The Earth Bible Sermons are readings of Bible from the perspective of Earth. The sermons are the Biblical responses if Jesus would have had to face the present ecological issues. It is a listening and responding to Bible texts from the standpoint of Earth. The creation is a symphony where we find a variety of creatures, each singing and worshipping the Maker in accordance with its unique character, different from creatures of another ‘make.’ The sermons in this book are acknowledging the intrinsic worth of each component of the creation, the purpose of each component of the creation, and the web of the creation. The Earth bible sermons which the Synod Department of Ecological Concerns presents, is bringing out its novel, innovative and unique views, ideas and aspects in the history of eco theological movement of the Church.

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad, retired as the Principal of Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara. Working as a Research Guide in Environmental Chemistry in the University of Kerala. Actively campaigning for the Green Church Movement from 1990’s onwards. CSI has been honoured by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with an international Eco award in 2009 when he was the convener of the Ecological Committee of CSI. At present he is in charge of the Department of Ecological Concerns of Church of South India (CSI).
Contents

Acknowledgements ... ix
Foreword ... xi
Preface ... xiii
Introduction ... xv

1. The Goodness of Creation
   Mathew Koshy Punnackad ... 1

2. Being a disciple with the entire creation
   Dharmaraj Rasalam ... 6

3. Christianity bears a great burden on guilt for the current ecological crisis
   David Reichardt ... 9

4. Sermon on the Scottish Hills and Mountains
   Trevor Jamison ... 15

5. The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
   Norman Hutcheson ... 20

6. Hope in the midst of tyranny
   Royce M. Victor ... 25

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Land Degradation</td>
<td>Chilkuri Vasanthaa Rao</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“You Give Them to Eat&quot;: Preaching the slogan of “Food for All”</td>
<td>Joseph Samuel</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Partnership in Redeeming God’s Creation</td>
<td>Shubha Keerthana</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Towards a Zero Waste Society</td>
<td>R. Shibu Mayam</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Water Pollution an action against the created order</td>
<td>Shajan V. Daniel</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>From the dust he made us, and to the dust we turn</td>
<td>Beena Priyadarshini</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Climate Crisis: A Call for Climate Mission to Climate Refugees</td>
<td>Anilal M. Jose</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Live a healthy and long life on the earth</td>
<td>T. Rameshbaby</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mining and its role in Global Warming, Acid Mine Drainage and soil and air pollution resulting from toxic emissions and heavy metals</td>
<td>Dileep Kumar Kandula</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sermon on fishing</td>
<td>Irwin Jesudoss</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Honour, Care and Protect: A Divine Agenda for Humanity</td>
<td>K. N. Bhushanam</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Serenity in a strident world</td>
<td>K. M. Charles Wesley</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Wildlife: ‘the little ones’</td>
<td>Iniyan Joshva</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unheard Cry of Living Water</td>
<td>S. Samuel Livingstone</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Then Water turned into Blood</td>
<td>M. Prashanth Babu</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Creation wasted by waste</td>
<td>D. C. Premraj</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Human development and ecological crisis</td>
<td>Varghese Enathickal V.</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>“The New Heaven and the New Earth”</td>
<td>D. Jeyasingh</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>Paul Francis</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Genetic engineering: Handling technology with Christian modus operandi (Concerns about genetically modified foods and genetic pollution)</td>
<td>Christopher Dharmaraj</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Water pollution</td>
<td>K. Jason</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Vincent Robert</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Waste no waste</td>
<td>Jacob Chacko</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Climate Change, Development, our “Prisoners’ Dilemma” and Oikos Theology</td>
<td>David Reichardt</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributors...

vi CONTENTS vii
Acknowledgements

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Prof. Dr. Dee George, who is working in US has helped me in editing this volume. She is the wife of Rev. George Simon Valayil, a presbyter of CSI North Kerala Diocese. On behalf of CSI Synod Department of Ecological department I extend our gratitude and thanks to Kochamma.

I don’t know many of the writers personally. I requested them to write eco sermons through phone or email. Around 50 clergy responded immediately. As we want to release the book during the synod session, we couldn’t accommodate the rest which got after the cut off date. The Department of ecological concerns expresses deep gratitude to the contributors for taking pain to write these sermons.
We will present the second volume to our esteemed readers by the end of June.

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Foreword

As the Moderator of CSI, it is indeed a privilege for me to introduce the book Earth Bible Sermon Volume 1. The CSI, through various activities and sustained campaigns, has brought the urgency of discussing ecological issues in both congregations and in the public sphere. A committee for Ecology has been functioning at the Synod level since 1992. We have been publishing Eco theological literatures to educate the congregation.

I am really happy to note that under the leadership of Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu, a group of young presbyters are working together to bring out three volumes of Earth Bible sermons during this biennium itself. I congratulate Dr. Mathew Koshy and all the presbyters involved in this project and pray for the success of this unique work. This book, Earth Bible sermons, introduces crucial areas of concern in ecology, drawing particular insights from local situations and relating it with biblical insights. I do believe that it will be a useful book for clergy in preparing sermons. I wish all success for this prestigious project of CSI Synod Department of Ecological Concerns.

The Most Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam
Moderator of Church of South India
I am really happy to note that the CSI Synod Department of Ecological Concerns is bringing out three volumes of Earth Bible Sermons. Twenty four Presbyters from eleven dioceses of CSI have contributed to the Earth Bible sermons volume 1. The Church of South India recognizes that God’s mission has various dimensions. The constitution of CSI clearly specifies the mission of the Church: 1) Proclamation of Gospel, 2) Nurturing the people of God, 3) service, 4) establish justice in society, 5) Stewardship of creation. Perhaps, this is the only Church in India that has specifically mentioned the ecological concerns in the constitution itself. In the constitution it is written as “The Church seeks to create awareness among all people about environmental and ecological concerns and thereby to care for God’s creation. It endeavors to encourage people to refrain from excessive exploitation of nature’s resources and to strive to keep the earth a habitable place for the present as well as future generations.” In comparison with other Churches, we can claim that we have Constitutional backing and we have been functioning since 1992. SECC published more than 10 books as resource books so far. CSI got the UNDP Award in 2009 for the eco conservation activities. But we have not been able to reach the grass root level so far. For CSI the ecological work is a part of faith. As Christians we have to protect the integrity of the creation. We want to teach the eco-biblical concerns at the grass root level.

Two presbyters from each Diocese of CSI will be meeting at Ootty on 21st and 22nd April to evaluate the Earth Bible Sermon Volume 1 and plan for the volume 2. A high responsibility rests on the Church to deepen
the awareness of church goers to what the Bible says about social injustice and integrity of creation. With all the issues raised by Amos regarding the need for social action, it is important for believers to remember that prayer combined with the proper exegesis of scripture will help them to gain a comprehensive knowledge of God’s will for personal, social, and ecological renewal.

CSI Synod department of Ecological Concerns would like to bring up five persons in each Diocese as Eco theological experts. Earth Bible sermon workshop is an effort on this direction. For Earth Bible sermon workshop Theologians, Environmentalists, and Environmental scientists will sit together and formulate Christian response to Ecological crisis.

The Earth bible sermons which the Synod Department of Ecological Concerns is bringing out is novel, innovative and unique.

I would like to congratulate Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnacakdu who has taken up the ecological work of CSI synod as a passion and is giving leadership in editing and publishing this book. It is worthwhile to mention that during his tenure as the Convener of Synod Ecological Committee, CSI got a prestigious award from UNDP recognising the ecological work of CSI.

Rt. Rev. Thomas K. Oommen
Deputy Moderator of CSI

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Introduction

The Bible Earth Sermons are reading of Bible from the perspective of Earth. I have been impressed and motivated by the reading Earth Bible edited by Norman C Habel. It has brought together mostly Australian scholars to reflect on the question of Biblical hermeneutics from earth perspective. It begins by acknowledging the anthropocentric orientation of the Bible and the problem it poses for interpretation from the ecological perspective.

The important contribution of the book is in its suggestion of six eco-justice principles that guide us in our interpretation of the Bible. They are,

1. **The principal of intrinsic worth**
The universe, earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.

2. **The principle of Interconnectedness**
Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.

3. **The Principle of Voice**
Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.

4. **The principle of Purpose**
The universe, Earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
5. The Principle of Mutual Custodianship

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse earth community.

6. The Principle of Resistance

Earth and its components not only differ from injustice at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

These principles give us a direction in the new reading of the Bible. Here the Earth and its interest will provide the interpretive focus. The book gives examples of several passages making use of the guidelines given by the eco-justice principles. Interpretation on one of the key text, Gen. 1.26-28 is a case in point. Normally it is interpreted as the basis for stewardship—humans as stewards ruling on behalf of God. The image of stewardship comes from the feudal background. God as an absentee landlord put humans in charge of his property. In our interpretation we tend to assume God as ruler, again a feudal legacy, humans are rulers of the earth. But the principle of custodianship changes the mode of relationship. ‘Custodianship is a mutual partnership. Earth and Earth community have, in spite of the assumed ruler ship of humanity, been the custodians of human beings. Earth has provided food, shelter, beauty and many other riches to sustain the body and the spirit of humanity. In return humans have assumed these riches as their right rather than the contribution of their partners in the Earth community.” The important challenge is to read the bible with the eyes of the subjugated earth. The meaning of the text is enriched by this perception of eco-justice. Certainly, this requires a new commitment to the earth and her future. From that commitment we should be prepared to look critically at the text and the biblical interpretation that is accepted as ‘normative’. What we consider normative is often a culture bound reading. For this reason the earth bible project asks us to make certain commitments before we begin to interpret the text. These commitments are expressed thus:

• to acknowledge, before reading the biblical text, that as Western interpreters we are heirs to a long anthropocentric, patriarchal and androcentric approach to reading the text that has devalued Earth and that continues to influence the way we read the text,
The Goodness of Creation

Mathew Koshy Punnackad

GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIS CREATION

The Bible is the story of God’s relationship with His creation, and it begins with an inspiring account of the beginning of that relationship. The story shows God’s delight and pleasure in crafting and forming interesting and diverse spaces, sights, sounds, tastes, and textures. Each day builds up on the day before, creating an interconnected web, and every moment of creation brings something new and beautiful. On the sixth day God created many kinds of animals. God also made a very specific and special being in the image and likeness of God Himself—humankind. And at every moment, God sees that the creation is good. That is the unmistakable message of the opening chapter of the Bible. Six times God declares what he has just done to be ‘good’, and the seventh time ‘very good’. The next thing God did was to bless the humankind and all the plants and the animals that had just been created throughout the earth. It was an invitation into the relationship with God, into the fellowship with all creations on the earth. We live in community with the entirety of God’s creation, and we have a responsibility to give fellowship for God’s creations. This knowledge helps us to instill a rich and abiding love for creation—a love that guides our daily actions and brings us closer to our Creator. The Bible affirms that all creation already praises/worships...
In the face of a deluge, God commanded Noah: “You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come, to you to be kept alive”. But deluges need not be only of the watery kind: they can also be floods of people sprawling over the land and displacing God’s creatures. “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen 1:23). To those who would expand across the land at the expense of all other creatures, the prophet warns: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isa 5:8). The story of Noah has much to say about biodiversity. In Genesis chapter 9, the phrases ‘every animal’ or ‘every living creature’ is mentioned six times as well as ‘every bird’ twice. This is a bio-diverse chapter, but the most important point is that God’s covenant was not just with Noah and his descendants, but with the animals. It is quite obvious that it is not God’s will that the animals perish or become extinct. All species were saved in the ark and to be protected through the covenant. God has provided an eco system suitable for its intrinsic value. For Poisonous animals God allotted shola forests. Man entered the ecosystem of poisonous animals, hence they are now coming to the plains. We failed to understand the intrinsic value of each component and the ecosystem surrounding it. Economists value only those things which has a monetary value. From the point of view of Economics the value anything in the universe is determined by demand of the Market. This is against the biblical perspective.

The creation of Mangroves and Frogs are the two best examples to illustrate the principle of purpose. The Mangroves were considered as a ‘useless’ vegetation. The conversion of mangrove habitat into tourist resorts, contributed significantly to the catastrophic loss of human lives and settlements during the 2004 tsunami. Mangrove is a group of tropical and specialized trees growing in the saline and brackish water system. These are the most suitable area for feeding, breeding and nursery grounds of these marine organisms and hence important for aquaculture purposes. Mangrove trees offer significant and unique habitat to birds, mammals, and fish populations through a complex marine food chain, creation of breeding habitat, and establishment of restrictive areas that offer protection for maturing offspring. In the past two decades, the entire coastline along the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, and Strait of Malacca in the Indian Ocean and all along the South Pacific Ocean has been a witness to massive investments in tourism and hotels. But Myanmar and Maldives suffered very less from the killing spree of the tsunami because the tourism industry had so far not spread its tentacles to the virgin mangroves and coral reefs surrounding the coastline. If only the mangroves were intact, the damage from tsunami would have been greatly minimized. It happened earlier in God. Indeed, John’s vision of the whole universe, centered around the throne of God, reaches its climactic crescendo of praise when he says, ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them’ bringing worship ‘to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb’ (Rev. 5:13). Now, we may not be able to grasp or explain how creation praises God. Worshipping God in a fellowship with the creation enhances the goodness of the creation. The three principles that keep the goodness of the creation are:

1. The Principle of Intrinsic Value: The repeated affirmation, ‘God saw that it was good’, is the seal of God’s approval on the whole universe in all its functioning. God created the universe and all its components with an intrinsic worth/value. The whole earth as a complex ecological system and all the components of those systems- from rocks to rainbows-have worth, because they are the part of these systems. Earth is a living creature with an intrinsic value. The formation of Adam from “the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) highlights the connection between human beings and the earth. Adam, the word for “human being,” is a play on adamah, the word for “ground” or “earth.” Everything created by God has an intrinsic value and nothing in the universe is neither a waste nor useless.
variety of habitats, people, plants, and animals are all interconnected in a fragile web of life that we call “biodiversity.” And every member is essential in keeping this web in balance. About 1.4 million species have been identified, and researchers estimate that millions more have yet to be recorded. Thousands of species may be vanishing each year as a result of pollution, over-harvesting, habitat degradation, and other human actions.

