

Ecological Conversion and Eco-Spirituality.

New Insights for Mission of the Church in Today's World

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“Centuries of uncontrolled exploitation have devastated life on planet Earth, and the survival of both humans and the environment as a whole is being threatened. The continuing advance of science and technology alongside the alarming increase in population particularly in poorer nations is putting enormous pressure on our available resources. Depletion, desertification and deforestation, climatic changes, droughts and floods and other natural problems threaten life on Earth. And with pollution on a hazardous scale these problems are being compounded to even more alarming proportions. No longer are these merely local issues; they demand urgent attention of the whole global community as human survival is at stake. And more important for

us, these are not merely socioeconomic, political questions, also but have deep implications for biblical theology"<sup>1</sup>.

### Introduction

This reflection wants to introduce into new models of Evangelizing Ministry and Mission which should be practiced by an ongoing ecological conversion and a new eco-spirituality. But first I want to look at the challenges and current understanding of mission from the perspective of the people aiming to have, longing for and in need for a genuine understanding of mission. To grow in such an understanding is actually a long process collectively.

### The emergence of a new Missiology

The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II made it clear that the church's mission is first and foremost possible only by honest dialogue.

"By virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all men of whatever nation, race or culture, the Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherhood which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigour" (GS 92).

Pope John XXIII especially encouraged the Church with his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* from 1964, which initiated the approach of *Reading the Signs of the times* as a method of discovering God's presence in the world so much loved by God. "The appeal to recognize the Signs of the times belongs" according to Hans Waldenfels "to the most important impulses of Vatican II"<sup>2</sup>. *Gaudium et spes* even starts with the programmatic sentence:

"To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other" (GS 4).

<sup>1</sup> K.R. Gnanakan, *Creation and Ecology*, [in:] W.A. Dyrness, V.M. Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, Illinois-Nottingham 2008, p. 207-208.

<sup>2</sup> H. Waldenfels, *Zeichen der Zeit*, [in:] M. Delgado, M. Sievernich (eds.), *Die großen Metaphern des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Ihre Bedeutung für Heute*, Freiburg 2013, p. 119.

Anthony J. Kelly observes in his article "The Ecumenism of Ecology" a new approach among the Christian communities, which have far-reaching and sustainable effects<sup>3</sup>.

"Ecumenical developments among the Christian communities in recent decades have not moved simply by discussing the core doctrines of Christian tradition in an abstract fashion. There has been an outward turn of common concern which arose from the realisation that all human beings are the beneficiaries of God's saving love and are called to participate in the planetary biosphere in a spirit of thanksgiving and justice"<sup>4</sup>.

### **The contribution on ecology from theologians and missiologists**

Theologians are looking at the ecological crisis from a gospel perspective. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, published *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*<sup>5</sup>. Bevans explains that

"we showed how the six elements of mission - witness and proclamation; liturgy, prayer and contemplation; justice, peace and integrity of creation; interreligious dialogue; inculturation; and reconciliation - could be explained in terms of prophetic dialogue"<sup>6</sup>.

These six elements of mission are the most accepted ones we find today in Catholic Missiology.

According to the two North-American missiologists there are six elements of mission: Witness and Proclamation; Liturgy, Justice,

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Kelly, *The Ecumenism of Ecology*, "Australian Journal of Theology", vol. 22, no 3, 2015, p. 193-205.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 193: "The awareness of being part of one web of planetary life, provoked in some measure by writings such as Lynn White's «The historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis», has both ecumenical and ecological consequences as faith awakens to the whole mystery of life and Christian responsibilities within it. Some authors speak of an «ecological conversion» taking place as an essential dimension of Christian conversion at this time, at least in regard to the development of an environmental conscience and a more keen consciousness of the Christian vocation within a planetary biosphere".

<sup>5</sup> S.B. Bevans, R.P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*, New York 2004; S.B. Bevans, *Missiology through the Back Door*, "Verbum SVD", vol. 52, no 4, 2011, p. 367-377.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

Peace, and the Integrity of Creation; Interreligious / Secular Dialogue; Inculturation; and Reconciliation.

