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Eco-Spirituality within an Inclusive Creation: A Nature- Based Spiritual Paradigm Shift

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Abstract: The serious ecological crisis is creating concerns among thinkers and theologians, pushing them to address the issues from their own perspectives. The world today is in the grip of terrorising Covid-19 pandemic with the reality and anguish of death. Beyond the present pandemic there are more deaths on our planet for a thousand other reasons than the Coronavirus. The prospect of a probable slower but a more certain end of humanity at some distant time is not denied. The danger associated with the environmental destruction and deterioration has aroused a deep collective fear the world over. This perspective provokes no lesser impact on the collective psyche. Yet, modernity has systematically denied the constant imminence of death and destruction of the world. We can only reasonably hope for a collective awareness of the changes needed and decisive action taken by all stakeholders. It calls for a profound conversion of the 'ways of life'. Christianity has to play a crucial role in translating into the concrete life those decisive actions.

The author argues that we need to live more consciously and impact the nature that has a slap on human greed. A nature-based eco-spirituality as a progressive spiritual science of the

future, will certainly make right the wrong that human race has committed with its respective affiliated religious biases and socio-scientific blunders.

Keywords: Ecology, Covid-19, Ecological Conversion, Ecological Spirituality, Laudato Si'

Introduction

The planet is in crisis. The serious ecological crisis is creating concerns among thinkers and theologians, pushing them to address the issues from their own perspectives. The world today is in the grip of terrorising Covid-19 pandemic with the reality and anguish of death. Beyond the present feared development there are more deaths on our planet for a thousand other reasons than the Coronavirus. The prospect of a probable slower but a more certain end of humanity at some distant time is not denied. The danger associated with the environmental destruction and deterioration has aroused a deep collective fear the world over. This perspective provokes no lesser impact on the collective psyche. Yet, modernity has systematically denied the constant imminence of death and destruction of the world. We can only reasonably hope for a collective awareness of the changes needed and decisive action taken by all stakeholders. It calls for a profound conversion of the 'ways of life'.¹ Christianity has to play a crucial role in translating into the concrete life those decisive actions.

As psychosomatic creatures of both body and soul (physical and spiritual), human beings within the daily 'ways of life' are part of one and the same substance.² One, therefore, cannot be separated from the other. We are always both physical and spiritual. Consequently physical things are felt spiritually, and spiritual things are experienced through physical senses. If humanness includes a sense of humility (from Latin root, *humus*, soil, ground, and earth) then human being has to be 'earthy' (grounded) person with one's feet firm on the ground, carrying

the smell and the sense of the earth. A person is a piece of the earth and connected with it. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, mystic and a paleontologist, identified his voice with that of the earth, wherein the physical creation itself speaks to God.³

We are commissioned by God to “go in the whole world and proclaim the Good News to every creature.” (Mk 16:15). This mandate is universal in its scope. The whole world today needs new spirituality that speaks new languages of love and mercy, of care and concern, of shared responsibility. All creation comes from the creator and it must be all communed to lead all back to its Source, the Creator, that is as Pope Francis referring to St. Francis of Assisi states, “drawing all other creatures into his praise” (*Laudato Si/* LS 11).⁴

This paper is an attempt to reasonably call all to develop an inclusive, prophetic and challenging spiritual attitude based on nature – a relational cosmic anthropology – of forming humanity as an integral part of life on earth. It is an invitation for personal transformation in one’s spiritual life that leads to a changed social behavioral pattern. Eco-spirituality is proved here to be a ‘common’ spirituality that will bring economics, ecology, ecosystems, eco-politics and eco-spirituality together, where faith and reason, people and planet, creature and creator will remain connected.

Spiritual Lessons from Covid-19 Pandemic

Keeping with the nature is the best cure against Corona virus and all eco-crisis: this is the lesson we learn from the COVID-19 pandemic outcome. We are called to be more human by becoming more responsible for our physical, mental, spiritual and emotional living. It teaches us more directly to move from religion that shifts human responsibility to the Other (God), through prayers, rituals and succour, to humanity itself through responsible participation in building the universal ‘kingdom’. Bill Gates in his reflection has emphatically reiterated the spiritual purpose behind each event however grave or simple,

that occurs in life. Bill Gates says, there is “a spiritual purpose behind everything that happens.”⁵ Despite the chaos there is a spiritual purpose behind the recent pandemic in order to remind of the important lessons we have forgotten to learn.

This pandemic has made human more humble and it needs to be so. Self-isolation has become the best safety measure: to teach that we need to turn to nature, to our very self, to introspect and realise the higher spiritual nature of our being. This is the responsibility for each one. Today we need to be realistic and not live in a ‘make up’ dream world of religious superstitious belief system for easy cure and personal satisfaction, shirking responsibility. The Urbi et Orbi blessing of Pope Francis at the empty St. Peter’s Square on 27th March proved the universal crisis of the world and of the futility of religious practices of all religions. The world is at risk of grave material, physical, mental and religious sicknesses. No Church-Mosque-Temple-Gurdwara has saved the humanity from these grave sicknesses. This grim situation is the reason for a substantial socio-religious systemic changes and a move towards a holistic cosmic spirituality within the most basic day-to-day routine affairs – the spirituality of the next-door.