God created the web of life which is interdependent. The loss of one species will break a link in the web which will weaken the harmony of the whole web.

Conclusion
The creation is a symphony where we find a variety of creatures each singing and worshipping the Maker in accordance with its unique character, different from creatures of another ‘make’. The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs. For a rich state of affairs, we have to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of each component of the creation, the purpose of each component of the creation, and the web of the creation. Shalom, in other words, is the fellowship of the creation to keep the goodness of the creation.

Consider another section of Scripture in which God inspired a psalm revealing more about the Goodness of His creation. “O Lord,” the psalmist writes, “how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions... You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalm:104:24, 30)

Bangladesh. In 1960, a tsunami wave hit the coast in an area where mangroves were intact. There was not a single human loss.

Frogs are an important indicator of ecosystems. They are also friends of farmers. Frogs feed on many insects and pests that frequently destroy the crops. Also, they are consumed by fish, some large insects, snakes, lizards, larger frogs, birds and small mammals. In the food chain, frogs play a big role in maintaining a healthy environment. Many of the human activities are unhealthy to frogs and their habitats. We drain the wetlands to claim land for cultivation, housing and tourist resorts thereby causing habitat destruction. The extinction of frogs, results in the multiplication of mosquitoes and other insects which will spread fatal diseases. If we could understand the purpose of the creation of Mangroves and Frogs and the role they have been playing in nature, we won’t destroy mangroves or kill frogs. Everything created by God has a purpose and nothing in the universe is neither waste nor useless.

3. The Principle of Interconnectedness: All components in the Earth are mutually interconnected or dependent on each other for life and survival. Man is not alone; we share this earth with 80 million other species. The relationship between these species is connected in a complex web of interaction. People who profess faith in God should discover and acknowledge the contributions that species and abiotia make to their shared ecosystems. Actions that inhibit their contributions will be identified and prevented. In the web of life, every animal and every plant relies on other plants and animals to survive. All animals and plants, in a sense, work together to survive. Bees visit the flowers of plants and take nectar and use it to make honey. While the bee is collecting nectar, it usually gets a powder on it called pollen. Bees fly from one flower to the next, carrying this pollen. Some of the pollen falls off into the flowers, and the plants use that to reproduce! The plant is helping the bees, and the bees are helping the plants.

The energy in living things originates from the sun. Green plants are the only living organisms that can use the energy from the sun to make food. This food can be used by the plants or by animals that eat the plants. If people/animals eat the plants, they get energy from the sugar in the plants. But people cannot hold out their hands to the sun and make food in the same way that the plants make food in their leaves. An amazing
We all know that, today, the climate change is leading the world into unprecedented changes in the natural environment as well as in human living conditions. It is actually affecting the way we live, with its dramatic consequences on our health, energy sources and food production systems. All the more, these adverse situations disproportionately impact the poor people who are already living under precarious conditions. Climate change, with its many facets, further worsens existing inequalities faced by these vulnerable groups. It also threatens to undermine the realization of fundamental rights for many people today, especially, in our part of the world. Therefore, it is an important issue for us today, and if unaddressed properly, it will have grave consequences on our generations tomorrow.

This seminar on ecological justice is a reminder that we are called as a responsible disciple of Christ to be in relation with the entire creation. I do hope that this conference will broaden your perspectives and enlarge your vision to connect more seriously with the entire creation.

As a responsible disciple of Christ we need to actively seek to discern God's will and act as a coworker with him. Today, this must include a reassessment of what Genesis means when it tells humankind to subdue the earth and have dominion over all living things on it. Can we be a co-worker with our Creator if we pollute air, increase electronic waste, discard our forests, and pollute our rivers and lakes? No. A serious spirituality begins only when we turn to a caring stewardship. In the distant past, human technological capacity and the tools available allowed us to make the earth more fruitful and many men and women found God while working in everyday life: plowing, weaving, baking, and working wood. But during the past century, the Humankind found ways of manipulating the very forces that shape nature. The earthly changes such as depletion of ozone, deforestation, contamination from toxic and nuclear wastes, global warming indicates that we are acting, not as stewards of a renewable earth. The Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist exploitation and abuse in the struggle for justice. Thus we see floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis and Cyclones.

For centuries, Christians viewed God's action in the world in terms of sin and redemption. First we sinned and then God redeemed us. But we need to understand the creation as a part of God's plan for our salvation.
The universe and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. God is the Creator of all things, but we need to identify that God’s activity of creation is not just in the past. To realize that God is keeping me alive at this moment, is a transforming spiritual insight. This insight will help us to be a co worker with God for the fulfillment of creation.

For too long, in our narrow self-absorption, we have thought of sin only in relation with our private lives. We consider Sin was between the individual and God. But when we realize that we are part of God’s network of creation, then we consider sin, not just in terms of individuality, rather the sin relates whatever creates imbalance in the totality of the creation. The Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other. All the creation works as God teaches it to work. We have no right even to change it for how it suits us. These days the humankind is relentlessly destructive. We have depleted the fisheries from which we eat, poisoned the rivers from which we drink, cut down trees and fouled even the air we breathe. Thus we are continuously sinning against God. Overcoming the sin means ending all these destructions. As children of God, we have to seek his help to discover a different way to live.

Now let us listen to the sounds of the creation, and remember all this is possible because of God. And ask ourselves how we can continue to care for God’s creation. At the end of time, God in Christ will make all things new. Jesus Christ will come to the earth again in power and glory, and unite all things in his divine Self. And we shall rise again. At that time every lily of the field will be a splendid song of praise to God, our Creator and Lord. Amen

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Christianity bears a great burden on guilt for the current ecological crisis

David Reichardt

John 3:16

In 1965 my family moved from Macknade, a rural village in the state of Queensland, where my father was an engineer in the southern hemisphere’s second largest sugar mill, to Sydney, Australia’s largest city.

My mother offered me a choice to help me settle into my new surroundings. Would I like to join the Church’s boys’ club or the Boy Cubs? I made one of my life’s most important decisions when I chose the Cubs. I met boys in Cubs and Scouts who have remained my friends until now. And I learned to love nature. I love outdoors activities! Camping and trekking with 1,000 school students in Kashmir last year was the most fun I’ve had for a long time! Living in the Himalayas now reminds me every day that we humans were created for what Norwegians call “open air life”.

Many years later I conducted a study that investigated how rural Australians from my Uniting Church tradition connected their Christian faith with the land in which they lived. One woman described the
“When [my husband] comes [home] to the river [from the city] he becomes more peaceful, more contented, more himself….Being around the river is part of a healthy Tim.”

Of herself she said:

“That’s where I come in from my faith perspective…Part of a healthy me… I’m a teacher… is teaching children to appreciate and be part of their wider environment because I do believe that children can’t be healthy until they are in touch with their environment which means to my mind putting them in touch with their Creator – their Father Creator.”

And yet there are in our Christian traditions long histories of both treating nature as some lesser thing, and of using nature for the resources she provides. Nearly 50 years ago Lynn White, an American professor of European medieval history, had a now famous article entitled “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” published in the prestigious journal Science. Professor White angered conservative western Christians by criticizing his own tradition. He argued that our deadly misuse of power extends to the way we Christians abuse nature itself.

“Especially in its Western form”, he wrote, “Christianity is the most anthropocentric (human-centered) religion the world has seen…we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim…”

Infuriatingly, he argued that if, as many western Christians like to believe, both modern science and modern technology have emerged largely from a western Christian worldview,

“Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for the current ecological crisis.

As a westerner, son of a sugar mill engineer, I feel both proud and dismayed. My father’s mill produced sugar for overseas export, and employment and wealth for many people. But good land was stripped of vegetation to grow sugar cane, and soot from the mill’s chimney stack blew onto the clothes my mother had washed as soon as she hung them out to dry. Worst of all, though we didn’t know it then, the fossil fuels burnt to run the mill’s engines released greenhouse gases which contributed to global warming. The western form of Christianity has produced western science and technology, which in turn has enabled humankind to dominate nature. While that has improved living standards for many, it is one of the main causes for the current ecological crisis that threatens life on our planet.

So what to do? What would Jesus do in response to this alarming situation?

Professor White argued wisely that depending upon science and technology to get us out of the mess they have got us into will not work. We have to go to religion:

“What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.”

I am sure Jesus would agree with “rethinking” just how we follow Him in a way that honours and cherishes His creation. The enthusiasm with which people of other religions, largely living in the developing world, have adopted western science, technology and lifestyles, and fouled their own nests, makes it unlikely that everybody following some other religion will solve the environmental crisis.

No, because the problem has originated with the western form of Christianity, the answer will have to come from within the western form of Christianity. Western Christians, with help from sisters and brothers in Christ from other traditions and parts of the world, need to re-examine our traditions and our understandings of the Bible in the light of the world-wide ecological crisis. That is how theology has always been done. Faced with a crisis the Church has always prayerfully re-examined its traditions, theology and ways of doing things, and re-read the Scriptures, seeking answers.

Professor White’s suggestion was to take a leaf from the book of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology. Francis, an Italian priest who lived in the 13th century, was famous for loving Nature and expressing his feeling kinship for it. He didn’t think of Nature as a thing to be exploited. Instead, in his famous hymn, “The Canticle of the Sun” Francis wrote,
“Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures, especially through my Lord brother Sun
...through Sister Moon and the stars...
...through Brothers Wind and Air...”

There are also a number of other eco-friendly strands within various Christian traditions. Recently there has been a revival of interest in Celtic Christianity, several of the medieval mystics, and traditions within Orthodox Christianity, all of which include care for creation in what it means to be a follower of Christ. And of course, within Catholic systematic theology, the Doctrine of Creation enjoys a position of respect.

But Protestants are used to focusing upon the Doctrine of Salvation. I was taught that the whole point of Christianity is that Christ died on the cross to save us humans from hell - the consequence of our sin. The verse that I was told summarizes the whole Bible - John 3.16 - is imprinted on my memory:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

But wait a minute! What is it that God “so loved”? The World! The Cosmos! The planet we humans inhabit is not just the backdrop against which the drama of human sin and salvation is played out. It too has been caught up in the cosmic rebellion against God. It was because God so loves the Cosmos that He sent His Son for our salvation. We humans have a very particular place of leadership in the Cosmos, but we are a part of it! Psalm 8 teaches us that.

That’s what Paul is talking about in Romans 8.18-25. Here is a taste, from verses 19 - 21:

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility...in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Reading the Bible eco-theologically in this way transforms our understanding of God’s salvation plan. It is not to save our souls from our bodies and this sinful world to some heaven far away. That is Platonic philosophy, not Christian theology. It is to re-establish God’s rule and all the good that flows from it on God’s earth. It is to reunite heaven, God’s realm, with earth, which has rebelled against God, but which by the death and resurrection of Jesus is being restored.

From this renewed perspective we can read the entire Bible in new, ecologically-influenced ways. Here are two of them.

Professor Norman Habel’s Earth Bible Project teaches us to read the Bible from the perspective of the earth. I encourage you to read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37) like that. Have you ever thought of what this parable would have looked like from the perspective of, say, the Samaritan’s animal which carried the wounded man to the inn? Was not this animal just as much a neighbour as its master? And could we not say that the landscape in which Jesus placed this story is being beaten up like that unfortunate Jewish man was? Who, in that case, are the robbers? Why it is us of course, the humans of this world!

Secondly, the theme of “The River of the Water of Life” runs right through the Bible: from its beginning, in Genesis 2, where the river flows from the Garden and divides into four “heads”, to its end in Revelation 22, where the River flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb, through the street of the New Jerusalem, flanked by the Trees of Life. It is an Eco theological reading of the Bible that tells the story of God’s salvation plan through the metaphor of water and rivers. The story reaches its climax at John 7.37-39, where Jesus interrupts the great festival of Sukkoth, which celebrated Moses striking the rock at Horeb from which life-giving water gushed. “If anyone thirsts, let him drink from me!” shouted Jesus.

And from the Bible we find a number of metaphors for who we humans are in relation to Creator and creation. We are God’s gardeners, suggests the second creation story in Genesis 2. We are stewards of God’s house, says the most common image, informed by Jesus’ several parables about stewards and masters, and made popular by the Canadian theologian John Douglas Hall.

But that is a discussion for another occasion! My concern in this sermon has been to address the objection to western Christianity raised by Professor Lynn White nearly 50 years ago - that it is contributing to the destruction of God’s good creation. If there is a silver lining on the
In Scotland today there are many, even within the churches, who remain skeptical about the reality of climate change or who do not see it as a priority for Christians. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, an alliance of non-governmental groups, including church groups, launched a campaign, commencing in February 2015, called ‘For the Love of …’: Participants are invited to fill in a postcard, completing the phrase, ‘for the love of with’ the name of something or someone important to them that will be effected by climate change. The cards are then forwarded to the Scottish Government’s First Minister, urging that she ensure “we deliver on Scotland’s climate commitments and make sure Scotland plays a proactive role in striving for an ambitious global deal in Paris” in December 2015. The Chaplain for Eco Congregation Scotland, an ecumenical movement helping local groups of Christians link environmental issues to their faith, preaches a sermon for the launch of the campaign, based on the Gospel account of the Transfiguration of Christ and experiencing the hills and mountains that are a prominent part of the Scottish landscape, as resources to encourage a renewed commitment to caring for God’s creation in Scotland.