Jürgen Moltmann, the famous theologian of hope has contributed to our topic as a systematic theologian. He writes: "Today, ecology includes also the changes the humans have introduced into the conditions of natural life on earth"<sup>7</sup>. For him the "human ecosystem has fallen out of balance and is on its way to the destruction of the earth and to self-destruction"<sup>8</sup>.

His theology of creation is clearly coming out in the following pronouncement:

"While there are «traces of God» (vestigia Dei) to be seen in all other creatures, the human person is created as God's image, representative and stand-in (imago Dei). This grounds the Christian concept of the human person: «The human person is not just another part of nature, but a person called forth by God and responsible to God, which is the basis for human dignity»"<sup>9</sup>.

For the Irish missiologist Denis Edwards *Ecology is at the heart of mission*<sup>10</sup>. He therefore proposes "that mission is also the church witnessing to the integrity of creation and to its place in God's creating and redeeming act"<sup>11</sup>. Consequently he writes:

"The church is in mission today in a world threatened by global climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, degraded land, damaged rivers and depleted fisheries. It was always true, I believe, that mission involved the whole creation. But in our day there is a new urgency to locate the ecological at the very heart of Christian mission"<sup>12</sup>.

Mary Motte, an US-American missiologist, presents a female perspective in her article *Ecological Concerns. A Mission Perspective*<sup>13</sup>,

<sup>7</sup> J. Moltmann, Ökologie, [in:] *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Bd. 25, Berlin 2000, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> D. Edwards, *Ecology Is at the Heart of Mission*, [in:] S.B. Bevans (ed.), *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Oregon 2013, p. 206-215.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> M. Motte, *Ecological Concerns. A Mission Perspective*, [in:] T.S. Lazar, M. Ueffing (eds.), *Intercultural Mission*, Sankt Augustin-New Delhi 2015, p. 371-384.

which enriches our traditionally male-dominated theological reflection on this issue. Also for her *Ecological Concerns are at the Heart of Mission*. For her ecological practice is already part of the mission of the church, therefore she goes a step further and proposes a *spirituality of creation*.

“Developing a spirituality from the perspective of ecological justice is indeed a path for mission... Ecological action can express a radical commitment to Christ and the practice of faithful discipleship. A deeper formation in the Gospel is ultimately the fruit of commitment to eco-justice, sustainability of the earth, and engagement with the poor”<sup>14</sup>.

The Indian theologian writes on ecotheology from a biblical-theological perspective.

“Creation perspectives for ecotheologies are required, but Christians have to ground their theology in Jesus Christ and his relationship to creation”<sup>15</sup>.

He argues further that:

“Humans must restore right relationships. God’s creation is held together by an intricate network of relationships... While Christians have strongly emphasized a right relationship between humans and God, and also among humans, they have not advocated right relationship between humans and God’s creation. This urgently required. Christians have seen that anthropocentric relationships have been the cause for ecological disaster”<sup>16</sup>.

Ken Gnanakan then asks in his dictionary entry on *Creation and Ecology*

“Must we then adopt biocentric relationships? The answer is negative; God is at the center of relationships... The «new creation» community that believers are is placed firmly within the context of the «creation» community and has the responsibility to discover and demonstrate eco-relationships, which must lead to a demonstration of eco-spirituality in the world today”<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>15</sup> K.R. Gnanakan, *Creation and Ecology*, [in:] W.A. Dyrness, V.M. Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Global Dictionary...*, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 212-213.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

For him “humans must restore right relationships” and develop “responsible stewardship”, since they are part of God’s creation.

“The «new creation» community that believers are is placed firmly within the context of the «creation» community and has the responsibility to discover and demonstrate eco-relationships, which must lead to a demonstration of eco-spirituality in the world today”<sup>18</sup>.