Life is changing dramatically. But this dramatic situation can be changed for better with an integral eco-spirituality. We need to ‘immune’ ourselves against all that has made us ‘worldly’. It is time to take care of our nature, our physical and spiritual health. A spiritual compassion is a medicine. It gives opportunity to live as one humanity without distinction. As humanity retreated in their inner homes, the nature reclaimed its space, with birds and animals reclaiming their way to live without fear and threat of humanity. Spiritual solace and “spiritual balm” at this moment of distress and clemency are superstitiously sought after by helpless persons who have no other solutions to their human problems. (e.g. Ramayana being telecast twice a day during the pandemic period for this reason!; lots of online stuff and live streaming, for the Christian liturgical rituals and prayers for domestic and personal use, etc.).

The global pandemic teaches that all are equal regardless of one's culture, religion, occupation, financial situation; no one is greater than the rest, that we share the sources equally. We all live loving and serving each other without boundary and discrimination. The universe is one, so is the humanity. We are connected and linked with the rest of the nature. Referring to Tom Hanks, Gates holds that "something that affects one person has an effect on another." That is the only way to live healthy and well in this world.

According to Bill Gates, we have put false borders in order to suppress and oppress others; in fact, such thing does not exist in nature. Health (physical, mental and spiritual) is as important as the natural wealth that we enjoy outside of us. These God-given sources are to be part and parcel of our life and responsibility. In this materialistic society we need to retreat back to live by our basic needs, our family and home life, and not the luxurious wants that we "give unnecessary value to". Our call in this world is to look after each other, look after the nature, take care of our common home; to protect, to share and support each other. It is time to start anew with a nature-spirituality. Pandemic has happened in the past, is happening and will happen. The cycle will go on but humanity learns a lesson from it to have a new beginning and heal the man-made sick earth. The global Coronavirus plague has been a "great corrector" of the course of human life that is divine in nature too.

The Ecological Problems

The Earth Day in lockdown, 22 April 2020, in support of environmental protection, is a message to reimagine the future of the earth and all life in it. Humanity is meant to be united with in spirit and body. It is to worship its Creator, the Supreme Power behind everything that is created, in spirit and truth.

The climate change is for the worst, as the earth grows hotter and the oceans warmer. It causes evaporation, forms typhoons, super cyclone (Umphun) and rainstorms. Consequently, there is

flood and tsunami in certain areas, and droughts, fires, smoke and smog killers elsewhere. Plants and animals are perishing. People are perishing due to the plague. All together this, according to experts, is “ecocide”. Yet there is always a hope that the destructive lifestyles can be changed with having renewable sources of energy such as geothermal, solar and wind power.⁶

Pope Francis states, “The space of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes [...] the imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now.” (LS 161). Due to such imbalance in nature, the human immune system too has weakened, and consequently we fall prey to the existing Corona pandemic that is haunting the whole humanity with fear and death.

The Point of No Return Approaches

We are living in a time of environmental degradation and social unrest, with mass demographical shifts, religious conflicts, migrants, refugees, inequality and other challenges connected with the nature. These social and ecological issues are interconnected.⁷ According to some climate advocates we are at the brink of ‘no return’. As the climate gets so hot it is not possible to reverse it. The fast ice-melting phenomenon will lead to a disastrous drought globally, leading to mass starvation. The years 2014 to 2023 is marked as the hottest years in 150 years⁸ and by 2100 this will reach a disastrous level of 3.2 degrees increase.

The world order has changed drastically within last seven months since December 2019, with the coming of Covid-19. The world is united more as never before. The world should never be the same. There has to be totally new concepts, new attitudes and new life style. Universal unity is noticed more with conviction that WE are one, that we cannot survive just as a single nation or individual. Adaptation is the key to the new situations as it comes on, through cooperation than competition. We need total attitudinal changes and live life differently through big thinking,

short-long term planning and quick decision making capacity. This is the post-pandemic time to learn always something new in the new reality, be self-dependent, be an entrepreneur, be self-employed. Above all we have to be spiritual and live in cohesion and in harmony with the rest of creation. Threat-prone species that have tried to destroy other species have disappeared in the past, and will disappear in future including human species that are endangering the rest of the nature. As human being, we cannot be threat to other beings through our materialistic and consumeristic life style. All these things we will have to do consciously with hopeful conviction and eco-activities, protecting the nature and all within it.

According to Jürgen Moltmann, Christian hope is a result of life itself and its personal capacity to overcome troubles and tribulations. It consists not in utopia of faith,⁹ or wishful hope or false optimism, but in actual change of life, its customs and practices. In short, it is a call for transformation through active personal approach and responsibility by abhorring all structural evils. Therefore, in order to meet the climate justice first there must be economic and environmental justice for all. It calls for changes in existing social, economic and juridical structures. For example, the rising ocean and radioactive waste that contaminate the water and atmosphere are great threat to humanity. A global action is needed to curb global warming, for mankind to survive. There is no return from disinvestment by Churches and religious institutes from fossil fuels, the attitudinal changes towards nature and climate justice. There is no return from positive function for climate justice. We cannot walk back from an ecological spirituality in order to save the earth. This *is* the moment, here and now, for a new, deeper and inter-connected eco-consciousness. Now is the time to promote basic ethical and moral values for care of creation. It is the core element of living today.

