relationship through the enhancement of the human-world relationship. The church does not claim that its environmental ethics is exhaustive. Rather it furnishes a set of broad principles that function as a point of reference for regulating the environmental mediation of relationships in conformity with the requirement of the emerging ecozonic age. The church is convinced that Christian living guided and inspired by these ecological principles will invariably be one that integrates ecological concerns with faith. In other words, it would be a concrete exercise of the love commandment in the contemporary world.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church's approach to the environmental issues is theologically comprehensive. It incorporates the scriptural, theological, and the ethical perspectives – the three interconnected spheres of theology – to underscore the theological implications of the environment for an authentic Christian life in the contemporary world. The teaching on ecology advances the principle of safeguarding the health of the planet and delineates the essential requirements for the exercise of faith in a world facing ecological crisis. Though it may not have been its intention, in doing this the Church also provides an integral theological method not only for an ecological theology, but also for theological reflection in general.

In this paper I have analyzed, with the help of the unified theological method, the significance of the love commandment for an ecological theology. Keeping the broader understanding of the love commandment as the general frame of reference I have sought to establish that ecological concern is an essential part of living the great commandment. In fact, in the context of the emerging ecozonic age, incorporating the ecological issues into the Christian faith is

the avenue open to the Christians to live the love commandment in an authentic and credible way.

Now we could ask: what contribution does the church's teaching on ecology make? The ecological principles proposed in Catholic teaching are not something entirely new. For, the United Nations has been, for a long time, issuing general norms and offering concrete action plans for protecting the environment globally and regionally. Most of the principles proposed by the Church are also explicitly or implicitly present in the documents of the UN, especially in Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit at Rio in 1992. Hence, the formulation of the major ecological ethical principles cannot be considered the major achievement of the Church's teaching on ecology.

In fact, the major gain should be located in the sphere of Christian living. As we have seen, the Christian life of faith is an unfolding of the love commandment. If in the past this foundational commandment has been misconstrued and sidelined to the detriment of Christian living, the teaching on ecology corrects this anomaly. It offers an opportunity to widen the scope of the love commandment so as to make the environmental concerns integral to the practice of Christian faith understood as living the great commandment. It convincingly shows that in the emerging ecozonic age, living the love commandment entails living for the earth, where humans encounter God and, in the process, encounter themselves and creation in God.

Notes

1. The term "Ecozonic Age" is borrowed from Thomas Berry. He divides the history of the universe into four phases, namely, the galactic, geological, biological and human. The human phase is further divided into five phases: the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, the age of the classical civilizations and religious cultures of the world, the rise of nation states and the emergence of science and technology and, finally, the Ecozonic Age. Cfr. Mathew Jayanth, "Ecologization of Eschatology: An Ecotheological Understanding of Human Longing and Fulfillment," *Disputatio Philosophica: International Journal on Philosophy and Religion*, No. 3 (2001): 61-62
2. *The Third Global Environment Outlook (GEO-3)* – the report released by the United Nations Environment Program on May 22, 2002 as a preparation for the UN World Summit at Johannesburg from August 26 - September 4, 2002 – clearly points out that the response of the

world community to the environmental concerns has been inadequate. Cfr. Mathew Jayanth, "Ecology, Economics and Ethics: Sustainable Development as a Framework For a Planetary Ethics", in *Religion, Society and Economics: Eastern and Western Perspectives in Dialogue*, Kuruvilla Pandikattu and Andreas Vonach, eds. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), 40-44.

3. John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, no.6.
4. A collection of the documents containing the official teachings of the Catholic church is available in Drew Christiansen, S.J. and Walter Grazer, ed., "And God Saw That It Was Good": *Catholic Theology and the Environment* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1996). The Documents include: "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" by Pope John Paul II, "Renewing the Earth" by United States Catholic Conference, "Christians and their Duty Towards Nature" by Australian Bishops' Committee for Justice, Peace and Development, "Pastoral Letter on the Relationship of Human Beings to Nature", by the Dominican Episcopal Conference, "The Cry of the Land" by the Guatemalan Bishops' Conference, "Ecology: The Bishops of Lombardy Address the Community" by the Catholic Bishops of Northern Italy, and, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" by the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines. In the subsequent references to these documents only the title and the article number or the page number will be given.
5. John Paul II, *Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Nos.15-16.
6. For a detailed discussion on the connection between the Kingdom of God and the love of one's neighbour, see George Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society" in *Collected Writings of George Soares-Prabhu, S.J.* Vol 4: Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective, Francis D'Sa, ed. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), 223-251.
7. Soares-Prabhu points out that reference to the love of God is rare in the New Testament. The reason is that, according to Jesus, it is precisely by loving one's neighbour that one loves God. Cfr. George Soares-Prabhu, "The Love Commandment" in *Collected Writings of George Soares-Prabhu, S.J.* Vol 3: Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action, Scaria Kuthirakkattel, ed. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), 65-71. See also "Renewing the Earth", p.238-239
8. The Second Vatican Council in its Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World emphasizes the need to take human beings in their totality as a body-soul unity. Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 14.
9. For a discussion on the link between the Spirit and environment, see Mathew Jayanth, "Ecologization of Theology for and Ecclesial Eco-

Praxis,” in *Dreams and Visions: New Horizons for an Indian Church*, Rosario Rocha and Kuruvilla Pandikattu, ed. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2002), 219-220. Anne M. Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God”, in “And God Saw That It Was Good”: Catholic Theology and the Environment, Drew Christiansen, S.J. and Walter Grazer, ed., (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 22.