Felix Wilfred has a similar understanding. For him

“Ecological spirituality is a spirituality of relationships, and this spirituality is life-fostering. For life is a network of relationships. The stronger they are, life becomes richer and spirituality becomes meaningful. This relationship is both with the world and with nature, both inextricably intertwined. The relationship we forge with nature helps us foster relationships of harmony and justice”<sup>19</sup>.

For Mary C. Grey *Ecological Spirituality*<sup>20</sup>

“is both ancient and new. As a spirituality of living gently with the earth, living as if the earth mattered, it has been implicit in many forms of Christian spirituality, especially that of religious orders like the Franciscan and Benedictine as well in churches that emphasize a sacramental tradition. But as an explicit form of spirituality it has only recently emerged as a response to the crisis of the environment and the treat to the very survival of the planet”<sup>21</sup>.

She continues saying that

“After Lynn White Jr’s article (1967), suggesting that theology must take some responsibility for the ecological crisis, various attempts were made to encourage ecological awareness in theology and to prioritize ethical thinking in this area, but it would be some time before the real urgency of the situation would energize influential movements in spirituality. In fact it was from those countries suffering most from the earth’s exploitation that the impetus would first come”<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> F. Wilfred, *Christians for a Better India*, Delhi 2014, p. 296.

<sup>20</sup> M.C. Grey, *Ecological Spirituality*, [in:] Ph. Sheldrake (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Louisville 2005, p. 261-262.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

### The contribution of the Church in Asia: FABC documents and papers

The final document of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC of July 27, 1990 is often called the *Asian Pastoral Constitution* since it has had a similar importance for the Asian churches as *Gaudium et Spes* had for the worldwide Catholic Church. In this document the bishops give us a differentiated analysis of the socio-cultural, political, economic and religious situation in which the people of Asia have to live their Christian faith. They do not hesitate to mention the social evils they experience in Asia like massive poverty, exploitation of the women, overexploitation of natural resources, the lack of perspective for the young generation. In the same document the Asian bishops declared:

“In the face of the massive problems engendered by social change and in the face of massive poverty, we can discern, however, many signs of hope”<sup>23</sup>.

The Asian bishops listed also the many positive signs which give reason for hope, such as a new consciousness of solidarity, the increasing number of people fighting for human rights, democratization and interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. “Dialogue between religious traditions, the ecological movement, and aspects of the women’s movement offer hope for a more holistic spirituality”<sup>24</sup>.

The Asian Bishops at their tenth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in 2012 in Vietnam searched for new ways of evangelization. The rich result of this conversation is published in the fifth volume of *For All the Peoples of Asia* under the title *FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia. A New Evangelization*<sup>25</sup>.

In that document the bishops envision that the church is “a Church in solidarity with the whole of creation”<sup>26</sup>. The bishops are

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<sup>23</sup> *Hope at the Crossroads. Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium*, [in:] G. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. FABC Documents from 1970-1991*, vol. 1, Manila 1997, p. 277.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>25</sup> *FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia. A New Evangelization. X Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Plenary Assembly. Final Statement. Xuan Loc & Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, December 10-16, 2012*, [in:] *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 2007-2012*, vol. 5, Quezon City 2014, p. 49-85.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

aware of the ethical implications of the ecological crisis, when they write:

“Even now hundreds of thousands are ecological refugees as they search for safer places away from floods and rising sea levels. Climate change is wreaking havoc on agricultural production and on sources of livelihood. We in Asia are becoming increasingly aware and concerned regarding the ecological problem and its ethical implications”<sup>27</sup>.

Reflecting on the biblical stories on creation, the bishops claim that

“To have dominion over creation is to be responsible stewards of creation. This is the first mandate of solidarity between human-kind and the rest of creation. It is at the root of the social and moral principle of the universal destination of created goods.... Having shared his goodness and love with creation and humanity God unconditionally declared all creation as «indeed very good» and affirmed the «integrity of creation». The story of creation is, indeed, the story of God’s purely gratuitous love”<sup>28</sup>.