Green Vegetation for Survival of Humanity

During the Climate Action Summit, a high-level meeting at the United Nations, September 23, 2019, Cardinal Pietro Parolin,¹⁰ Vatican secretary of state, said, “We all recognise how important forests are for the whole world and indeed for the very future of humanity: they are the world’s most reliable renewable resource and are essential for integral human development.”¹¹ The “irreplaceable importance” of forests is underestimated.

In the same Climate summit it was stated that education about forest conservation is crucial in considering it “not merely as resources to be harnessed, but also as a sanctuary to be cultivated and constantly replenished.” Destruction of vegetation and rainforests that cause a great human suffering “risks the loss of species and vital relationships that could end up altering the entire ecosystem.” Several ecosystems and vast biomes also face serious threats. Excessive deforestation and the deterioration of that biodiversity compromise the future of the earth, our common home. It is not just environmental crisis but also social and ethical. Its impact is strongly felt by those who depend on forests for living, livelihood, cultural heritage, rights, values and social structures. Cardinal Parolin states: “Care for our common home, and care for our brothers and sisters in that home, must go together.” It calls for “integral ecology and integral development, balancing the responsible use of forests for economic and social development.” We must take “an integrated, multilateral approach that combats poverty and restores dignity to the excluded, at the same time as it protects this precious, indispensable and endangered gift.”¹² The recent CBCI Plenary Assembly’s final document states, “[A]ll people of good will have an obligation to protect the ecological equilibrium of the earth, intended by the creator [...] and start treating all of creation with respect and concern.”¹³

An Inclusive Integral Ecology

The recent Amazon Synod put the environment at the heart of the church's concerns. The Church that is turning green and being in a season of creation, has been even offering courses (degrees) on integral ecology.¹⁴ We are not "masters of creation" but stewards who are concerned with moral voice about the environmental issues. Through many new initiatives, the Church is reaching out to a maximum number of people with *Laudato Si'* and is giving importance to ecologically sensitive people. The Caritas International and many other organisations have made the care of the common home one of its strategic orientations for the years to come.¹⁵

The notion of "human ecology" in the 'green' encyclical 'Laudato Si' has a broader socio-economic interest and is inclusive of socio-economic concerns, bioethics as well as anthropology.¹⁶ It is not something merely "grafted" onto Church activities, but it calls to completely revisit her spiritual and pastoral projects with a paradigm shift.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, ecological concerns become an opportunity for the Church to be more credible in world.¹⁷ The process of secularisation push people to live their faith more concretely "in the midst of the world." Ecology constitutes "a path for the future", a spiritual ideal with radical frugality and with supportive lifestyles irrespective of colour and creed.

Eco-Theology

Creation is the context for humanity, which is biblically the climax of the creation process (cf. Lk 3:23-38). In this context of creation, humanity's nature consists in relating closely with the world around it, and as created in God's image, it functions as counterpart and co-workers within the created order. From a layperson's point of view, this creation narrative is "geocentric" based firmly on a "theocentric" assumption.¹⁸ All persons by

virtue of creation are God's people (Ps 24; Acts 17:26). The shared life that the Creator has given is to live in God's big picture - God's life that became visible in the world. We live so, by allowing the 'free wireless' connection.

The causative agent of creation is God, and the created universe is the expression of the love of God (Gen 2:27), who is still at work (John 5:17) through the cosmic Christ (Col 1:15-20) – the archetype (*prototokos*) of creation; “image of the invisible God”; the agent “in whom” and “through” whom all things visible and invisible were created (Tim: 1:17); the *sustainer* of all things; the reconciler-redeemer of all things in heaven and on earth (Col 1:20; Eph. 1:9-10). This is clearly the fundamental meaning of creation by the Word of God when viewed from the contextual and hermeneutical perspective of the New Testament.¹⁹

Every space and species is sacred and the Creator is the owner of the entire creation. The Creator-Spirit God moves on earth from the beginning (cf. Gen 1:2; Ps 19L:1-4). It is only through creation that the Creator can be experienced. Therefore, there is the need to recognise the intrinsic value of all beings in the universe (cf. LS 84) and see the Creator in the natural world. Ecology has to “recover a serene harmony with creation” (LS 225). Christian theology always exalted the human being above material creation thus permitting people to abuse and exploit the material world, forgetting its integrity and sacredness. Today, in the eco-theological perspectives, eco-spirituality is considered to be more essential than eco-theology.

There is a need to include all theological disciplines in eco-theology with clearer strategies that contribute to the UN sustainable Development Goals. It is a call to transform the individual and the world in the light of the Spirit and perspective of creation inclusive of technologies, economy, ideologies, religions and cultures. There is no eco-spirituality without peace and social justice, and this spirituality will unveil the energy driven by biblical visions of Creation (God's Kingdom) and life.²⁰

The Cosmic Christ

The cosmic Christ, in human flesh, through his incarnation divinises the whole humanity by giving the Spirit in it that makes ALL “into one body [...] and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:13, 27). This mystery, that extends to the whole of creation, is the foundation of everything that the universe holds. Nature is everything. The animate and the inanimate with its independent action have its roots in the single wholeness of the universe. God is there precisely “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10). This integral coherence of creation is clear when Paul writes of Jesus Christ: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible [...] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:15-20). So that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

Human life is grounded on a “closely intertwined relationship” with God, neighbour and with the earth itself (LS 66). Christ, in doing so, came to save the whole creation (cf Rom 8:23). According to Amaladoss, the God who enters human history is also the creator of everything. This inseparable handiwork of God continues to exist and evolve. According to the Darwin theory of evolution, from matter life emerges through a progressive complex process. If so, the incarnate ‘Cosmic Christ’ leads the whole of creation to its consummation bringing all things together.²¹ Therefore, humanity has the right to live on this earth, because the Christ’s “incarnation is already redemption.” The cosmic Risen Christ is part of that evolution process, the ‘free wireless’, that we all have to connect to. Understanding Jesus ecologically, his redemptive mission extends to the entire universe and not just humanity alone.