Mark 9:2-9

‘And there appeared … Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.’ (Mark 9: 4)

Saint Mark does not tell us, so we are left to speculate. What was the content of the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah? What were they talking about on top of a mountain two thousand years ago?
ago? We can never know for sure the answer to that question but, alternatively, we might wonder what they would talk about if they were up there today. Suppose, for example, that they were asked to discuss the ‘For the Love of …’ campaign, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland’s call for climate action for the sake of all the things that matter most to people. What answer might they give?

I wonder if they would say, ‘For the love of … hills and mountains.’ That might seem like too great a leap of imagination for you, but all three have significant, positive connections with hills and mountains. Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal in a very bloody encounter on the top of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Moses, in his time, leading the Israelites on a long journey through a wilderness, ascended Mount Sinai, encountered God in a cloud (similar to today’s reading), famously, returning to the bottom of that hill, carrying the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-20).

As for Jesus, sometimes the hills provided him with a refuge to which he could withdraw for prayer and reflection. On another occasion, in Matthew’s Gospel, a hill is the venue for preaching the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and that Gospel concludes with the Great Commission; Jesus sending out his disciples into the world, delivering this command from a mountain top (Matthew 28). Then, of course, there is this moment of Jesus’ transfiguration ‘up a high mountain’ (Mark 9:2). So, to me at least, it doesn’t seem impossible that, if asked today, Elijah, Moses and Jesus would all declare a love for hills and mountains.

They wouldn’t be alone in that. I’m confident that I’m not the only one here today who likes hills and mountains. As a child, growing up in urban Belfast, the skyline on view from my bedroom window featured the hills within which that city nestles. Today I preach this sermon to you in Edinburgh; a city often symbolized by its castle, prominent on a hill top. This is a city of several hills, such as Calton Hill, the Braid Hills, and Corstorphine Hill. And this city is located in a nation whose beauty is enhanced by its many hills and mountains; Pentlands and Cairngorms, Grampians and Munros.

For humankind, hills and mountains have always been places of awe; places where one feels one is closer to the God, to the divine, to the ultimate in life. Our scientific understanding has moved on from the time when we thought that there was only the earth below where we lived and firmament above, where the gods dwelt. Today we know that the earth is not the center of the universe but goes round the sun, not vice versa, and that this solar system is not unique but is located in a galaxy which is but one amongst myriads in God’s universe. The idea of a literal, simple ‘down here’ and ‘up there’ to reality is now problematic, yet experience of ascending to the heights still speaks to something deep in the depths within each one of us; that speaks into our very soul.

The international development organization, Christian Aid is seventy years old this year. One member of staff has been inspired to celebrate this anniversary by arranging for supporters of the charity to climb to the top of seventy of Scotland’s Munro hills during 2015. This celebration is now underway, with the first couple of hills already climbed. Being a Christian event, the physical climb is accompanied by spiritual resources, for prayer and reflection on the journey. These encourage participants to think about God and the wider world. But also, being a Christian Aid event, there is no chance that this is going to be permitted to become simply an exercise in spiritual escapism, for spiritual experience is inextricably tied up with the material landscape of God’s creation.

The intentional combination of the spiritual and the material is the way things should be when we attempt to reflect upon and respond to God’s work in creation, as Jesus’ experience on this particular mountain top demonstrates this to us. Up on that hill, in the company two other well-known mountain men, with a trio of dazzled disciples looking on, Jesus experiences something awesome, something that might be labeled as a supernatural or ‘spiritual experience’: ‘he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.’ (9:2-3)

Jesus’ experience is profound, opening up to us a glimpse of greater reality about himself, about God and about the world, but no form of spiritual ‘escape’ is on offer. When this episode comes to its conclusion, Jesus descends the hill and returns to everyday life; confronted by human need, by suffering and by the demand for practical responses.

We are not provided with the content of Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah but the Gospel does offer us a few words from God: ‘and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him!”’ (9: 7) God’s voice, coming from the cloud, symbolically
however, today we respond by committing ourselves to a loving mindset with regard to this world, including its hills and mountains.

Let us base our attitudes and actions on loving the things that we believe God loves. In concluding leap of imagination, think how God might complete that phrase, ‘For the love of …’. The voice from the cloud declares, ‘I do this for the love of the world; for the love of the world, including its hills and mountains’. So, I ask you, I invite you, I urge you, for the love of others, for the love of Jesus, for the love of God, let us love God’s world (not forgetting to include within that, love the mountains and the hills of Scotland).

carries all the authority of the creator of the heavens above, the earth beneath, and all its creatures. Jesus, located now on this mountain top, a part of God’s beloved world, is identified as God’s Beloved one: a Beloved Son sent to God’s beloved creation.

Love for the world is what motivates the sending of Jesus into this world in the first place. Such divine love for this world demands human response, but what form should that take? Peter’s struggle to respond appropriately, suggesting a minor building project to mark to a mountain top vision of divine love (9: 5-6), shows that this is not always straightforward.

Today, however, we get our opportunity to respond. Our response depends on a spiritual recognition of how generous God the Creator is in putting us in a world containing the resources to sustain us spiritually and materially on our journey through life. The hills and the mountains speak to us of this truth. The hill tops grant us a new perspective on the awesome vastness of the earth’s beauty, giving us a sense of the earth’s mystery, located within a wider universe - creation. Our hills and mountains offer us something of that mountain top experience, described by Mark, giving us a glimpse of the significance of Jesus.

Equally importantly, we also realize that at the same time hills and the mountains play an essential role in sustaining simple, joyful material existence within God’s world. These Scottish hills and mountain sustain us through rich biodiversity; home to thousands of species of animals and plants. The Scottish Highlands are the location of significant, substantial peat lands, sucking in and retaining vast quantities of CO2, at time when the world’s atmosphere has more of that than it needs. And in the interactive relationship between us and our environment the mountain seven provide us with sustainable hydro-electric power and power from the winds which sweep across our hillsides.

Open your eyes then, to the scope, the scale, and the significance of the good gifts God that gives us, though hills, through mountains. Listen! Hear how they, in company with the in rest creation, speak of divine generosity. Then we know a faithful response is what’s required. Details of individual, practical responses to the needs of this time of environmental threat and uncertainty are the subject for another sermon. For now,
The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it

Norman Hutcheson

Psalm 24

Creation is the world in which we live and move and have our existence.

From Creation we take our energy in food form from vegetables and animals that enable us to work.

From Creation we are hydrated from water that falls upon the earth.

From Creation we receive materials to build our homes, heat them, cool them, furnish them.

From the biodiversity of creation we receive plants that grant us health, correcting illnesses in the body.

From Creation we receive the air that we breathe.

From Creation we receive the raw materials from which economic prosperity is built.

The Psalmist reminds us that the earth is the Lord’s as is the inhabited world. A situation that has been too easy to take for granted, and has meant that the planet has endured massive climate change derived from human activity.

For example, in an influential article published in the journal *Science* in 1967, Lynn White, citing the command to subdue and have dominion, laid the blame for many environmental ills on the Judaic-Christian heritage. Whilst there are elements of truth within his thesis, the article has been criticised because it does not adequately account for environmental destruction in times and places not touched by the Judaic/Christian tradition and, in part, because of a flawed interpretation of the text.

But the Churches, particularly of the Calvinist tradition have been slow to recognise the demands of Creation, often preferring with other groups to look to the eschatological hour as being the moment when the sins and errors of planet earth would be redeemed, and the new earth would be perfect again without human involvement. The moment when Jesus returned to the earth, “all things would be made new.” (Revelation 21.5)

The last decades of the twentieth century has created a new challenge to the churches. Starting with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, where the future of a world without birds’ song due to the overuse of pesticides was predicted, the churches have slowly risen to the challenge of a new lifestyle based on a theological premise of the Earth. There is now a recognition that the whole earth is in travail (Romans 8.22) and we are midwives to call forth the new creation. We have to come to realise that the earth is in pain, carrying the wounds of past generations within it. The rising seas, the melting of ice and the rise in greenhouse gases, all point to mankind’s abuse of the planet. Historic activities can be ignored, but they cannot be forgotten.

Modern archaeology often uses aerial photography to identify what may lie below the earth. The planet has a long memory, and forts and walls built in two millennia, and long since ploughed over, will be revealed from the air, making possible accurate excavations of archaeological sites.
The fact that the earth does not forget her wounds is the challenge for Christians of the twenty first century. It is our task to heal the injuries of the past, and build a strong foundation for the future.

I have taken two passages as our theme. The first is the Enthronement Psalm of David, Psalm 24. Probably written to welcome the King in his ascendancy as the ruler of the nation.

There are two distinct words used in the Psalm for the world.

The Apostolic Polyglot Bible uses two different words in verse 1 of Psalm 24.

The first one γῆ, (gy) is associated with the firmness of the created earth. It is a land, water and sea word. Often associated with the Mother Goddess Gaia, the one who gave birth to the Earth and the Universe in the Greek narrative.

The second οἰκομοιμηνή, (oikoumeny) derived from the word for house or dwelling. The connotations are intimate, domestic, and relational. Everyone who lives in it is part of the οἰκομοιμηνή, while living on the γῆ.

When Jesus came according to St. John, He dwelt among us. The verb used dwelling is ἐσκήνωσαν, (eskynosen). Literally He pitched his tent among us. The image of the οἶκος, (oikos) the household, a place of closeness and intimacy is emphasized by the proximity of Jesus to the rest of us. He did not live in a remote place, surrounded by the desert and indifferent to the world. He was there in the middle of the campsite, sharing the ablution block, the communal food area, and the rest areas.

Our Saviour in His arrival and sharing our lives did so without the remoteness of the entry of the King as depicted in Psalm 24. He was close to the earth, close to the world of ordinary people, close to the world of the household and the domestic rounds with all its concerns.

The environment has become a significant issue for young people. The church has the opportunity to engage in missiological terms with a generation in the West at least, that has drifted away from traditional religion and churches. The Church of Scotland Journal, Life and Work (Feb 2015) reported on the rise of a new phenomenon – New Atheism. Moffat reports that students from Church backgrounds lose faith at university, not least because of the impact of this new wave of thought.

There is a growing connection between humanistic New Atheism and radical environmentalism. New Atheists like Daniel Dennett see belief in Darwinian evolution as the key to man’s “salvation.” The embrace of radical environmental positions is a logical consequence of the embrace of Darwinism. The print, broadcast, and electronic media are filled with prophetic, apocalyptic warnings of an impending uninhabitable earth that will be caused by “evolving man” himself, through his pollution of the environment, his overuse/abuse of technology, his inability to control population, his over-consumption of (allegedly) increasingly scarce resources, and dozens of other environmental “sins.”

While New Atheism makes much of Enlightenment rationality and the use of scientific enquiry, the Church has tended to focus on issues of Justice, water safety, food supply and related matters. By contrast to New Atheism, the voice of the Church is mute. This may be in part because Church people still are uncertain of the impact of challenging climate change.

In rediscovering the Genesis account of Creation, I note that each day was marked as evening and morning, not morning and evening as would be normal to describe a day. The day starts when the work of Creation has ended, and it will be given to mankind to use the hours of day light to maintain what God has made. Mankind was ultimately given “dominion” over Creation, which word has come to be debated endlessly. In Hebrew the word radah is used in connection with relationships. Kings of Judah and Israel had radah, but they were called to exercise that power with due regard to the well-being, not only of the subjects but also of the land. Levitican law was clear on the right even of the land, to say nothing of people to have rest and Jubilee. Creation story continues in the J tradition by having Adam till and care for the soil. Nothing even in the pre fall days was given as a right, only the privilege to create food as a result of careful use of the earth’s resources.

It has to be realized that such a care for the Earth does not come free. Obligations in the sphere of Justice and food security now have dominion. Instead of the man having dominion over the Earth, the call of the Earth
becomes dominant, demanding a response that acknowledges that Jesus pitched His tent among us, sharing our common life, and that we must now share the Earth with those whose tents are planted around us.

Being Christ like is inhabiting the land, while recognizing that we are sharing that with the whole household of the inhabited world.

We close in the prayer of Archbishop Tutu,
Earth and Air and Water are your Creation, and the web of life is yours.
Have mercy upon us in the face of climate chaos.
Help us to be Keepers of the Earth
To simplify our lives,
To reduce our use of energy,
To share the resources You have given us,
To raise our voices for Justice
And to bear the cost of change.

Hope in the midst of tyranny
Royce M. Victor

Psalm 126

Psalm 126 is the seventh of the Song of Ascents, which starts with Ps 120. It is likely that this collection of songs was originally used by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem or as part of a festal celebration in Jerusalem. The frequent use of names, “Zion” and “Jerusalem” in these Psalms, points towards its possible connection to the pilgrimage to the city. The relatively short nature of these psalms is probably meant to help the pilgrims to memorize them. It is also noted that these Psalms often deal with matters of daily life – challenges and concerns of life, routine activities, context of life etc.

The major debate of the Psalm is about its context. Some translate all the verbs in the psalm in future tense, thus making the psalm a prayer for help. Some others translate all verbs in past tense, thus making the psalm consistently a song of thanksgiving. However, one can easily discern a tension between vv 1-3 and 4-6 that exists in the Psalm. Both vv. 1 and 4 contain the expression סֻּבּוּת, סָבָעָת, originally meant “fate” or “fortune” can more appropriately be translated here as “captive.” Then Ps 126:1 would refer to the return of captives from Babylonian exile. Such an
interpretation, however, is quite impossible in v. 4, where the imperative šûbî hints at the language of prayer. The psalmist asks God to turn the fate of himself and his people. Thus, vv 4-6 may be understood as a prayer of hope.