Following the recommendation the FABC bishops made in 2012, Fr. Clarence Devadass, the Executive Secretary FABC Office of Theological Concerns, published in June 2015, the most comprehensive and updated FABC Paper on our issue, called “Towards responsible stewardship of creation an Asian-Christian approach”<sup>29</sup>. In the Preamble the author writes:

“Ecological issues are paramount among the most urgent to be addressed in our time. Since the industrial revolution, the general intensity of human conduct onto the environment has exceeded its potential for restoration over a vast area of earth’s surface. It leads to irreversible changes in the eco-system. The resource base of a region and the quality of its air, water and land represent a common heritage for all generations. Their destruction and manipulation in pursuit of short-term gains compromise the opportunity for future generations. The search for a solution to this problem cannot be only at political, economic,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 64-65.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>29</sup> C. Devadass (ed.), *Towards Responsible Stewardship of Creation an Asian-Christian Approach*, “FABC Papers”, no 146, June 2015.



technological or ethical levels, but requires also a contribution from the religious, spiritual and theological perspectives"<sup>30</sup>.

Explaining the Asian realities the paper remarks:

"For the peoples and cultures of Asia, the ecological system plays an integral part of their daily lives as it provides them with sustenance, protection, and also a sense of the Divine. Asia is blessed with vast forests, beaches, mountains, rivers, and many other aspects that maintain the eco system. They not only provide for humankind but also for the many other species that depend on them for their survival"<sup>31</sup>.

The document is very concerned because

"In many of the countries in Asia, due to rapid urban development, very little consideration is given to the environment. In the race to be a developed nation, forests are depleted, rivers and seas are polluted, and there is very little concern for sustainable development. This is indeed a cause for deep concern"<sup>32</sup>.

The document elaborates all the positive wisdom and traditions being part of all the major religions in Asia like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam and, finally in the religions of the indigenous peoples of Asia.

"These groups have so much to give and to teach (post)modern societies. They have been acknowledged for their environmental consciousness and ecologically-sound way of life, especially at this time when we in Asia experience half of the natural calamities and disasters in the world. Their natural healing practices, communal way of living, as well as their deep spirituality have inspired and challenged people living in globalised societies that have promoted individualism and greed, as well as unhealthy lifestyles"<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 4: "These so-called developments are often driven by profit and therefore many people are blinded to the need to care for and protect the environment due to profitable development. Linked to profitable development is also corruption. There is no denying that corruption is rampant in Asia and therefore there are greater opportunities for exploitation. Therefore, even though there may be legislation to protect the environment, these laws are often not enforced due to corruption that exists in the system".

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.

I believe we should go to learn more from indigenous people, regarding their understanding of the natural world. Their belief could be summed as follows:

1. Belief in Interconnectedness: Indigenous peoples look at life in a holistic and integrated way. The spiritual and the material permeate each other. Nature, culture and cosmos are interconnected and work together.

2. Belief in the Sacredness of all things: Everything is an epiphany of the Divine and there is Divine presence in everything. This is the reason for their deep respect and care for creation and the natural world.

3. Belief in Spirits: The indigenous peoples believe in spirits, both good and bad, who reside in material and natural things. They – especially their shamans – relate with the spirits (through their rituals and prayers) and negotiate for community needs and desires<sup>34</sup>.

Christian communities and their leaders and theologians have to enter into dialogue with all religions and especially into dialogue with all Cosmic or Primal religions as they are part of the cultural and spiritual heritage of all indigenous peoples all over the world. There is much they can offer not only to Christians but to all members of contemporary plural and secular societies.

Chapter IV of the FABC Paper 146 deals with the biblical theology of creation as it is expressed in the two narratives in Genesis. One section talks especially about the “Mission of the human being: Stewardship over creation”

“God’s special intention for creating the human being is made specific in the responsibility and task given to it «to have dominion» (rada) over and to «subdue» (kabash) especially all living beings. These are very strong terms, but in view of responsible stewardship for God’s creation under God’s authority, stewardship is an awesome task. In essence, stewardship means rendering service to God’s order and plan in creation.