Life in Cosmic Context

We acknowledge nature for what it is by our attitudinal change towards the earthly matters. The cosmic dust that we are made of (in God's image) is the source of the cosmic drama in which we all act and participate. The sacred knowledge, agreeing with the Greek wisdom confirms that cosmos – the earth and stars – is alive with soul and intelligence.²² Life lived within a cosmic context and the daily cosmic experiences can evoke greater sacred significance in depth. There exists a balanced and dynamic harmony in the nature. During catastrophes, in turmoil, panic and human suffering as in the case of the COVID-19, in the midst of the cruel course of history, we can still see the sacred cosmic character of life. Going beyond the mundane follies of the 'foolish'²³ that forge human destiny, there are endless possibilities for correcting the course, through the very continuity between thought, speech and action. The untouched intelligible order is perfect beyond the calculated man-made chaos.²⁴

It is a test for everything and everyone with a resilience of economy, religious faith and life. A time to get back to mother earth and enjoy the fruit of human labour. The pandemic is likely to impact 2.7 billion workers (81%) of the world. In India about 400 million workers (90%), the informal economy are at risk of falling deeper into poverty. There will be an explosion of poverty and deaths. We cannot claim to be the sole proprietors of properties and economy, instead, make the financial administration participatory, with greater transparency, accountability, and responsible use. In short, we have to become "Creator's faithful caretakers".

Post pandemic Christians have to practice a spirituality that makes sense and not continue with liturgical, noisy, ritualistic prayers, based on demonstrative, collective popular devotions. It is necessary and urgent to have a spiritual paradigm shift in the Church and re-imagine the sacramental, pastoral, and liturgical theologies and communal practices.²⁵ This too applies to the familial, social, political, and international relations realms too.

The clergy has to stop preaching and start listening! They should search together with the people the meaning of 'praying in spirit and truth', for the worshippers must "worship in the Spirit and in truth." (John 4,24). This search is for innovative ways to keep the people optimistic, hope-filled and trusting in the Divine Providence.

Theology of Creation

Demanding respect for the cultures and faith system of all people, the Church urges respect for a worldview that sees God in all things²⁶ and she does not promote pantheism. The synod on Amazon, enlarged its view "to include the theology of creation, where the Word of God resides." The natural world is sacred and binds people in close relationship with it. Christianity seeks and finds God in all things (cf. St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*), which according to St. Bonaventure, is called "pantheism," - a theological concept meaning "recognition that all of creation is an expression of the love of God." St. Francis' renunciation of a life of luxury was a reawakening of his senses to the natural world. He realised that all things – animate and inanimate - have one single Source of life which is present in every being created by God. Even today, the indigenous people all over the world, relate to the cosmos as part of it, and that makes them part of the whole. Everything is the manifestation of the sacred, and is sacred. God, therefore, is not distant.

Is it necessary, therefore, to have a building in which to worship? The sacred dimension does not have a wall around it. If God is in everything, how does one build a place for God? Every element of creation has a spirit, (in Spanish or Portuguese the word 'spirit' signify "mother", e.g. homeopathy term, *mother* = basic spirit, root *mater* meaning *matter*). It reflects on the belief that the sacred is present in the world. Recognising the sacred, means "loving the presence of the Creator in everything."²⁷ Every person and species is sacred. Because of the divine presence in creation, a person cannot own things, neither can s/he misuse and

destroy them. One cannot destroy the environment and all within it, for economic gain through deforestation, extractive industries, logging and mining, infrastructure projects, hydroelectric dams etc. Neither can one destroy humanity by artificially creating virus in the lab for a selfish motive to kill other human 'enemies'. This is unethical and a sin against humanity and the Creator.

The ancestral wisdom passed down the generations "inspires care and respect for creation" and prohibits abuse of the environment. Their cosmovisions, involve greater care for and preservation and protection of nature. Christians, will have to perceive the world as creation, where humanity contemplates the 'face of God'. The theology of creation, of God's presence in everything, runs through all of Church history and its documents. According to St. Augustine the first book written was creation. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the Christian faith and eco-spirituality.

Our Common Home

Our understanding of grief and grace is limited by anthropocentrism. But, "[t]he Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures" (Laudato Si', LS 68). To meet our reckless 'hunger' for more, we have turned to be "gods of convenience, ownership and mastery." In all humility we have to admit that the loss of vegetation and water bodies are not just loss of resources or that of the 'common home'. It is a "loss of an integral part of myself, as a creature who participates in the glory of being alive on Earth."²⁸

The *Catholic Catechism*, inclusively declares: "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection [...] Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness." (CCC 339; LS 69)

Human beings are not the only centres of the universe, instead with Darwinist understanding of four billion years of evolution, they are parts of a wide infinite “web of ecological diversity that includes all life.” Genetically we share a part of us with trees and animals. “We are not the apex of creation but a mere strand.” The ecology is not a resource, but our kin.²⁹ We are interdependent. Life beyond *homo sapiens*, all living and non-living are a part of the universal wider narrative. Trees, shrubs, bushes, seeds and flowers ‘talk’ to each other. They care for and heal each other, through nutrients, medicine, air and water. They make the air, and grow with it, and water and soil. They, regenerate, communicate, grow in diverse directions. A hundred thousand “species of love” survive, adapt and keep on making things. We are integrally dependent on these complex, resilient and quite mysterious ‘systems’ of creation that created us.