Psalm 126 continues the perspective of the preceding psalms – the people have experienced God’s deliverance in the past, which most possibly refers to a post-exilic context of the Psalm. The reference to the joy of the nations on a turn in history (v. 2) also suggests the same time frame to the Psalm. Such motives are hard to suggest a pre-exilic context, since then Israel and the nations were much more in a position of antagonism. The divine act in the past functions as a plea for a divine act in the future. The reference to the past is the ground of hope to entice the Lord to turn again the fate of his people. The agricultural metaphor depicted in vv. 5-6 explains the agrarian context of the psalmist. The psalmist addresses the returnees from the exile, who are trying to rebuild their life in their ancestral land, which is still under the strategic control of foreign powers. The land of Judea, which was under the power of the Babylonians during the exilic period, is now controlled by the Persian Empire. Bearing all these factors in mind, let us closely look at Psalm 126 and see how the people mentioned in these verses challenge our lives today.

1. Active in the Midst of Challenges
The post-exilic period was a time of reconstruction of the Jewish community from its lowest situation. During the beginning of the 6th century BCE, the community had lost all they had from God – land, monarchy, religion, freedom... The people and land had to face utter destruction from the hands of the Babylonians. Jer. 39-43; 52; 2 Kings 24-25; and 2 Chr. 36 give us clear picture of the massive devastation took place in Judea by the hands of the invading army. A large number of Jewish population (specifically, the creamy layer of the community) were deported to Babylon, and the land was literally burned into ashes. The remaining populace were mostly agricultural labourers and they had to face forced labour (see 2 Kings 24: 14-16). Land tributary system of production was introduced; thus the people and land were systematically abused by the invaders. The new system of production demanded over use (or abuse) of land in order to pay the heavy taxes imposed on the people. The massive destruction of the land, including its flora and fauna, and over use of land resulted climatic fluctuations and related agonies in the land. The people of the land and vegetation were at the verge of extinction.

Neh. 8: 13-18 (also see Neh. 5: 1-5) gives an image of post-exilic situation of the people and flora and fauna. It talks about the renewal of festival of Booths among the community. For bringing the needed “trees and branches” for the celebration, the people had to go to the “hills.” These verses confirm the utter devastation of vegetation taken place during the Babylonian conquest of the land and later period. Dearth of rainfall and drought became common phenomena of this era. Ps 126:5 demonstrates a similar image: “Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting.” In an undisturbed agricultural cycle, reaping is the expected outcome of sowing. Due to fluctuations in the climate, arable farming became vulnerable and hence the source of great challenges. Despite the sowing in tears, which hints at the absence of any expectation and could have been caused by drought as a result of which the dust made the eyes tear, the reaping caused joy.

The psalm displays the true picture of the agrarian context of the post-exilic period. The climate and the socio-political situations were against the inhabitants. They were facing all these troubles to which they had contributed literally nothing. However, even in that difficult situation, the people did not sit idle or lose their hope in the future. They toiled hard in the face of severe conditions for a better future. They did not accuse anybody for their present situation nor did they show their fist against anyone. They did not give up their hope in their God who has control over their present and future.

The Psalm reveals the pathetic situation of farmers of all ages. In today’s context too, they face similar situations. The climate and socio-political changes affect them mostly than anyone else. As we know, the people who are already suffering most from climate change, are those who have done the least to cause it, and have the least resource to do anything about it. The Psalm shows the enduring resistance of the agricultural workers and small scale farmers to the hegemony of oppressive alien powers, who made their life situation worse. They are not only fighting
for their very existence but also work hard for a better future under God’s supremacy in the midst of all these challenges.

2. Active for Goodness of Life
The psalm 126 depicts the true nature of people of God. God’s people cannot sit idle in any situation but are called to work hard for a better life under God’s guidance and rule. This active participation in the social life is not to bring another disaster to the society but meant to bring positive changes in life and society. The Psalmist gives thanks for bringing the captives back to their ancestral land (vv. 1-3), and then affirm his community’s hope in God who is going to turn the present life situation to a more livable one (vv. 4-6). The harvest imagery depicted in these verses reveals that the people expect great blessings from God for their hard labour in the fields. Their effort is to make the life of land and people back to its normalcy. It is an ardent effort not to destruct anything or anyone but to protect and conserve the life of people, land and its flora and fauna. In other words, their hard labour and prayers are meant to preserve their land and its flora and fauna along with the life of people which are closely connected to each other. They understand that when land does not yield properly, the life of the people will be in trouble. The destruction of land and its vegetation will eventually destroy the life of every creation that is connected to it.

The prayer of the psalmist reminds us that the people of God live in the hope of God’s deliverance from all agonies and bondages they experience in their present situation. The hope is always based on the past experience of faithfulness of God and the deliverance. Moreover, the psalm 126 informs that the people of God always live by both memory and hope.

Conclusion
The psalmist primarily addresses the struggling returnees as well as the inhabitants of Judea in order to encourage them in their process of rebuilding the community and life of land after its terrible destruction. However, the message of the psalm is meant for all generations of human beings. The people of God are reminded that their life is heavily depended upon the life of the flora and fauna around them. Lives of all creations are connected to each other. Life of every creation is essential for the survival of human beings in this world. One should remember that the human being is not necessary for the survival of other creations but lives of other creations are an absolute necessity for the endurance of human life. As Pope Francis reminds us, “If we destroy creation, it will destroy us.”
The housing of the miners built in the early stages of the establishment of coal mines is called “GolBanglas” (the domed houses). These GolBanglas are still inhabited by the mine workers, and the domes of the houses prevented the wild animals like leopards sleeping on the roof tops. Today there are no leopards since the forest has been cut down. The mining company on the one hand and the miners on the other hand have caused deforestation. In the Indian subcontinent, satellite data confirm that India is losing 1.3 million hectares of forest a year, nearly, eight times the annual rate put out by forest department. God, who heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, also listens to the cries of the dying trees and drying forests, a situation leading to deforestation caused by the human greed.

“Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled!” (Zechariah 11:2). The consequence of the deforestation is denudation; causing the rich fertile top soil washing away causing desertification. This erosion continues and the earth bears the brunt of human misbehavior. The industrial wastes and toxic effluents also leak and sink into the earth making it contaminated resulting in losing its natural abilities. The sinking poisonous chemicals seep so deep into the earth that they even contaminate the waters that the earth holds and utilizes to sustain life of the earth and life upon the earth. The Pokran incident is still fresh in our minds. The testing of atomic bomb makes the earth much more prone to long lasting radiation causing soil pollution and maiming and mutilating all life in its environments. The beauty of the earth is marred by pulling down the mountains and exporting the granite. This defacing of the earth for profits is to the maximum extent of human exploitation of the earth and its body. Will we not have any mountains in future in our areas? May be not, if this granite business continues and thrives!

While the human beings are mistreating the earth, God accuses us saying, “… Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness…” (Joel 2:3).

2. The earth is mourning before God its Creator:
The Earth mourns its plight and decadence of life on the earth. The word of God says: “Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are perishing”. (Hosea 4:3) The depletion of forests is directly related to the disappearance of the birds, animals and other creatures. Since the cutting down of forests is the destruction of their natural habitat, it accelerates the rate of extinction exponentially in the world today. The red data books published by the Indian government report the extinction of many birds, amphibian, reptiles, fish and animal species. The land, forest and animal life is intrinsically related to each other along with human beings. When earth is destroyed, then all else is on the path of destruction.

God questions human beings and their wickedness towards the earth. “How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it, the animals and the birds are swept away …” (Jer.12:4). God questions the wickedness of the people, the worldly lifestyle, commercialization, urbanization, and real estate business that turns agricultural lands into saleable and re-saleable products. This way of the world is also getting into the church, and the church with its rich resources of land ought to utilize its land resources for the mission of transforming the lives of the poor and needy. But the tragedy is that some of the greedy ones have begun to make market out of it. Utilizing the land for the mission of the poor would be only one side of the ministry. Safe guarding the lands, replenishing them with eco-richness and developing the area with the natural flora and fauna, which is native to the region, would bring it back to its pristine worth, the way God wanted it to be and created the way it should be.

3. God is preserving the earth and its richness:
God is committed to the preservation of earth and its richness. God’s word says: “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with their entire host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” (Nehemiah 9:6 KJV). God takes up the mission of renewing the earth by re-creating the deserts to blossom; the prophecy of Isaiah comes true: “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like a rose.” (Isa.35:1). God is at work renewing the earth, recreating life and restoring the Universe. The promise of God as recorded in Isaiah 65:17 “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.” and further in the New Testament “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” (Revelation 21:1).

Jesus Christ is redeeming the earth
At the very beginning of his earthly ministry; Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. If the first Adam brought the earth under curse which changed the beautiful earth into wilderness; the second Adam begins his ministry in the wilderness and to the wilderness and from the wilderness. Jesus began the reconciliation of the cursed earth with God and with human beings, and hence the wild animals harm no more. The gospel writers narrate: “And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.” (Mark 1:12, 13).Jesus Christ with his presence upon the earth, his stay in the wilderness, his walking in the fields, his baptism in the river, his prayer in the garden and his death over the mountain, burial inside the earth has touched every part of this earth and there by shared his redemptive fellowship with the whole of the earth. As the disciples of Jesus Christ, we follow His example in making every part of this earth a redeemed space making it a better place of living for all flora, fauna, nature and human beings.

Conclusion
In a situation like in the coal mines and of course all mining; may it be mining for iron, manganese, mica, gold, silver, copper or for any other minerals, initiatives are to be taken to ensure that the company follows the norms of mining and secure the mining area and make the place a safe space for habitation of humans and all other flora and fauna, that is native to the region. Instead of exploiting the non-renewable natural resources, human beings could increasingly commit themselves to the use of wind energy and solar energy. This would reduce the strain on the earth and its resources.

As children of God, we need to realize the Hebrew word for earth is ‘Adamah’ and the generic name for human beings is ‘Adam’. Adam means
an earthling, one who is made out of the earth. From earth we are made and to earth we will return. We need to keep this important truth in our minds and relate with the earth as we relate with ourselves. Loving the earth is loving God, its Creator, and harming the earth is harming ourselves and all lives.

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“You Give Them to Eat”:
Preaching the slogan of “Food for All”

Joseph Samuel

“To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and other to want.....”

Wendell Berry, The Gift of Good Land.

Introduction

Poverty and hunger are two Himalayan hurdles in the contemporary phase of global development. Often, at modern times, the hunger deaths are totally ignored or deliberately forgotten news for the media society. Media world, as advocates and agents of the transnational and corporate agro-industrialist and neoliberal capitalist giants, intentionally cover up the consequences of the greedy economic agenda of their patrons. Poverty and its related life negating and devastating after effects are termed by them as mere insensitivity of the state and its democratic process, and they encash internally, the conflicts within the communities and propose the interests of the multinational companies as the shloka of salvation for the struggling lives. Having all the expertise in the global and local arena to arrest the food crisis and grain scarcity, the countries like India and
many others like us in the southern hemisphere are not yet liberated from the slavery of food dependency and death. The purchasing power of the common folks and their democratic right of accessibility to nutritious and quality food products have been systematically drained due to unjust agricultural policies and strategic hibernation of the concept of the benevolent state. The Transnational control and parameters of food grain pricing and systematic deprivation of the base farmers and peasants from the pricing process intensified the crisis in depth. It is in this context of local impact of an otherwise global unkind and blood sucking interest of the powerful elites, the ecological and environmentally compassionate engagements of the faith communities become decisive in the wider scenario of food insecurity and hunger. As environmentally concerned ministers and the prophets the word of God, we are called and commissioned by the spirit of God to speak the crisis and speak to the crisis. Food democracy, food sovereignty, and food security are all very positive and constructive slogans and prayers of hope for the Christian commitment to really act upon. We engage scripturally with ecological crises in order to propose a different life approach, which surely contra to the exploitative dominant and easy path and alternatively subversive in its conception and practice.

“Sheep without a shepherd”- A Political Discernment (Mark 6:30-34)

Markan narratives of the feeding of the multitudes, one of a Jewish nature and the other of Gentile, offers enormous potential to read the Biblical texts into global crisis of food/grain scarcity. Mark 6:30-40 portrays the faith communities’ engagement with a hungry crowd. This episode falls into the stream of events where the Jesus’ Movement begins its initial expansion through the mission of the twelve (Mk 6:7-13). At the beginning of the story we see Jesus, as a compassionate and concerned teacher and senior friend, listening to the apostles’ stories of mission engagement. Having heard all of their life experience as pioneers in the mission of the reign of God, Jesus, now tells them to retreat to desert place for further reflection and regeneration. Before they were moved to the specific place they might have had their preparations to spend few days in solitude in terms of storing enough food and water for their survival. The narrative sequence proposes two main reasons for their retrieval. The primary one, they all just returned from a hectic work, for many of them, it is a new and unknown endeavour. They might have faced difficulties in their mission activities since the teaching and the messages are totally new for the community. As a concerned shepherd and guru, Jesus, permits them to have proper rest. Since Mark reports that many people were coming and going and they had even little time to rest and eat, they are guided to move to solitude. The second reason for their retreat at desert is that, as the story explains, the brutal and ruthless beheading of John the Baptist by the power monger and puppet king Herod. John was a prophet of social justice and economic equality. The common people expected for a radical transformation through the ministry of Baptist. His death sent out a red signal to all the splinter movements to be conscious of challenging the order of Herod and his political superiors namely the Roman Empire. However, we see the crowd recognize the disciples’ private intension to stay away from the frustrations and turmoil of the poor and oppressed. Before the apostolic community lead by Jesus reached the shore, the crowd moves and they in turn make the wilderness congested with the people in real need. Moved with compassion, as a person who really feel and experience the pathos of the people, Jesus began to teach them. The reason behind his compassion, as Mark puts it, is a political allegory of ‘sheep without a shepherd’. This ideological under current which revolves in depth of this narrative signifies the inadequacy or political willingness of the socio-political and religious leadership to directly and compassionately deal with life threatening issues of the poor and needy. Our Lord’s deliberate and sincere reasoning serves here as a focal point for the church’s response to social issues. We need political discernment to involve in the problems of the society. Amartya Sen, the Nobel-prize winning Asian-Indian Economist, states that “there is no such thing as apolitical food problem”, because the denial of everyone’s right to life and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, is violated as a result of lack of discernment of the political leadership. The root cause for worldwide high hunger index is strategic and unkind economic injustice and the uncritical hand over of the agricultural land for special economic developmental zones. Unwise and greedy approaches of the development experts to exploit the natural resources resulted in the unpredicted climate change and thereby the large portion of the population have been deprived from their right to own land and cultivate for their life
sustenance. Therefore, it is the Missional responsibility of the ministers of the church and also the environmental activists to engage in the policy making level to lobby and advocate for political sensitization to deal the food/grain crisis for just legislations and also organize the grass root level action groups of children, youth and of men and women for community farming and corporate agriculture.