11. The documents of the church on ecology mentioned in “And God Saw That It Was Good” refer to the two creation accounts in the Book of Genesis chapters 1-3.
12. The creation’s dependence on God is emphasized in the following documents: “Christians and their Duty Towards Nature”, p.251; “Pastoral Letter on the Relationship of Human Beings to Nature”, No.30
13. The documents that stress the goodness of creation are: “The Ecological Crisis” No.3; “Renewing the Earth”, p.228; “Christians and their Duty Towards Nature”, p.251.
14. The integrity of creation is emphasized in “The Ecological Crisis” No. 7-8, 16.
15. The church maintains a sacramental view of creation. Cfr. “Renewing the Earth”, p.231.
16. The human responsibility for the creation is affirmed in the following documents: “The Ecological Crisis” No.3; “Renewing the Earth”, p.228-229, “Christians and their Duty Towards Nature”, p.251-53, “Ecology: The Bishops of Lombardy Address the Community”, p. 302.
17. For the Fall and its consequences on the earth, see, “The Ecological Crisis” No.3; “Renewing the Earth”, p.229; “Christians and their Duty Towards Nature”, p.253.
18. The documents that present a cosmic view of redemption and new creation are: “The Ecological Crisis” No.4; “The Cry of the Land”, No. 2.1.6. For a discussion on the ecological significance of the cosmic view of redemption, Cfr. Mathew Jayanth, “Ecologization of Eschatology: An Ecotheological Understanding of Human Longing and Fulfillment, *Disputatio Philosophica: International Journal on Philosophy and Religion*, No. 3 (2001): 61-62.
19. The document “Renewing the Earth” specifically mentions the term ‘social ecology’ on page 224. For a concise discussion on social ecology, Cfr. Mathew Jayanth, “Ecologization of Eschatology: An Eco-theological Understanding of Human Longing and Fulfillment, *Disputatio Philosophica: International Journal on Philosophy and Religion*, No. 3 (2001): 223-224.

20. The following documents address the question of the dignity of the human person. "The Ecological Crisis" No.7; "Renewing the Earth", p.224-225.
21. Pope John Paul II writes, "The right to safe environment is ever more insistently presented today as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights". See, "The Ecological Crisis" No.9.
22. The principle of respect for life is dealt with in the following documents. "The Ecological Crisis" No.7; "Renewing the Earth", p.232, "Ecology: The Bishops of Lombardy Address the Community", p. 303-304; "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?", p.310
23. The question of justice and eco-justice is addressed in "Renewing the Earth" p.225;
24. The connection between the option for the poor and the option for the earth is emphasized in the following documents. "The Ecological Crisis" No. 11; "Renewing the Earth", p.234.
25. The notion of the Planetary Common Good is found in "The Ecological Crisis" No. 9; "Renewing the Earth", p.232, "Pastoral Letter on the Relationship of Human Beings to Nature", No. 41.
26. The following documents deal with the principle of solidarity "The Ecological Crisis" No. 10; "Renewing the Earth", p. 233, "The Cry of the Land", No. 3.2.2.
27. The universal purpose of created things is a general Christian moral principle for the regulation of the use of created things. It is discussed in the following documents: "The Ecological Crisis" No. 8; "Renewing the Earth", p.233, "Christians and their Duty Towards Nature", p. 250; "Pastoral Letter on the Relationship of Human Beings to Nature", No. 32, 35 a, c, "The Cry of the Land", No. 2.2.1.
28. The need for ensuring the equitable distribution of goods is stressed in "Renewing the Earth", p. 239, "The Cry of the Land", No. 2.2.2.
29. The Church's view on development can be found in "Renewing the Earth", p.234, "The Cry of the Land", No. 3.2.3.
30. The following documents addressed the question of consumption "The Ecological Crisis" No.13; "Renewing the Earth", p.235, "Ecology: The Bishops of Lombardy Address the Community", p. 303.
31. The documents that call for a change of attitudes are the following. "The Ecological Crisis" No.13; "Renewing the Earth", p.239-240.
32. Pope John Paul II points out the cost of war in terms of environmental harm in "The Ecological Crisis" No.12.