Service with all humility by doctors, nurses, police, priests, nun, volunteers and other social workers, is the great lesson that the present pandemic teaches humanity. A host of people who bear the brunt of the pandemic, even death with total dedication to the victims of Covid-19, both in body and spirit. They have put their lives at risk with a sense of duty driven by love. During such terrible catastrophes, there always have been movements of selfless solidarity through hardships and risk. There arises love in people, being spent readily with sacrifice. Therefore, there is a mysterious link between love and pain, where suffering is transformed into sacrificing but contagious love. Here spirituality of love becomes a cry of salvation for the suffering for all with all *humility* (the word originates from humus = soil, earth).³⁰

As once, the late 88 year old Baba Amte said, we should not delegate our job to God. Missionary charity has to turn into parity with equality, dignity and rights.³¹ Ours has to be a responsible living where each one earns his/her living by work. We need action here and now to serve each other in the midst of the pandemic which has taught us to do away with offering many rituals and saying lot of prayers. In fact, Covid-19 has

shut down all places of worships of all religions. Hunger for religious rituals sometimes can be unhealthy and self-centred practices with a sense of privilege and contentment, and dependence too, prioritising personal spiritual, better still, religious sentiments. Instead, we need a prayerful sentiment, as in the words of Pope Francis in the closing prayer in *Laudato Si*: “Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.”

Religion and Eco-Theology

World religions that have “served various expressions of spirit of the world”³² to such a degree that they have been considered to be suppressive and destructive structures with authoritarian attitudes and actions. On the other hand, as Pope Francis has attested too in *Laudato Si*, many religions have contributed to an alternative way of life with ethical living in relation to other human being and the natural environment.

The idea of religion as the result of human attempts to preserve and manage one’s own existence, and not just a human-cultural product, stems from the existential depths of the person, - his finality as encounter with himself. (e.g. cult of reason promoted by the Enlightenment). This understanding has considerable consequences, bringing forth necessary changes, out of such “religious” experiences. Progressive evolution of humanity takes place along the development of the religious self-awareness. Contrary to this notion of religion as self-realisation of man, the Judeo-Christian religion is a way of answering to the call of the Creator, though there is a concern to replace religion as man’s answer to the call of its Creator by ritualistic expressions, by a pantheistic natural religion. Christianity, through its doctrines, morals, traditions and cults, and despite of its many ritualistic tendencies and superstitious practices, responds to a supernatural and supra-worldly reality. It is a dialogical event of the Creator’s self-communication-revelation to His creation itself.

Ecological Sin

There has been an ongoing debate on the Internet over Pope Francis' announcement in 2019 on including the "ecological sin" in the Catechism of the Catholic Church along with a proper definition of it. The Church is taking seriously the obligation to care for creation. For some, this is considered to be a highly politicised issue, and for others 'harming the common home' is not a sin (if that was so, killing animals for consumption is sin too !). We cannot ignore the fact that the death and destruction brought about during the Covid-19 pandemic has a close relation to moral integrity, corruption and religious bigotry.

Ecological sin was discussed at Amazonian Synod in October 2019 and the Church was asked to deepen its theology in the context of ecological sins. In fact in the final document on the Amazon Synod, ecological sin is defined as "an act of commission or omission against God, against one's neighbor, the community and the environment" (Synod on Amazon, n.82).³³

According to theologian Celia Deane-Drummond, director of the U.K.-based *Laudato Si'* Research Institute, ecological sins "are in one sense simple to understand, but in another sense complex, since they are in between the category of natural evil and moral evil". Ecological sins "join together human suffering and those of other creatures," based theologically "on a doctrine of creation."³⁴ The ecological sin of destruction and disrespect is a break with Creator, and with living and non-living kin. And the cause of Covid-19, starting at Wuhan in China and spreading to 186 countries, killing over 5 lakhs of persons is one such sin against nature. Society with its belief systems and un-ethical living has contributed to this ecological sin. In this precarious situation, humanity has to seek the foundation of natural living through a spirituality that is apt for our time.

An Authentic Inclusive Spirituality

How do we understand spirituality to be? The subjective experiential approach to seeking the truth is a spiritual search. Spirituality seeks to appropriate this truth through a vision and way of life, thus seeking fulfilment or self-realisation. Such vision gives meaning and motivation for life. Both reason and faith-based spirituality, based on a world view gives purpose and value in life. It serves as practical *Sadhana*, a way of life, than a belief system that is more ritualised through a structure and institution.³⁵

Spirituality is the inner symbolic, conceptual and non-conceptual way to realise the ultimate transcendental realities beyond reason and interpretation, which is, in turn transformative. It is beyond being meaningful, but a natural way of being one's self in its fullness and is open to varied worldviews to chose from. It is an endeavour to constantly seek the truth, *Satya*, reality. It is beyond faith and reason, above all rituals and dogmas. Beyond all fundamentalism and fanaticism, there is always an open discernment and discretion in a spiritual search for truth according to place, people and time.