“Give them something to eat, yourselves”: An Imperative for Action (Mark 6: 35-38)
As Jesus went on teaching the crowd, the time was late for the crowd to eat their day’s meal. Disciples gently requested Jesus to send the crowd away to the neighbouring villages to get their food. This can be seen as their concern for the people as well as their inability to feed them all. They haven’t even thought about feeding themselves and therefore force Jesus to keep them away as they eat their food. They all know that Jesus, having established an authoritative patronage on the crowd by means of his teaching ministry, has every right to control them. But the story takes an unexpected turn or twist when Jesus bluntly and emphatically responds to their request by stating “give them something to eat, yourselves”. This verbal exchange between Jesus and the apostles forms the crux of this incident. The tone of their reaction sounds astonishment and also a sense of reproof. As we have already seen in the first point, the context of this miracle is the joyous return of the disciples from the mission. When they were sent out, Jesus gives them strict order to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts.....(Mark 6:7-12). Nevertheless, now here in this interaction, it seems that they have money and also bread for them all. For the apostles perspective the solution for the hunger is to “buy” food and they repeat this again and again. It seems like a dominant paradigm for them to follow. They are more market conscious. Somehow this has become prominent notion for all the people to buy food. Food is become a commodity in a globalized world. Not only food, all the basic necessities of life have transformed into commodities of trade and traffic. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when he was tempted by the evil forces to submit himself to the market power of food/bread as commodity. Here, unfortunately, the disciples’ community falls back into the same steep of Market. When we discourse on food sovereignty and food justice, we also need to consider how just the market economy in globalism is. Is it open for more poor and downtrodden to participate in the food system? These queries and questions pause great challenge to the present economic structures that accelerates ecological degradation and environmental disaster. In continuation of the Markan narrative, Jesus behaves contrary to the disciples’ intension and proposes them to have self-auditing from within. Jesus invites them to see themselves to realize what they have kept without dispersing for others. Otherwise, Jesus manages the available resources to meet the hungry and the needy. As Mahatma Gandhi had once said, we have enough for our need, but not for our greed. The problem is not we don’t produce for our needs, but the corporate greed, in fact destabilizes the entire food system. Jesus’ invocation compels the ecologically sensitive faith communities’ to constantly act on the justice concerns of the food distributive system.

“And all ate and were filled”: A Food for all Campaign (Mark 6:39-44)
Jesus requests the participation of the apostolic community to feed the people. The real miracle part in this story comes here as Jesus takes Bread and fish to bless to share with everyone in need. This invokes the wilderness experience of the Israelites as they were fed by Moses with Manna and quail. This wilderness feeding is central to the Exodus Event and Sinai Covenant. God’s covenant renewal and reestablishment of a just relationship with the creation is symbolically signified here in this feeding of the multitude. Here we see the triumph of covenant economy and the economy of redistributive sharing of the available resources. Jesus completely denounces the dominant idea of the economy of autonomous consumption and exploitative market mantras. To resolve the world hunger and its local casualties, we need to effectively and critically participate in the democratic process. Land and all the natural resources need to be equitably distributed among the people for everyone to affirm their space in the food system.

Conclusion
As we conclude this meditation, let us pray like this;

God of our future and our present,  
Help us to enable life’s great feast to happen here and now,  
To open hearts and hands, baskets and pockets;  
To share bread with our neighbours
Partnership in
Redeeming God’s Creation

Shubha Keerthana

Isaiah 24:1-23

While creating this world, God shared His own life with each and everything on this earth, all the creation are naturally provided with their own uniqueness and dignity, we human beings co-exist with them and enjoy the fruits of all creation. Though we freely are benefitted out of them, we never care for their life, their continual existence and their longevity rather we always tend to exert our control over them with an arrogant attitude that human beings are the crown of all creation and thereby we incur injustice to them in order to satisfy our greedy wants. Our selfish wants have led to their loss of life with dignity which in turn ends up in their total destruction.

Let us reflect this biblical text (Isaiah 24:1-23) from the light of the contextual ecological issue prevailing in my own home town, Kolar Gold fields. As the name suggests, this field is naturally blessed with Gold deposits, so the land was plundered for its Gold by the mining until 2001. When these mining activities were effectively carried out, the impact of it was so severe on this land that it greatly affected the environment and the human community. The wastes were dumped in huge mounds which were generally called as cyanide dumps. Air and the water bodies were
Human injustice and God's judgment

In Isaiah 24th chapter, we see the cosmic judgment that is going to be passed on the humankind for violating God's laws and breaking the everlasting covenant which God made with all creation during Noah's time. (Genesis 9:9,10). We often blame God for the crisis we experience in our lives and never realize that we are the real cause for it. God never intends to curse the land which was created with God's own hands, because God saw everything that was created and said 'it is good'. It is People's wickedness, their sinful activities and their evil systems which are destroying the earth and converting them into a wasteland. Due to human greed and selfish motive of exploitation and accumulation the land is deeply wounded and cursed (Isaiah 24:5-6). Though human beings are the only cause for plundering the resources of the land and making it desolate, The judgment or the punishment is not experienced by the human beings alone but sadly all the other innocent creations also had to bear the consequence as they are inter connected in nature. As we read in Isaiah 24:2-3, we see that no one is spared under God's judgment. This cosmic judgment is not just seen during Isaiah's time alone, but from the very beginning of the creation itself. When humanity (Adam and Eve) disobeyed God's word, God happened to curse the land as well (Genesis 3:17). Whenever violence and injustice is done to the earth by human community, God had to intervene with the creation to pronounce judgment.

Human partnership in God's redemptive mission

God never created this earth with the purpose of destroying it; rather God is always interested in having a fellowship with human beings, plants, animals, land, water, air and all the creation of the world. God's desire is to establish an everlasting covenantal relationship and to reveal God's Glory all over the earth. Humanity's disastrous engagement with the nature has forced God to intervene as a judge on this earth. God's purpose of judgment is not to punish the land or put an end to this earth. But God seeks to do justice to the creation. He grieves and feels the pain of the wounded earth and co suffers being in solidarity with the earth.

As partners of God's redemptive mission on this earth, we are called:

• To make people realize that the injustice which they inflict on earth will certainly bounce back severe fatal consequences on themselves.
• To come out of our controlling and exploiting attitude towards our fellow creation.
• To put an end to all the oppressive and imperial evil powers that deteriorates the earth.
• To repair the broken relationship by restoring the freedom and dignity of God's creation.

The Rainbow which was given as a sign of God's covenant with all the creatures of the earth deliberately reveals God's relationship. Our relationship with nature influences and determines our relationship with God. This covenant is not just made with Noah's family and the creatures that came out of the ark, but it is the covenant even to the present era and it is an everlasting covenant for all generations (Genesis 9:12).

If this mining activity again shoots up, God's judgment which was prophesized by Isaiah, surely come true thereby ruining the City completely as said in Isaiah 24:10, where the inhabitants of the land will be scattered, plants, animals and the people will suffer from fatal diseases, air, water and other natural resources will be polluted and fertile layers of the fields will be lost. Therefore mining activity is like doing hysterectomy to our mother land, which means operating and removing the womb of the land.
thus completely destroying the life generating and the life sustaining quality of the earth.

Having practically realized that the mining is nothing other than digging our own graves, like Prophet Isaiah, who raised his prophetic voice concerning the ecological issues that prevailed during his time, we are called to take part in the prophetic mission of God to redeem the creation by turning away from our greedy and selfish attitude and all our evil actions which destroy our place of living and deteriorate our habitat. The wounded land groans for its healing. May we serve as God’s agents to care for the suffering land such that the land is restored back with all its goodness revealing God’s glory! May the Creator God inspire us to do justice to our fellow creation that we may dwell in safety by living in harmony with them and enjoy the life in all its fullness!

Towards a Zero Waste Society

R. Shibu Mayam

Lev. 11: 44-45, 19: 2, 20: 26

Introduction

Waste, ‘the consequence of everyday life’, is one of the most disrespectful hindrances which everyone of us are exposed to deal with. It is defined as, “any portable objects that have been abandoned by its owner(s), or requiring orderly disposal to protect the public welfare” (the German waste Act). The New Zealand Waste Strategy defines waste as “any material, solid, liquid or gas that is unwanted and /or unvalued and discarded or discharged by its owner.” Its generation starts from human body to the biggest industries. The welfare of a community as well as environment depends on how we dispose of waste. It becomes a matter of conflict with improper management. This sermon is an attempt to deal with the waste management issues from a social as well as biblical- theological stand point.

Waste in history

The history of waste situation ranges from bodily expulsions and carcasses thrown out by hunters in the primitive nomadic societies to the accumulation of waste in settled life. A lot of waste management techniques were existent from the ancient times- the rubbish chutes in Mohenjo-Daro, toilets and drains in Harappa and Punjab, the trunk sewers in Crete
in 2100 BC, the sanitary laws of Moses in 1600 BC, the sewers in old Jerusalem in 200 BC, etc. Waste accumulated in the streets and around the towns in Rome in 14 AD. The pre and post Vedic period in India witnessed a shift from the concept of considering nothing as waste, which later became soil nourishers to the creation of the caste system in Hinduism, that led to an ‘outcaste’ group supposed to do filthy jobs even as low as cleaning human waste. The situation became more complex with the industrial revolution and the present growing consumerism which had turned waste a product of human comfort. The developed countries tried to sort out the issue of waste accumulation by either dumping into the sea or sending barges full of waste into third world countries.

Recent statistics
The recent statistics reveal how much waste is accumulating in India, especially in Kerala. Kerala is expelling 8300 tons of waste per day and it is estimated that at the individual level in urban areas, an average of 200-400 gm and in rural areas 8-10 gm is produced per day per head in the State. Though it is a simple thing to manage the waste at the source itself, mere carelessness in handling makes its management difficult.

Various means of waste disposal
Consumerism and the consequent throw away culture is one of the main culprits of waste accumulation. The general principle for waste management is 4 Rs- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recovery, which is called the Integrated Waste Management (IWM) system. Minimizing the use of consumer goods, change of consumer habits, use of durables instead of disposables, and reusing the ‘once used’ items are some of the means of waste management. Others prefer recycling which is problematic as it is ‘pro-industrial’ and resulting in the production of inferior objects, especially in the case of plastic, says environmentalist Bharati Chaturvedi. Recovery of energy is suggestible in the case of composting and incineration, and burying the residue in the sanitary landfill, but each of the method is not completely without faults; composting is eco-friendly and produces bio fertilizers, but proper treatment has to be done to contain the leachate, that is, the waste water mixing with water sources; though incineration can reduce the volume of waste under high temperature, it produces carcinogenic toxins such as dioxins and furans; sanitary landfills contaminate the environment with leachate and toxic chemicals. From this it is clear that any of the human made efforts of waste management is not perfect.

It is with such a profound understanding we need to go deeper into the biblical theological perspective of waste management.

Biblical-Theological Perspective on Waste Management
God has created everything ‘good’ (tob) and ‘holy (kadosh). The Hebrew words tob means useful, purposeful, beneficial, valiant, true, etc. and kadosh (Lev. 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26), means ‘separateness’ or ‘cutting off’. Waste is something that is useless and its management involves restoring the wholesomeness of creation making it useful; and holiness depends on one’s own proximity to God, sanctification is necessary to restore one’s broken relationship with God and community as well. The basic thrust behind holiness is the verse; ‘be holy for I am holy’ (Lev. 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26). The book of Leviticus stresses the importance of holiness and ritualistic purity.

The Bible gives us instances of traditional waste disposal methods which involves,

i) Burial of human waste and dead bodies so as to avoid infection. The method of covering the ‘night soil’ with soil was to return the waste to nature so that nature can restore its material cycle through decomposition (Deut. 23:12-14); the collective burial system as exemplified in managing waste through limiting space.

ii) The Israelites used to burn carcasses after each sacrifice, which was done to reduce the volume of waste to the optimum level (Lev. 4:2), and the practice of eating animal remains by the priests in a holy place, was another way of managing waste. Hell consisting of hades, the interim place of the soul (Rev. 20: 14) and gahanna, the permanent place, needs to be equated with the eschatological fire (Mt. 5:22, 23:33); and the valley of Hinnom (Jer. 7:32, 19:6, Isa. 31: 9, 66:24) could be equated with the hell of Last Judgment. Here burning was done to reduce the volume of waste and to create a zero waste culture.
iii) **Dumping/ landfilling** was done to dispose of pagan artifacts (1 Kin. 15:13) in the Kidron valley during the reign of Asa (ca. 910-896). This disposal system was performed outside the city boundary so that waste would not affect normal life.

iv) **The alternative use of waste** is its use as resource as the term is relational. This was evident in the burning of weapons as firewood (Ezek. 39:9-10) or as fuel pellets. This practice highlights two things; firstly the systematic reduction in the accumulation of waste as its environmental function and secondly the daily needs of the people for firewood was met.

v) Jesus’ concept of waste is revealed in his **resistance to a throw-away culture** as delineated in the instance of feeding the five thousand (Mtt. 14:21, Lk. 9:17, Jn. 6:12). As he did not want to make the hill area a dumping yard of garbage, Jesus insisted his disciples to ‘gather the fragments, not the crumbs or scraps left over so that nothing may be lost. Jesus was in fact eco-friendly and respecting the right of the earth to be pollution free and being human friendly, that is, honouring the right of people to live in a cleaner environment. Such incidents open the depths of Jesus’ zero-waste economy. He was also resisting to the profit oriented capitalist economy promoting an urbanized culture, exploiting the poor and takes away their rights, which is revealed in the temple cleansing incident (Jn. 2:13-22). To Jesus it is sinful to have wastefulness and having abundance is a reason for wastage.

vi) Jesus ensured **community participation** in collecting and disposing of waste. We are not sure what he had done with the left over; it can be presumed that he, along with his disciples might have preserved it for later consumption or used them as pig feed as pig rearing was very popular those times.

vii) Here come the question of **role of taking initiatives** of waste management; it is to be remembered without waiting for the other, each individual has voluntarily to step out to dispose of waste as Jesus might have done (Mk. 10:45).