This stewardship is meant to responsibly safeguard the divine intention of «ecology» in creation. In this the human being has

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 22: “In a special way, their relationship with the land summarises what they believe in. They believe that the Land is sacred and that the Land is life itself. The land is the source, the setting and their community of life”. Ibid., p. 25: “Part of this indigenous eco spirituality is the healing practices of indigenous ritual leaders called shamans. Recognition and study of shamans/shamanism as integral to indigenous culture and spirituality have also been a recent concern for the Asian church”.

a double task: first of all, it must be responsible to its own «ecology», namely to take proper care of the goodness of communion of body and the breath of God in it, so that it can be a worthy personality and **agent for stewardship**; and secondly, it must direct and guide the «ecology», namely the heart-matter of all creation”<sup>35</sup>.

The task of stewardship for creation is an obligation for any human being, it places us all squarely in creation’s ecology today in the face of climate change and climate justice.

Felix Wilfred called *Laudato Si* “a jewel in the crown of the social teachings of the Church, and a great contribution to humanity grappling with the environmental crisis”<sup>36</sup>. Michael Amaladoss found the spirituality of creation in *Laudato Si* something great, holistic and original: “This is very attractive especially to the Easterners like us”<sup>37</sup>.

### **Papal teachings on environmental concerns**

Ecological consciousness was not yet a topic during the Second Vatican Council and appeared the first time in an apostolic letter of Paul VI in 1971.

#### **The environment**

“21. While the horizon of man is thus being modified according to the images that are chosen for him, another transformation is making itself felt, one which is the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity. Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace – pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity – but the human framework is no longer under man’s control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> Quotation taken from: F. Wilfred, *Theological Significance of Laudato Si’: An Asian Reading*, “Vidyajyoti”, vol. 79, 2015, p. 661.

<sup>37</sup> Quotation taken from: M. Amaladoss, *A Spirituality of Creation According to Pope Francis*, *ibid.*, p. 575.

The Christian must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all<sup>38</sup>.

John Paul II's 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace is the second important Pontifical pronouncement on ecological concerns. It is entitled *Peace with God the Creator; Peace with All of Creation*<sup>39</sup>.

Denis Edwards comments: "The encouragement of the emergence of this new global, ecological awareness is a constant in John Paul II's teaching, which he describes elsewhere as ecological conversion"<sup>40</sup>.

John Paul II sees the need for "an education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth... Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the *responsibility of everyone*" (JP II 1990, 13, 15).

Twenty years after this message, Pope Benedict continues in 2010 this teaching with his Message on the World Day of Peace with the theme: *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*<sup>41</sup>.

Benedict asks

"Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of «environmental refugees», people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such

<sup>38</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolic letter "Octogesima adveniens" (14 may 1971)* [on-line], [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19710514\\_octogesima-adveniens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html) [access: 14.08.2016].

<sup>39</sup> *Message of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990* [on-line], [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html) [access: 14.08.2016].

<sup>40</sup> D. Edwards, *Ecology Is at the Heart...*, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>41</sup> *Message of Pope Benedict for the World Day of Peace (1.01.2010)* [on-line], [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliiii-world-day-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html) [access: 14.08.2016].

as the right to life, food, health and development" (Benedict XVI, 2010, 4).

The teaching of our present Pontiff Francis is the culmination and a kind of summary of ecclesial and Christian theology of creation, environmental concern as well as a spirituality of creation and ecology.

Many of the issues mentioned by secular movements and by theologians have found an entry into this papal document of 2015<sup>42</sup>. Pope Francis frankly admits this influence.

United by the same concern

"These statements of the Popes echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church's thinking on these questions. Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches and Christian communities - and other religions as well - have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing. To give just one striking example, I would mention the statements made by the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the hope of full ecclesial communion" (LS 7)<sup>43</sup>.