The experiential approach to spirituality is one of extrinsic testimony, that is the witness to truth with self-authority and not something that is based on rational experiment that can be verified. It is "self-reflective rationality" that makes one more human. It is an act of faith, non-compulsive but freely sought after, in ones search for truth that is humanising. Spirituality is a constitutive element of human living with the nature in the most natural way. It is the way to self-understanding and ordering of life in the natural order.

Spiritual charisma of individual is often distorted when such charisma is institutionalised. Spirituality is a charismatic experience within the nature. It loses its true charism when stereotyped into some routine religious practices wherein the natural experiences loses its vigour and authenticity. Spirituality is in the realm of consciousness of the true reality of self, world

and others. Such conscious experience of reality affects our being and lifts one to super-consciousness with superior moral goodness. It fulfils our deepest hopes and desires, and engages one with meaning and motivation within the nature and its existential realities.

There are common elements within diverse spiritual practices in so far as it is naturally human, across cultures and nations. A basic spirituality based on the nature bridges the divide across geographical distances. A spirituality that recognises oneself in the other and vice versa, and every one is connected with the other and the cosmos. We all breathe the same air – the breath of life for all. An inclusive spirituality holds the nature at the centre of humanism globally for persons to love each other instead of hate. It is beyond borders and boundaries, beyond all religious differences and parameters which are due to perspectives and ideologies. Beyond faith and reason spirituality has to be grounded on nature and engage itself with it. This spirituality helps to internalise the truth with a balance between self-realisation and detachment without becoming exclusivist.

The present ecological crisis caused by consumerist culture, socio-religious bigotry and a globalised market economy, and the Covid-19 as a consequence, has to find a new spirituality with a concern for human values, new world views and supernatural realities. We need to reverence the universe, in a special way our only planet to care for and thus change our attitude and behaviour. This would be a spirituality that can appropriate such values and express it in a way of life.³⁶ In this present moment of global plague and crisis of different kind, putting away all religious divides, a universal eco-spirituality can give meaning and show the united path to overcome human misery with united motivation and hope for a holistic universe. That would be an enriching experience for all in this cosmic journey, of which we are all participating pilgrims. We are a part of it. With its transcendental nature eco-spirituality is consciously concerned about humanity as a whole, and is stretched to the divine reality beyond the material to pure

consciousness where each is connected with the rest. Spirituality brings the human and divine together.

Spirituality must “penetrate” the ecological ethos through prayerful connectedness. The ecological crisis is a spiritual problem (cf. LS 119) where the relationship between humanity and the earth has been broken. Today it calls for ecological asceticism (LS 9). In order to protect our planet with all existing within it, an eco-spirituality harmonises the material with the human and divine consciousness through “cosmostheandric solidarity”. According to Pope Francis’ “On care for our common home” (*Laudato Si*), only an integral eco-spirituality can transcend this material realities with all its crisis and lift the human to the divine (cf. *Laudato Si*, 11). In the midst of the present degrading world order caused by human greed and creed, we need to get our act together and live unitedly an eco-spirituality with a common transcendental vision without losing sight of what looms within the nature.

Ecological Spirituality

The laws of nature are immutable, neglecting which may result in the destruction of the nations and extinction of its civilisation. Soft spirituality in search for temporary solutions and satisfaction will only aggravate the situation. Rather than looking towards institutionalised religious cults and rituals, superstitious belief systems, *sadhus* and god-men for mental satisfaction, world governance has to listen more attentively to hydrologists, geologists, urban planners, World Health Organization and ecological economists. It is socially unjust to neglect the natural water system, land and the forestry, zoological balance and bio-ethics, and it is ecologically imprudent to keep people distant from the origin of the resources for sustainable use. Today, the inevitability of total respect and sustenance of the natural world through eco-spirituality as a way of life, is obvious.

Characteristics of Ecological Spirituality

Presently, spirituality at the popular level has become managerial, a set of techniques rather than a search for holism and wholeness. Sadly, it has turned to be a caricature of conformity, (e.g. International Yoga Day) rather than a spiritual exercise against spiritualism. A cultural renaissance is needed through a strong eco-spirituality. A bio-ethical spirituality would be a response to the denial of alternatives, plurality, or the sense of the complexity of the natural world.

Pseudo-spiritualism has taken over the pseudo-secularism of the past.³⁷ The real challenge today is the search for alternative spiritual and plural worlds. The economic models and policies show little sense of ecology. The bio-diversity both at global and regional levels need to play with a sense of pluralism. This will allow a range of possibilities to combine the ecological and spiritual worlds.

A planetary spirituality, challenging the limits of the existing global paradigm, makes nature a part of the preoccupation with the political and ethical living. Consequently, ecology, ethics and culture together will create resistance to the destructive models and policies, by even making science more ethical. Going beyond the passive fixity, an eco-spirituality becomes open to new ideas, new possibilities with alternatives through an act of trusteeship.

Practical Approaches and Proposals

Eco-spirituality needs creative practical approaches for its consolidation. A new movement of the Eco-Spirit will denounce the plundering of the natural resources of the world. It invites to a “true integral conversion” from “ecological sin” which is a “sin against creation” (*Laudato Si'*, 8), through disrespect and violence to nature. People’s survival depends directly on the ecological balance. The capitalist exploitation of the environment by multinationals is a sin of selfish interests. They offend creation - our common home-, they offend the creator.