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**Evaluation and Conclusion**

Waste is the product of modern development promoted by the capitalist economy and the fight against waste involves a battle against capitalism too. The third world countries and even the villages are becoming victims of the garbage imperialism of developed nations and the urbanized world. These conditions raise the necessity of leading a simple life. Waste, though it is physical thing, challenges the very existence of the environment and its creation. Anything that violates life is a spiritual question too. The Bible stresses the need for affirming and sustaining life. And the theology that emerges from waste management is the zero-waste theology (ZWT) which emphasizes the need to respect the nature’s right to be pollution free and to keep God’s creation and its purpose as good, holy and unhindered. Each of the method of waste disposal has its own shortcomings. We should also realize that totally rejecting consumerism is not always easy. In this context priority should be given to follow the 4 R’s. And the management of waste needs to be done with a recognition of others’ sentiments and surroundings; and also to replace the TINA (there is no alternative) with there are alternatives, and the old adage, ‘my waste your property’ with ‘my waste, my property and my responsibility’. The roles of taking initiatives, strengthening the civil society, individual and community level participation are also to be considered to create a cleaner, safer and better environment to create a healthy biosphere.
Water Pollution an action against the created order

Shajan V. Daniel

Introduction

Water is very important for life. Without water, the plants would die and people and animals would go thirsty. In the bible we see the word water is used as an imagery to describe several biblical concepts such as God’s word, purification and cleansing, deliverance and blessing from the lord etc. At present 16 percent of the world’s population don’t have access to safe drinking water. Water pollution is one of the major global problems, leading worldwide cause of death and diseases, and that it accounts for the death of more than 14,000 people daily. It is estimated that 580 people in India die of illness due to water pollution every day. Water-related illnesses such as diarrhea kill 3-4 million children each year. And it is estimated that, water-related diseases could kill 135 million people by 2020.

Water is Precious and Life Giving Gift

As Earth’s population grows, demand is increasing on the available waters. The oceans, rivers, and other inland waters are being misused by human activities, and their quality is reduced. When farmers use fertilizers in fields, the chemicals they use gradually washed by rain into the groundwater or surface waters nearby and cause pollution. Chemicals released by smokestacks may enter the atmosphere and fall back to the earth as rain, and cause water pollution. The detergents used for washing cloths and the drugs we throw carelessly also cause water pollution. Sewage disposal affects people’s immediate environments and leads to water-related illnesses. Agricultural runoff, sewage discharges and industrial waste, when they come to the rivers and lakes result in the death of fishes. Pollution affects more and more of the Earth’s water supply every year.

Sewage doesn’t cause a big problem as some other pollutants in the developed countries. But in India the situation is different. It is the major source of pollution. The sewage water carries harmful bacteria and chemicals that can cause serious health problems. Many industries do not have proper waste management system and drain the waste in the fresh water which goes into rivers, canals and later in to sea resulting in the death of fishes and aquatic animals.

The polluted area of water can’t support sea life. These areas are known as “dead zones,” and there are more than 400 of them around the world, causing major damage to the health of the oceans. The most basic effect of water pollution is directly suffered by the organisms and vegetation that survive in water, including amphibians. Several people die each day due to the consumption of polluted and infected water. As per the Economist report (dated 2008) each day over 1000 children die of diarrhea in India and the numbers have only increased alarmingly in the last five years, because of water pollution by both natural as well as man-made activities.

Life is God’s gift and He has given an environment where every species can exist, grow and multiply. Water Pollution by the human activities harms all living things on the earth. The irresponsible attitude of some towards the waters, which is given for the use of all, results in serious consequences against the life on earth. Human health and sustainability is achieved where the well-being of plants and animals are taken care of. They have to be able to resist disease and destruction. Water pollution is a threat against the life of human as well as vegetation, fish and aquatic animals. It is an act against the divinely created order.
**Water is a Great Resource**

Rapid urbanization in India during the recent decades has given rise to a number of environmental problems; increasing water pollution is one among them. Several towns and cities which sprung up on the banks of rivers are not carefully planned and don’t have proper sewage and waste water management system. Partly treated or untreated wastewater joining rivers or lakes is used for irrigation which may cause surface pollution and affect the vegetation and animals. The major sources of municipal water for most towns and cities are heavily polluted rivers. Migration of workers from the surrounding rural areas to the cities for livelihood has worsened the situation; they are not given proper sanitation facilities.

The electroplating units, paper mills, steel plants, textiles and sugar industries are some of the significant contributors to water pollution. Agricultural runoff and improper agricultural practices became an important cause for this issue. Municipal water treatment facilities in India, at present, do not eliminate traces of heavy metals. Most Indian rivers are polluted by industrial wastes, they contain harmful toxic chemicals.

Pollution became a serious issue due to the negligence of social responsibility. The increasing level of water pollution reveals the failure of the policies and actions of government. Effectiveness of the legal and administrative measures is the important thing in controlling water pollution because of industrial waste, sewage and waste water. Ineffective treatment systems in India really waste reusable water resource. Increasing selfishness may lead people to cover up their faults and blame others. Most environmental experts agree with the idea that the polluter pays for the loss. It may lead people to behave in an environmentally responsible way.

**Renewal of Religious Practices**

Some religious and social practices also add to pollution of our river and lake waters. Dead bodies of cattle and other animals are disposed in the rivers. Dead bodies are cremated on the river banks. Partially burnt bodies are also flung into the river. All this is done as a matter of religious faith and keeping the traditions. These practices adversely affect the water quality. Mass bathing in a river during religious festivals is another environmentally harmful practice. Religious life should have a social commitment. Renewed religious practices from all religions are one of the necessities to solve this problem.

**Water, an Area of Stewardship**

Water pollution is a serious problem which demands proper environmental stewardship, while it seeks to harmonize the fulfillment of the needs of all creatures. God has promised to help his people, but the providential care of God does not guarantee to protect us from the results of human negligence. God has saved us in Christ. He has made us a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). But we still reside in a fallen world in which the consequences of our actions are felt every day.

We increasingly face environmental issues in our society today, and the Lord’s church cannot be silent or ignorant of the responsibility we have been given to be the stewards of God’s creation. As we examine the theme of water pollution, we are to be willing to become good stewards of creation.

**In the Beginning: The Inception of Man’s Responsibility for Creation**

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God creates the universe, the earth, and all living things, then man and woman, and pronounced them all “good” (Genesis 1:25). Worldly value systems focus on the ability of nature to be used or subjective ideas of beauty, but God values the nature and finds it as good. In the creation story, we find the origin of man’s responsibility to nature in God’s commands to Adam. From the two accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, God declares man’s responsibility to subdue and have dominion over the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:28), but also he has to work (or till) and keep the Garden, that is the nature (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew word used for “work” in this passage means to keep, guard, protect, or preserve. Thus from the very beginning God expected man to use the products of nature for his sustenance, but also to be responsible in that use and to preserve the life-giving system in creation.

**Conclusion**

Water pollution need to be considered seriously because it too harms the environment on which people depend. The environment is not something distant or separate from our lives, it is everything that surrounds us that
gives life and health. Making people aware of the problem is the primary step to solve this problem. Greater public awareness can make a positive impact. Water pollution is an area which demands proper environmental stewardship, while it seeks to harmonize the fulfillment of the needs of all creatures, both human and non-human.

From the dust he made us, and to the dust we turn

Beena Priyadarshini

Genesis 2:7

The 21st century is known for its technological enhancement, creativity, development, modernization and globalization. Living with such conceit of so called epoch of intellectuality, exploiting the nature, brings disproportion in the ecosystem and jeopardizes the life on earth. The devastation experienced on the mother earth comes from all corners. The earth which is known for its richness in its resource and a place of residence to all living creatures has become a place of depleted reserve. Human kind under the idea of research subverts life on earth, through spaceship missions polluting the skies, infiltrating into the oceans which endangers marine life and by depositing chemical waste contaminating the soil.

In the biblical text, the creation narratives holds a unique place, as it reveals the creativity of God and God’s favor upon all living kind. After creating everything, God saw it was good, which was not for self-appreciation but for the co-existence of all created order. What was good and plentiful in God’s display has now become eroded and exhausted because of humans’ nurture.
Living at this context, what could be our reply to God, for the responsibility which was rendered to us to be stewards of creation? When God designed the entire universe, his purpose and vision was not comprehended by the humankind. God never aspired for ownership but today everyone wants to be owners of the land. Therefore by participating in selfish needs to accumulate possessions, we exploit each other.

Land and soil are the greatest resources gifted to humankind by God in order to sustain life on earth. Soil is very important for us. The plants that feed us grow on soil and keeping them healthy is essential. However this very land is subjugated and the soil inflicted with the rise of concrete buildings, human-made chemical waste, anthropogenic activities, transportation, etc.

1. From the Dust to Life: Soil that Which Transforms
“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being”.
Gen 2:7.

God’s creation comes from void to life, with the word pronounced; we see everything created came to live. But when God created the man, we see “Out of the dust man was formed”. In nature, “soil” has the tendency/capacity to transform organic matter, sustaining ecological system by converting one’s organic waste into another’s resource. The unique feature of soil is to endorse life.

But today living in the arena of promoting industrialization, fossil fuel consumption, nuclear energy etc., has drastically changed the soil’s capacity to convert any organic waste into another’s resource and posed a serious danger to all living forms of life.

The famous industry known as the VV Mineral, a 25 year old company, had been mining beach sand that includes radioactive minerals on the kanyakumari coast. In a detailed investigation, it had been revealed that the company did not secure proper regulatory clearance and had been involved in mineral separation, a process that generates high radiation, without fulfilling the AERB (Atomic Energy Regulatory Board) norms. The effect of sand mining has been a major issue on the environment and people along the coastline of Tamilnadu and Kerala for the past few decades. The company extracted and exported garnet and ilmenite to more than 20 companies, which yielded a huge profit. But the employees and people residing around the company were affected with serious health issues due to radiation from the minerals. A record of 10-15 cases of cancer in every village at the surrounding area was recorded. Issues of down syndrome and impotency have also been traced. Traditional livelihood of the sea coast has also been hit; since the sea has eroded the villages as the sand was being removed from the shore.

The cry and pathos of these people are the never ending resonance to our ears, which echoes the anguish that the nature is experiencing and the lapse in the natural ability of the soil. The soil which is the center for our life and existence, which meets our basic resources every day, is disillusioned and besieged. Today neo-liberal globalized markets have captured our soil aggressively, contaminated it and frayed us into various complications. There is a need to regain our lost soil, and the purpose of our lives within the context of Gods larger purposes for world and to exercise our stewardship in a more embracing and holistic manner. We are responsible to promote sustainable resource to all. The dust is our identity, and to the dust we should return. Let us safeguard the God given gift to humanity and transform life to all.

2. Protect the Land to Protect the Soil
Land is the central theme of biblical faith. In Deut 8:7-10 the land is described as a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and the hills; a land with wheat and barley; vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and where nobody will lack anything. The land depicts its potentiality to produce and produce to all without scarce. But during the time of prophet Amos, we see the land was imposed by the injustice of the affluent and the rich. When Israel opened the doors to trade and commerce, houses were built on grand scale with some Israelites owning both a summer and a winter house (Amos 3:15). These houses were luxuriously furnished, decorated with ivory. Only a small part of the population shared the wealth of the land. In further reading we also get to see how the needy was sold for a pair of sandals; and justice was denied to the oppressed. (Amos 2:6-7). The land which was given to all was in a period of time was grabbed from the poor and the needy, exploited only to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. The Deuteronomistic theology, demands for accurate
Climate Crisis: A Call for Climate Mission to Climate Refugees

Anilal M. Jose

Genesis 46:5-7

“...in the midst of migrants in search of a better life there are people in need of protection: refugees and asylum-seekers, women and children victims of trafficking... Many move simply to avoid dying of hunger. When leaving is not an option but a necessity, this is more than poverty.” Antonio Guterres

The world today is marked with migration at various levels. People move from their native land in search of better opportunities, better living conditions, good food, avenues of employment, and so on. We cannot deny that the environmental factors have a growing influence on the decision to move. Environmental migration is understood as a multi-causal phenomenon, where environmental factors mix with other economic, social, cultural, demographic and political dynamics; thus making it difficult to disentangle the environmental factors from others. This migration due to environmental causes or climate change may be voluntary or forced. Migration, in some situations, will be permanent, where a formerly habitable land becomes irreversibly damaged. Our chosen text does speak about the migration of the family of Jacob due to famine, in
search of food and better living conditions from Palestine to Egypt. We may consider them as one of the earlier climate refugees, mentioned in the Bible. We shall have a closer look into the biblical narrative.