For Pope Francis "the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change" (LS 13). Therefore he writes:

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges" (LS 14).

Pope Francis touches also the question on the understanding of Genesis 2 and 3:

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<sup>42</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter "Laudato Si" on Care for Our Common Home* (24.05.2015) [on-line], [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) [access: 14.08.2015].

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, no 7.

“The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to «have dominion» over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to «till it and keep it» (Gen 2,15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3,17-19)” (LS 66).

For Francis “Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion” (LS 228).

The encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis on the *care for our common home* received an international recognition far beyond the Catholic Church and even Christian churches. The resonance LS found among Indian theologians stands for many theologians from the Two-Third World.

“One of the elements that has found resonance among Indian theologians is the fact that *Laudato Si'* looks at the environment from the perspective of the poor. This is the hallmark of the theology developing in India, a theology from below, inspired by liberation theology, born out of the experience of the poor, and a theology in solidarity with the victims of history”<sup>44</sup>.

## Conclusion

My intention of this short reflection was to throw a bit of light in the contemporary search for a Christian understanding of the environmental crisis and its many attempts to respond to it by developing an adequate eco-theology and spirituality at the service of the pastoral ministry of the Church. Christians at grassroots level in their families and as members of Small Christian communities and parishes as places of communion of communities are adequate and relevant places where eco-theology and eco-spirituality is creatively received, practiced and further developed<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> C. Campos, *Laudato Si': An Indian Perspective*, “Theological Studies”, vol. 78, no 1, 2017, p. 217.

<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis declared in 2013: “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters... It is a community of

The theologian and specialist in Islamic studies, Prof. Christian Troll S.J., indicate the common responsibility Muslims' and Christians' have as believers in the God of creation.

"In fact, when thinking about what most deeply unites us as Christian and Muslim believers, it is arguably the shared belief in God as the Creator of the universe and thus the Creator also of the planet earth we inhabit. For the believer creation is a gift emanating directly from the Creator. Hence it possesses the quality of sacredness. This in turn implies on the part of believer, the servant, the worshipper, an attitude of basic respect, if not awe, regarding this sacred gift"<sup>46</sup>.

For Troll "*gratitude* must be regarded as the fundamental ecological attitude", since "*gratitude* as fundamental attitude generates a specific consciousness that accompanies all technical and cultural activity of the believing person"<sup>47</sup>.

Christians should learn what it means not only to talk about the church and faith, but to be empowered by a faith that is lived and a faith that is experienced as a relational live enhancing reality! Faith is not just a term or area for reflection, but as Jim Fowlers sees it, an "*active mode-of-being-in-relation* to the other or others, accompanied by belief, commitment, love, and risk"<sup>48</sup>.

And for that we have to develop a contextualized spirituality of environment and creation, mission and social action. Theology can not only take Scripture and tradition into consideration, but is called to take ecology and the integrity of creation as equally important as part of their reflection<sup>49</sup>. Dialogue is much more than an approach; it is a way of relating and hence living as a Christian. The Christian community has to be understood as a relational community which forms its members in the likeness of Christ.

communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no 28).

<sup>46</sup> Ch.W. Troll, *The Sacredness of Creation: Muslims' and Christians' Shared Ecological Responsibility*, "Salaam", vol. 35, no 3, 2014, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>48</sup> J. Walsh, *Evangelization and Justice. New Insights for Christian Ministry*, New York 1982, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. M. Sievernich, *Die Christliche Mission. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt 2009, p. 228. *Id.*, *La missione cristiana. Storia e presente*, Brescia 2012.

Pope Francis encourages and enlightens us by telling us: The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him “to go forth” (EG 20).

This can only be experienced if we are ready to get involved in the ministry to work for the integrity of creation and the protection of our environmental, in any place where the Spirit will lead and guide us.