One has to recognise and denounce “ecological sin”, including social sin, since society is an integral part of creation, and make people conscious of the grave consequences of the violation of nature. It is possible to save the ecosystem through new paths of ecological, pastoral, cultural conversion at the personal, communitarian and societal level.

One of the four priorities (Universal Apostolic Preferences) that the Jesuits, following the fellow Jesuit Pope Francis has proposed, is *to care for this earth*, God’s creation, in the face of the present environmental disaster and climate change.³⁸ It is never too late to be on the reversals of human behaviour in order to correct the extreme weather patterns and natural phenomenon which are affecting gravely the world. Besides, more sharing of material and intellectual resources on eco-spirituality in order to deepen and be aware of such spirituality. Eco-community, Green Churches, Eco-diaconia, Creation day activities, Eco-meditations, Eco-activities, Care of the earth programmes, are some of the effective ways to promote eco-spirituality within indigenous and inculturated perspectives.

Conclusion

Within an unprecedented pandemic situation of helplessness, we look towards a new pattern of living in harmony with all the rest – animate and inanimate – while discerning a true way of living. While knowing what factors that led to such an alarming defenseless reality of unwanted death – a universal possibility - we need to decide upon what and how we deal with the rest of the nature. In the present condition of defenselessness, that essentially relates to human life in its relationship with nature, we need to put things and life in order, based on an eco-spirituality, where the creative manifestation of the creator is respected and lived with, fully in unison, keeping everything connected as eternally planned. Humanity cannot put asunder the balances put between things and living beings. Selfishness, greed and exploitation of nature have to be shown the door. We have to

take care of our common home overcoming the harm that we have done to nature. We need to reconcile with the Creator, other human, the nature and the society at large. Through a total conversion, an eco-spirituality that speaks the voice of nature and its signs, here and now, has to be a part and parcel of our life. This will be the only saving paradigm shift in the world ahead.

Being in the world has to be understood as being-with-the-Other. We may or may not find any psychological comfort from the faith practices, from the pastoral actions of the institutional Church. We have to be conscious that we are not our own stuff, but invisible gifts of grace to each other. As Christians we have the possibility of giving form to life of each one, irrespective of creed and colour with the universal outpouring of prophetic spirit.

The environment issue, post pandemic, is going to stay. It is time to live more consciously and impact the nature that has a slap on human greed. A nature-based eco-spirituality as a progressive spiritual science of the future, will certainly make right the wrong that human race has committed with its respective affiliated religious biases and socio-scientific blunders. Many such man-made structures have been demolished with just one virus spread world over. It is time to invent a more adaptable life, satisfied just with the very basics in life with a conscious and natural spiritual foundation. As a creative community we need to live as co-responsible for the unity and perseverance of the world, our common home.

Notes

1. Cf. Marc Rastoin, *Live Your Faith from The Perspective of the End*, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/live-your-faith-from-the-perspective-of-the-end/>, 20.12.2019
2. Cf. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon 2006, p.111
3. Teilhard de Chardin writes: “Lord, God, I stand before you as a microcosm of the earth itself, to give it voice: See in my openness, the world’s openness, in my infidelity, the world’s infidelity; in my sincerity, the

world's sincerity, in my hypocrisy, the world's hypocrisy; in my generosity, the world's generosity in my attentiveness, the world's attentiveness, in my distraction, the world's distraction; in my desire to praise you, the world's desire to praise you, and in my self-preoccupation, the world's forgetfulness of you. For I am of the earth, a piece of earth, and the earth opens or closes to you through my body, my soul, and my voice." As cited in, Ron Rolheiser, *The Scent of Humility*, September 9, 2019, <https://ronrolheiser.com/the-scent-of-humility/#.XgSm5kczam8>, 26.12.2019

4. Pope Francis writes: "Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he (St. Francis of Assisi) would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise."
5. Bill Gates, *What is the Corona/Covid-19 virus really teaching us?*, an open letter allegedly a fake message ascribed to Bill Gates as appeared in the English Paper – The Sun, 24th March, 2020 which was later withdrawn. cf. also, www.theartquotation.wordpress.com, 29.3.2020.
6. The change to renewable sources of electricity needs to be accelerated in order to hold the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius and reach carbon neutrality by 2050, using carbon capture technology and having zero tolerance for greenhouse gases.
7. Cf. David G. Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future," *Colloquium*, 46(2014)2, p.139.
8. Cf. Shay Cullen, "Saving the Planet and Ourselves," <https://www.ucanews.org/news/saving-the-planet-and-ourselves/86760>, 26.12.2019
9. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, Harper & Row, New York 1965, p. 333.
10. The high-level meeting was themed "Multilateral Action in Favour of the Protection of Rainforests" and held as part of the Climate Action Summit. Cardinal Parolin as the head of the Vatican delegation to the 74th session of the U.N. General Assembly addressed a high-level U.N. meeting on universal health care the same day.
11. Cardinal Parolin. "We Must Protect Forests for the Future of Humanity," *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/09/25/cardinal-parolin-we-must-protect-forests-future-humanity>, 6.1.2020.
12. Cardinal Parolin. "We Must Protect Forests for the Future of Humanity," op.cit., accessed 6.1.2020.
13. CBCI, XXXIV Plenary Assembly, Bengaluru, 13-19 February

2019, Final Statement, 84(*VJTR*)5, May 2020, p.61.