The Narrative
The narrative in Genesis 46:5-7 portrays the journey of Jacob aged 130, and his family to Egypt. It was a complete move, which included all the movable property along with all the people. And thus Jacob reached Egypt with all his descendants, his livestock, and his personal goods. Though it is connected with the flow of the Joseph story, the context is set on a climate crisis in the land of Canaan. The crisis brought in by the famine triggers their move in search of food and better living conditions. We may explore the text further in detail.

1. The Climate Crisis Creates Climate Refugees: Jacob’s family became Climate Refugees in Egypt
Migration related to environmental change and degradation is one of the most ancient forms of human mobility. Jacob’s family became refugees in Egypt. The 1951 Refugee Convention (United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees), as amended by a 1967 Protocol, defines a refugee as,

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

The fear of famine and its impending consequences necessitates Jacob’s family to migrate in search of food grains. Due to the long consecutive seven years of famine the land did not give any yield. In an agrarian context the situation is devastating. The whole land dried up and the fruit and grain yielding plants withered. The survival of the people came to an endangering juncture. The situation was drastic to all the families lived in the land of Palestine. Jacob’s family was no exception. The reality of the unavailability of food grains in the land of Israel necessitated them to search for possible sources of food supply. Therefore, the children of Jacob were forced to travel long distances to find food for their family. In doing so, they went into the land of Egypt hearing the information that they had food in store. The search for food in another nation would have accompanied with its own risk of insecurity and death. In the process they met their brother Joseph whom they had once sold into slavery. The narrative says that Joseph, using his influence in the administrative circles, ensured that they got a better land to live in and supplied with regular food. The narrative here, reveals both the push and pull factors of migration. The famine in Israel is the push factor and the availability of food supply in Egypt as well as the presence of a known kin, Joseph, in the land of Egypt served as the pull factor in the migration of the Jacob’s family. The search for systems of survival in times of climate crisis brought Jacob’s family into the status of climate refugees.

As Jacob’s family failed to adapt to the climate crisis, it is to be regarded they are in a state of ‘forced migration.’ The same can be seen across the globe today. The development projects undertaken by the governments forcefully displace the native people from their mother land. They have no option but to find new places and migrate. The natural calamities like cyclone, flood, tsunami, landslides and drought forcefully displace people from their homelands. In such situations, the affected people are internally displaced as well as internationally migrated. Those who migrate do suffer in multiple ways. They are pushed into the state of uncertainty and vulnerability.

2. Climate Refugees are Vulnerable in Diaspora: Jacob’s Family became Vulnerable to Slavery:
The vulnerability of Jacob’s family was a multi-fold one. In the first place, they were vulnerable to the climate crisis, which they encountered in their own land. Secondly, they were vulnerable to the situations in Egypt. Later when the whole family moved into Egypt, they were assigned a specific land. They were vulnerable there also as their mobility was limited and their freedom was confined to that particular area of the land alone. Though, in the beginning, the family of Jacob had received a royal welcome by the Pharaoh into the land of Egypt, in the course of time situations changed. The initial welcome and care they experienced was due to the influential position of Joseph in the administration. But, as time passed by the descendants of Jacob were considered as a burden in the land by
The refugee status of any migrant family is reiterated here. They suffer multiple marginalisations in the present context. They are ill-treated, denied of human dignity, threatened with job insecurity, paid less wages for hard work of long hours, denied of decent accommodation and facilities, forced into bonded labour, denied basic human rights, denied citizenship and this list can go on. The very migrant status itself has bearing on them and making them vulnerable. This situation calls for implementing Climate justice effectively.

3. Climate Refugees deserve Climate Justice: God’s Intervention calls for our Initiative

It is noteworthy that previously, God had told Isaac not to go to Egypt (Gen.26:2), but now Jacob was allowed to go, when Jacob stopped the caravan at Beersheba to worship the God of his father Isaac (Gen.46:1–7). Jacob's family, at the time of the migration to Egypt consisted of about seventy people (vv.5–27). The divine intervention brings in the promise of return from the migration into the promised homeland. The migration, though, was a necessity at that particular point in history; God assures them a better future in which they will be able to return to their own land where they would enjoy their freedom with all the rights. Can that be seen as an assurance of anticipated climate justice for the future?

Administrative intervention in the climate crisis is done by Joseph in the land of Egypt. There were clear policies set out beforehand to deal with the anticipated climate crisis. These policies did not overlook people of other countries who would migrate to Egypt in search of food during the time of long famine. In Robert Bullard's view, “in addition to the physical and natural world, the environment included the spaces where people lived, worked, played, and went to school.” Therefore, environmental justice is the idea that “all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and public health laws and regulations.” The Egyptians who benefitted from Joseph’s plans of survival were asked to pay for the service they received, as it was done to the migrant people. Though in one sense, it can be seen as a corporate policy to amass the wealth of the people by the royal administration, it can also be considered as a policy to ensure equal justice to all. In the biblical narrative, Joseph continues to oversee the country of Egypt. He collects the money which the Egyptian people use to purchase the grain. When the money is all gone, he accepts livestock as payment. When the livestock is all sold, he accepts land as payment. Only the priests are exempted from this administrative policy. Here, Joseph distributes the procured during the time of good harvest, back to the people who produced them and thus ensured the sustenance of life for all.

The Biblical narrative says that the family of Jacob became part of the work-force in the land of Egypt and contributed to the economy of the country by tending the royal cattle. Joseph knew that Egyptians did not like to live alongside people who kept sheep or cattle. Therefore, Joseph told his brothers to introduce themselves to Pharaoh that they were keepers of both sheep and cattle. They have added that they had brought their flocks and herds along with them. This would ensure that Pharaoh gave them a territory separate from the Egyptians, where they could live together and multiply without their culture and religion being too easily corrupted by the Egyptians (Gen. 46:28–34). Pharaoh allotted Goshen to them. Goshen is identified in Gen. 47: 11 as the district of Rameses. The family settled in the fertile land of Goshen near the mouth of the river Nile (Gen.47:1–12). This land, with its scrub-covered plains, was an excellent area for cattle. It is estimated that around 214 million people live outside their countries of birth or citizenship. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that almost half of these persons are economically active. This involves most working-age adults, taking into account that the global migrant population includes children and aged dependents.

Therefore, objectives of climate justice need to include initiating administrative policies to manage environmental migration and to prevent forced migration resulting from environmental factors in the national and international levels. In the context of forced migration, these policies must ensure providing assistance and protection to affected populations, and to seek durable solutions to their situation. Climate justice needs to address the human rights to water, food and health, as well as others. This calls for our climate mission to climate refugees.
4. Climate Mission to Climate Refugees: The Mission to God

Being a church called out with a mission, the Church of South India is also engaged in the climate mission to the Climate Refugees. The people belonging to the CSI dioceses have been migrating across state borders as well as national borders for many years. This movement do have multiple reasons. On the one hand, it is motivated by better options such as, better education, better employment, better living conditions, and so on. On the other hand, some of these migrations were triggered by the climate crisis brought in by natural disasters as well as various development policies of both the state and central governments. The building of large dams, nuclear power projects, mines, sea ports, air ports, and large factory establishments, among many others, do force people out from their natural habitats and traditional employments. Fisher folks, adivasis, agricultural labourers and cultivators were forcefully evacuated from their homelands. The deterioration of cultivatable land has also resulted in the food crisis in many Indian states. Therefore, it is our call, as a Church to initiate a Climate Mission to deal with the climate refugees.

Our mission to God is the response to God’s mission to us. Our mission to God is to be revealed in serving the people in this part of the world. Our climate mission needs to be started with challenging the brands given to the displaced people. The term refugees came to be understood as derogatory. WCC document asks for addressing the people by replacing the term ‘climate refugees’ with “climate-displaced people”. This name came from the understanding that there is a choice involved in migration. People often ultimately choose to leave their homes and are not always forced to flee for their lives. Considering the displaced people with compassion and addressing those using terms that ensure dignity is one of the important need today. In the biblical narrative the family of Jacob is not considered by Pharaoh as migrants, however, later, after the death of Joseph and the Pharaoh, who received them into the land, they came to be known as migrants. Later when God sends Moses to deliver them from bondage, Moses calls them as children of God and assuring their self-worth. It is therefore our mission to God, as a church to compassionately name them and bring the displaced into the fold.

The second aspect in our climate mission to God is that of confession. Today, the linkage between anthropogenic changes in the climate and the climate crisis is well recognized. Human actions are the major reasons that endanger both human rights and the environment. Migration is thus understood as one of the ways in which people affected by this climate crisis take on as an adaptation strategy. From our part we need to confess our own actions that brought in the climate crisis.

The third aspect in our climate mission to God is to search for solutions to the problem. The questions need to be asked include, is migration always a choice? How is forced migration being addressed? What short and long-term solutions are to be explored? The answers to these questions might enable us to persuade the governments to initiate policies and projects to address the issue of displacement and migration in all levels. It also initiates a re-formulation of ministries of the church to cater to the needs of the displaced people, to affirm their human rights, equality and humanity. Most of the times, the State authorities do not want to hear about climate justice, and there has been a trend of diminishing expectations. Given the inauspicious nature of the political environment, the approach has to be incremental and low-key, moving forward in small steps.

The fourth aspect in our climate mission to God is to move beyond the usual ministries of providing humanitarian assistance by giving financial aid and pastoral care to enhance the voices of climate victims. Church cannot deal with all the issues involved in relation to the climate crisis by their own. But church can create a space where people can find ways to offer their own responses.

The fifth aspect of our climate mission to God is to save lives. The biblical narrative gives the following insights also. During the famine, the life was not prosperous for the Egyptians, but at least they are alive, and for this they are grateful to Joseph. Their words, “you have saved our lives” (Gen 47: 25), confirms that the “save lives” of Gen. 45:5 includes Egyptians. Already the promise of God to Abraham to be a blessing to nations is being fulfilled. The Egyptians are blessed by Joseph’s presence. They do not die. They survive a catastrophe, thanks to the initiatives, interventions and involvement of Joseph. We, the church today, is called to take initiatives and effectively intervene and dynamically involve in the mission to save lives and be a blessing to many. God has called us to do the climate mission today.
Conclusion
We are in a mission where the reality of Climate Crisis grows day after day that pushes many people into Climate Refugees as in the case of Jacob's family who became Climate Refugees in the land of Egypt. The refugees become vulnerable in their diaspora context as the Jacob's Family became vulnerable and forced into Slavery. This calls for a climate justice to the climate refugees across the globe. God's intervention into the reality of climate crisis calls for our response and initiative. This initiative of Climate Mission needs to be seen as our mission to God. Our mission to God can be fulfillled by doing justice to the least of our brothers and sisters around us. This mission needs to be expressed in serving the people in need of justice in this world, with a view to make this world a better place to live in for the whole creation.

“You will not find much signs of life where crops or grass can't grow
Where rain refuse to fall, death comes painful and slow
The survivors become climate refugees
In camps where millions live in hopes for visas to Lands overseas
But in the camps many for years must stay
And can only dream of places far away
Grow old and die in utter poverty
How sad and tragic for many life turns out to be
Circumstance of place of birth beyond us to explain
You will not find much signs of life in places starved of rain
Only insects crawl on the bare and sun baked ground
And no signs of life for miles and miles around
And the people who survived the famine weakened by hunger and disease
Live in the crowded camps of climate refugees.”

A poem by Francis Duggan

Paul says in Ephesians 6:1-3, “children obey and honour your parents, which is the first commandment with the promise - that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth”.

Not only Paul, but heavenly father also intended the same for humanity. At the time of creation God separated the water above the expanse and below the expanse as a protection in order to keep the humanity from the Sun's rays and heat. As refrigerators play a vital role in the houses to preserve food and other beverages, God protected humanity. That's why the life span was very long for the people before Noah's flood.

Adam lived for - 930 years
Seth - 912 years
Jared - 962 years
Methuselah - 969 years
But after the flood only Noah lived for 950 years and his decedents lived a shorter life.
Shem - 500 years
Arphaxed - 403 years
Peleg - 209 years
Nahor - 119 years
The life span for man started decreasing after the flood; for God’s protection on humanity had been destroyed by the sin of mankind. Moreover, after the flood, when Noah consumed wine, he got fully drunk and was not aware that he was naked. The Sun’s rays that reached the earth directly (the water above the expanse poured on Noah’s flood) fermented the wine and spoilt the food items. To overcome this we had to use refrigerator in order to preserve our food in the later years.

Secondly, God had created the second layer of protection through the stratospheric ozone layer that protects life on earth by observing ultra violet rays.

The ozone layer is our warrior against the mighty Sun which is bombarding the earth with harmful UV radiation and we are trying our best to protect it. Ozone is basically a gas, also referred to as O₃, which is formed and reformed constantly in our Earth’s atmosphere. If it were not for the ozone layer, our Earth would be barren with slight traces of life. The depletion of the ozone layer is a phenomenon that was observed during the latter part of the 70s and has since then showed a declining rate of 4% per decade and there is a remarkable decrease over the polar regions of the Earth. It is also being said that the southern hemisphere of the Earth could have an additional 20% depletion of the ozone that could result in natural calamities like tornadoes, avalanches, fires, tsunamis etc., in the future years. The main reason for the destruction of the ozone is by man-made halocarbon refrigerants such as CFCs, halons and Freon that are released into the atmosphere and are known as ‘ozone depleting substances’ or ODS. These harmful substances strike the ozone and split it apart. Most of us might not know this, but it is observed that one single molecule of chlorine from the cfc molecule undergoes a chain reaction and kills up to 1,00,000(1 lakh) ozone(o₃) molecules. The ozone depletion has led to a worldwide concern, since UV rays strike our earth more directly, due to which health hazards like skin cancer, cataracts, damage to plants and many more complex problems are rising up. Therefore many governments have banned products that produce these ODS.

Here are five simple ways in which we can contribute to protect the ozone layer and our planet.