I want to conclude with the thoughts of Bevans and Schroeder, who summarize the theological aspect of our theme on the mission of sustainable ecology and development in a forward looking positive way that gives us Christians the needed courage to live our mission with joy:

“Human beings are called by God to a human wholeness that includes the possibilities of participating in a society that is just and peaceful not only in the sense of the absence of violence but also the absence of the causes of injustice. The emergence of ecological consciousness of the last three decades has stretched the notion of salvation even further to include not only human well-being, but the well-being of all creation as well. The spiritual wholeness that the gospel brings is neither disembodied not dematerialized but reflects the love of God who expressed the divine identity in total solidarity with creation”<sup>50</sup>.

Latin American liberation theologians helped to be aware of the dehumanizing effects of social and institutionalized sinful behaviour in humankind and to work for to overcome it.

“More and more today, however, humanity is being understood not as the centre of creation but as an integral part of it. Humanity is being understood more and more in the context of *cosmic* wholeness. This, too, seems to be within the trajectory of ... theology, with its deep evolutionary and historical perspective. Mission for the sake of humanity is therefore more and more becoming involved in issues of eco-justice. Only when the cosmos is whole can humanity experience wholeness”<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> S.B. Bevans, R.P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context...*, op. cit., p. 377-378.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



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**Ecological Conversion and Eco-Spirituality.  
New Insights for Mission of the Church in Today's World**

**Abstract**

Theologians are looking at the ecological crisis from a gospel perspective. The Asian bishops are aware of the ethical implications of the ecological crisis. They claim that the task of stewardship for creation is an obligation for any human being, it places us all squarely in creation's ecology today in the face of climate change and climate justice. We should also learn more from indigenous people, regarding their understanding of the natural world. Christian communities and their leaders and theologians have to enter into dialogue with all religions and especially into dialogue with all Cosmic or Primal religions as they are part of the cultural and spiritual heritage of all indigenous peoples all over the world. There is much they can offer not only to Christians but to all members of contemporary plural and secular societies. Christians at grassroots level in their families and as members of Small Christian communities and parishes as places of communion of communities are adequate and relevant places where eco-theology and eco-spirituality is creatively received, practiced and further developed.

**Keywords:** ecological crisis, eco-spirituality, eco-theology, indigenous people, stewardship for creation.

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**Ekologiczne nawrócenie i ekoduchowość.  
Nowe spojrzenie na misję Kościoła w dzisiejszym świecie**

**Streszczenie**

Teologowie spoglądają na kryzys ekologiczny z perspektywy Ewangelii. Biskupi azjatyccy są świadomi jego moralnych konsekwencji. Twierdzą, że zadanie zarządzania na rzecz stworzenia stanowi obowiązek każdej istoty ludzkiej i sytuuje dziś ludzi w obrębie ekologii stworzenia. Ponadto zadanie to stawia człowieka w obliczu zmian klimatycznych i sprawiedliwości klimatycznej. W tym kontekście należy więcej dowiedzieć się od rdzennych mieszkańców o ich rozumieniu świata natury. Wspólnoty chrześcijańskie, ich przywódcy oraz teologowie muszą wejść w dialog ze wszystkimi religiami, zwłaszcza

kosmicznymi lub pierwotnymi, ponieważ są one częścią kulturowego i duchowego dziedzictwa rdzennych ludów świata. Ludy te mogą wiele zaoferować nie tylko chrześcijanom, ale także wszystkim członkom współczesnych pluralistycznych i zsekularyzowanych społeczeństw. Chrześcijanie na podstawowym szczeblu – w swoich rodzinach i jako członkowie małych wspólnot oraz parafii, miejsc komunii wspólnot – tworzą adekwatne i istotne miejsca, w których ekoteologia oraz ekoduchowość są twórczo przyjmowane, praktykowane oraz rozwijane.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys ekologiczny, ekoduchowość, ekoteologia, rdzenni mieszkańcy, zarządzanie stworzeniem.