14. Many pontifical universities are offering a common degree in integral ecology. Laudato Si' Chairs or Institutes are now flourishing all over the world, in Budapest as well as in Oxford and Panama, summer University in France, The Taizé Community on environmental issues with a Laudato Si' course, Courses at Interdisciplinary Center for Ethics and Integral Ecology at the Catholic University of Lyon.
15. Cf. Nicolas Sénèze (Rome) and Mélinée Le Priol, *Ecology, A New Horizon for the Church Laudato si'*, Pope Francis' Second Encyclical, Now Reflects the Mood of a Generation, Vatican City, December 27, 2019, https://international.la-croix.com/news/ecology-a-new-horizon-for-the-church/10858?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_content=27-12-2019&utm_campaign=newsletter_crx_lci&PMID=e0bf16242f5244d5ecc2158ed0e57693, 28.12.2019.
16. "Laudato si' is a social encyclical," the pope repeated in June 2019, to the Centesimus Annus Foundation, a group of entrepreneurs and economists who reflect on the Church's social doctrine.
17. 4th October 2019, Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, marked the end of the Season of Creation month and the 40 years since St John Paul II proclaimed St Francis Patron Saint "of those who promote ecology". The Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Franciscan Friars (JPIC-PFM), and Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) organized events to show how "everything is connected" (Laudato Si'). <https://catholicnewstt.com/index.php/2019/10/11/season-of-creation-ends-synod-on-amazon-begins/>, 28.12.2019
18. Cf. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon 2006, p.107.
19. Cf. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode*, op.cit., p.109.
20. Cf. Christoph Stuckelberger. "Eco-theology Strategy," in Dietrich Werner & Elisabeth Jeglitzka (eds), *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security*, Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development, Globethics.net Global No.14, Geneva 2016, pp.141-144. (soft copy from www.globethics.net, 8.5.2020.)
21. Cf. Michael Amaladoss, "The Cosmic Christ," in *The New Leader*, December 16-31, 2019, p.11
22. Cf. *Timaeus* Plato, 30 B.C., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, (ed.

- Edith Hamilton and Houghton Cairns), Pantheon Books, New York 1963, p. 1163.
23. Cf. Saint Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey unto God*, (trans. E. Cousins), Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1945, p. 67.
 24. Cf. Justin O'Brien, "Eastern Spirituality and the Religious Educator," *Eastern Spirituality and the Religious Educator*, pp. 171-189.
 25. Cf. George Mutholil (Head the South Asian section at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome), *Re-Imagining Religious Life In Post-Covid-19 World*, Jamshedpur, May 3, 2020, www.mattersindia.org, 3.5.2020.
 26. Cf. Barbara J. Fraser, *God in all things - Synod looks at indigenous 'theology of creation*, Vatican City, 10th October, <https://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2019/god-in-all-things-synod-looks-at-indigenous-theology-of-creation.cfm>, 10.10.2019
 27. Barbara J. Fraser, *God in all things - Synod looks at indigenous 'theology of creation'*, *op.cit.*
 28. Brianne Jacobs, *Review: A novel for the age of 'Laudato Si'*, January 02, 2020, https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2020/01/02/review-novel-age-laudato-si?utm_source=Newsletters&utm_campaign=4f715fc409-DAILY_CAMPAIGN_2020_01_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0fe8ed70be-4f715fc409-58840629, 3.1.2020
 29. Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory*, which won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize, is a story about people challenging us to feel that kinship with that web.
 30. Federico Lombardi, *Giving Life*, CNUA, Vol Xiii, Issue 166, 7th May, 2020, www.catholicnewsasia.org, 8th May, 2020.
 31. Cf. Varghese Alengaden, *Christians, stop delegating your job to God*, Matters India, Indore, 20 April 2020, www.mattersindia.org, 4.5.2020.
 32. Nikolaos Asproulis, "Creation, History and the Church," in Dietrich Werner & Elisabeth Jeglitzka (eds), *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security*, *op.cit.*, p.189.
 33. *Final Document of the Synod on the Amazon: Full Text, 26 October 2019*, vaticannew.va, 3.5.2020.
 34. *The 'ecological sin' debate, Pope Francis announced in 2019 that the Catechism of the Catholic Church would be updated to include a definition of 'ecological sin'*, La Croix International staff (with Catholic News Service), Vatican City, January 3, 2020, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-ecological->

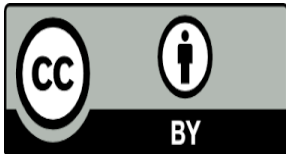
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35. Cf. R.C. Heredia, *Science, Religion and Spirituality*, in VJTR, 84(2020)2, pp 7-8.
36. Cf. R.C. Heredia, *Science, Religion and Spirituality*, in VJTR, 84(2020)2, p.105.
37. Cf. Shiv Visvanathan, *Thinking differently, democracy is exciting when it celebrates difference*, in The Telegraph, 19 Jul 2019, p. 13.
38. Cf. Mario Pereira, *What will the Jesuits do next?* <https://www.ucanews.org/news/what-will-the-jesuits-do-next/85845>, 26.12.2019.

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