1. Regulate Vehicle Emission
   It would be a great option in the future to develop and switch to vehicles that have a hybrid or electric zero-emission engine. When possible it is advised to car pool, take public transport, walk, use a bicycle that would limit the usage of individual transportation.

2. Use eco-Friendly Household Cleaning Products:
   Usage of eco-friendly and natural cleaning products for household chores is a great way to prevent ozone depletion. This is because many of these cleaning agents contain toxic chemicals that interfere with the ozone layer. A lot of supermarkets and health stores sell cleaning products that are toxic-free and made out of natural ingredients.

3. Avoid Using Pesticides
   Pesticides may be an easy solution for getting rid of weed, but are harmful for the ozone layer. The best solution for this would be to try using natural remedies, rather than heading out for pesticides. You can perhaps try to weed manually or mow your garden consistently so as to avoid weed-growth.

4. Developing Stringent Regulations for Rocket Launches:
   The world is progressing in scientific discoveries by leaps and bounds. A lot of rockets are launched over to the space without consideration of the fact that it can damage the ozone layer, if it is not regulated soon. A study shows that the harm caused by rocket launches would outpace the harm caused due to CFCs. At present, the global rocket launches do not contribute hugely to ozone layer depletion, but over the course of time, due to the advancement of the space industry, it will become a major contributor to ozone depletion. All types of rocket engines result in combustion byproducts that are ozone-destroying compounds and expelled directly in the middle and upper stratosphere layer – near the ozone layer.

5. Banning the Use of Dangerous Nitrous Oxide
   Due to the worldwide alarm caused by a study in the late 70s about the alarming rate at which the ozone was being depleted, nations around the globe got together and formed the Montreal Protocol in the year 1989 with a strong aim to stop the usage of CFCs. However, the protocol did
not include nitrous oxide which is the most fatal chemical that can destroy the ozone layer and is still in use. Governments across the world should take a strong stand for banning the use of this harmful compound to save the ozone layer.

As the words of St. Paul, God reminds us to live a long life on this earth through preserving this planet not only for us but also for our future generations. It is our bounden duty to teach and to bring awareness to the people around us in this regard. We need to be a model for the others in preserving our precious nature. May our good lord motivate us to be a channel of blessing in saving this planet.

Minerals are major sources of energy of any country. Mining is the extraction of the minerals and metals from the earth. It is the foundation of industrial civilization. Mining is important because it is necessary for nations to have adequate and dependable supplies of minerals and materials to meet the industrial and economic needs of any nation. Mining Industry in India also is a major economic activity which contributes significantly to the economy of India. It is unarguably a core industrial sector and crucial for India’s economic growth.

Many ecologists argue that modern industrialization and mining are very much insensitive to the environment. The modern technology in mining has created much for the humanity but there were also serious threats and ill effects to the environment.
Along with the above problems, depletion of resources, desertification, climate changes, Global warming, droughts, freak floods and other such natural problems endanger all forms of life. The earth, as a whole, has begun to lose its immunity and become ill.

Resolving this ecological crisis is no longer a problem we can leave to the scientists. Just as we are all part of the problem, we, as Christians, also should be a part of the solution. As the Bible is the primary source of our theology, it is significant to look at some of the biblical accounts that contain ecological concerns.

The Bible does not contain a systematic ecological theology, but it contains God’s concern towards land and environment. It also contains many insights that can help form the basis of a sound environmental ethics. If we read the Bible with ecological perspective, we get many insights for the protection of environment.

I. OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING - GENESIS 1:26-31

Work it and take care of it

A common perception is that the Bible shows little concern towards environment and perhaps even encourages its exploitation. This view is expressed in an influential and often-cited article by Lynn White entitled, ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis’ (Science, March 10, 1967). For him, Christianity accepted this biblical view of creation, fostering the attitude that human beings transcend nature and may exploit it (Based on Genesis 1:28). Therefore, he concludes that Christianity ‘bears a huge burden of guilt’ for our ecological crisis. But Claus Westermann interprets the words “subdue it and rule over it” not by the way of dominance but by the concept of kingship. This means that the king is responsible for the whole creation. God expects human beings to be just and responsible and render real services to the created order. That’s why in the other account of creation narrative (Genesis 2:4-25) God puts the man in the Garden of Eden “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2: 15 NIV), Duty of humans is to take care of the environment as a good steward, but not to destroy it.
The Earth is Yahweh’s
- Genesis 1:3 - “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
- Psalms 24:1 - “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it”.
- The earth possesses an autonomous status as an ethical and covenanted entity. In Genesis 9:8-17, God directly includes the earth and all the animals as participants in the covenant.
- The theological principles underlying the verses in relation with Jubilee is that the land must not be sold permanently, for the land is Yahweh’s.
- He gave it as a gift to humans. This would mean that the natural resources of all kinds can only be used with a sense of responsibility and accountability to God. No one has the authority to exploit it.

II. NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING - COLOSSIANS 1:15-20
New Testament announces that the process of restoration hoped for has already began in the coming of Christ into the world i.e., cosmos. He came as the embodiment of God’s love and concern for the whole cosmos.

Jesus’ Concern towards Environment
The New Testament authors perceive Christ’s active presence in the natural world right from the time of creation (Colossians 1:15, John 1:1-2, Heb 1:2). In fact, creation was made ‘in’, ‘through’ and ‘for’ him. It tells about the involvement of Christ in the history of natural world, in creation, in redemption and in final consummation of all created things respectively.
- The goal of His Messianic coming is to save all creation and to re-establish the kingdom or oikos of God in terms of its original integrity within the created order.
- He came to redeem the entire creation from exploitation as it waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be raveled. (Romans 8: 19-20 NIV)

- Jesus’ Mastery of the forces of nature like wind, water, disease and infirmity in the Gospels is seen as a sign that the whole environment is incorporated into salvation history.
- If we analyze Jesus’ use of nature imageries (Mt. 6:28-29, 13Ch. etc.), we can certainly say that he has great ecological concern.
- Jesus also gave sacramental character to nature in particular to water, wine and bread, showing that nature turns sacred in and through Him.
- However, many scholars supported that the concept of ‘Kingdom of God, the main theme of the New Testament, has great ecological implications.

III. ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Humanity’s Relationship with the Rest of Creation
One of the affirmations adopted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on justice, peace and the integrity of creation included the commitment to respect, conserve, and work for the integrity of creation as “members of the living community of creation in which we are but one species.” All of the other species have their own interest, inherent integrity and are valued by God. Therefore, along with all other species we have to live on a healthy environment and dependence.

Protection of Creation as an Act of Worship
God has set His glory above the heavens (Ps. 8:1b, 19:1, Isa. 6:3). The whole creation is manifesting God’s glory. God created human beings as masters over the creation and gave the creation to us as a gift. Christian worship is not only praising God for His gifts and blessings, but also respecting Him by protecting those gifts. Therefore, protection of creation becomes as an act of worship.

CONCLUSION
Ecological Activities in Churches and Church Related Institutions
Some of the environmental activities that church can do within the congregation are as follows:
Sermon on fishing

Irwin Jesudoss

Key verse: "So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water stream, according to their kinds.......God blessed them and said be fruit full and increase in number and fill the water in the seas....."

Jesus provides a miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11)

Before preparing this sermon on fishing, I had to conduct a funeral service to Mr. Yesu Kaliyaperumal (fisherman), a member of the village church of my pastorate. He was hit by a big wave and fell exactly in the midst of the motor wings of the fiber boat and his head was broken.

This happened in front of his two sons who accompanied him while fishing. The life of poor fishermen in our society is highly dangerous, pathetic, risky, and encountering the power of nature directly each day to get their daily earnings. Many a times such calamities go unnoticed and never remembered by the society. This incident disturbed and challenged me personally to think more on the issues related to fishing and effects on ecosystem. Let us ponder up on the text (Luke 5:1-11) keeping as the base for our meditation.

In the creation narrative, God the creator, sustainer, judge, and redeemer created the universe in a majestic display of power and purpose. God has ultimate rule over the earth and he gratefully exercised this
authority with loving care. This authority is delegated to the human race to take responsibility of the co-creations and the entire planet with care and be acquainted with the value and purpose of each creation. In the long run the effect of self-centered human activities triggered to massive and drastic changes in the eco-system, that directly or indirectly impacted the very existence of human race. The present scenario of human life exhibits greed, selfishness, amass of wealth, hegemony which challenges the conception of love, oneness, sharing, and distribution of power due to which humans conflict with nature and end up in crisis. Rather as Rev. Dr. D. R. Sadananda (General Secretary CSI synod) mentions “human beings who are made out of the dust of the soil, do carry in them this inner possibility of becoming a source of transforming energy. Therefore as we tend the garden of God, not only as stewards of the creation, but also as the tillers of this earth, we do have an opportunity to become a source of new energy for the transformation of the whole creation”. This aspect of humans looking beyond private and self interests would greatly facilitate our planet home, which would end up in Eco-centric attitude from anthropocentric attitude.

Fish, fishing and fisherman are mentioned often in the gospel accounts. Jesus used a number of illustrations on fishing and spent much of his time in preaching near the shore of Galilee. And among Jesus’ apostles, seven were fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas and Nathanael) (John 21:2, 3). The first century fisherman were patient, hardworking, and willing to endure hardship in the pursuit of worthwhile reward. Those who accepted the invitation of Jesus to join him in the disciple-making work like wise needed such qualities if they were to be effective ‘fishers of men’.

In the text Luke 5:1-11, Jesus preached to the crowd from Simon’s (Peter) boat when they were washing their nets. As the fishermen on the sea of Galilee used bell shaped nets with lead weights around the edges which would cause the nets to sink around the fish and the fishermen would pull on a cord drawing the net around the fish. So nets have to be kept in good condition by washing to remove weeds and then mended. Jesus when asked for a boat, Simon without hesitation, provided it for the proclamation of the gospel. This stands for Simon’s obedience and patience. Sometimes we neglect to give our sources (time, talents, wealth) for the proclamation of the gospel, simply for meaningless reasons, forgetting that whatever we possess are given by God. When Jesus asked Simon to let down the nets for fishing, he humbly expressed the difficulty that he did not get anything in spite of all his hard work, but still obeyed the word of the master, ‘because you say so I will let down the nets’. This sense of listening, accepting and implementing Gods voice is very much necessary for us to be blessed. Though Simon was a good fisherman, and his knowledge on every aspect of fishing and all its techniques, is highly prudent, without complaining and arguing, he committed himself in the act of God that resulted in abundant blessing. In our life, humans forget to obey and take up Gods way and rather try to gain abundant blessing (profit) from nature in his own way which normally results in elimination and annihilation. Jesus mentions the place for fishing (put out in too deep water) V-4 which proves God’s acquaintance and authority on nature, but without understanding, caring and knowing the value of nature, people today execute heavy new technique to suck the fleshiness of mother planet. Overfishing, blast fishing and bottom trawling, the result of new mechanization has ended in water pollution and extinction of marine wealth. These modern fishing techniques threaten the very survival of traditional fisher folk. Rt.Rev.Geevarughese Mar Coorilose Metropolitan in his book ‘Green Liberation’ mentions the “mechanization of shrimps trawling has contributed to the incredible growth of the industry in the context of an insatiable demand for shrimps for overseas markets,” due to which the lives of traditional fisher folk are greatly affected, but they adopt indigenous methods, and own craft for variety of fish. Even their nets would have different meshes for different species, whereas the mechanized vessels use a single net which trap fish indiscriminately. This massive fishing by big corporate companies sweep the natural wealth of marine life and poor fisher folk suffer the consequences. When Simon was blessed with large number of fish so that their nets began to break....partner boat came to help....both the boats were filled with fish so that their boats to be sink.....Simon Peter’s reply was ‘go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ V-8. This reply of Simon Peter raises question; Why he said that? Because the presence of Jesus had benefited or profited him with plenty of fish that would bet him more money...why he said that?. Because for us in this corporate world, anything and anybody that fetches more profit, is more important. So Peter should have embraced
Jesus and made him to stay with him for rest of his life so that daily he could be blessed with such miraculous catch of fish. But Simon expressed his beauty of faith by feeling his own insignificance in comparison to this man’s greatness. As this was the second call of disciples, (after the first call in Mathew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20) Simon already knew Jesus’ authority, healing power and divineness. So Simon felt his unworthiness and said, “leave me Lord”, which also expresses that he said **enough** to his huge blessing, not trying to get more fish from Lord, but said, “enough”. If we think in this way, what should be our prayers? Often faithful people run to different conventions and meetings to receive more and more blessings to fulfill or satisfy one’s own and family requirements, never and ever bothered about the life of fellow beings and co-creations, but worried only about self. Can we make a prayer that, “Lord, it is enough of your blessings to me and my family, please do give more to my neighbour or bless the nature around me from which I extract more.”

This sense of sharing, caring and love of humans to others around us, can really put an end to the prevailing greediness, and enable us to actively act as collaborators with God in saving a fallen world to renewal. As Simon, the fisher folk, the marginalized of the society, dalits, tribes, women etc., normally live with the nature and their livelihood always coup up with the nature as they only fulfill their need and not greed. But the civilized world in the name of development, technology, globalization and industrialization have exploited and manipulated the life of the earth. **Rev. Dr. K.C. Abraham** mentions that ‘the industrial culture is based on particular mind set or an assumption that the aggressive domination over nature is the absolute right of the human species and earth has limitless resources for human use.’ This has resulted in environmental degradation, resource depletion, and inequitable distribution and the direct victims are the marginalized of the society.

It is also visible from the text that the aspect of sharing is inevitable, where Simon calls his partners from other boat and shared the fish so the resource is not wasted or kept for oneself but distributed to meet the needs of others. So God’s grace is for everyone, but in reality, we can see that resources are used by only the dominants and the majority live in scarcity. Our responsibility and concern towards the use of nature and for our future generations must be positive, so that everyone enjoys God’s providence. And in the V11, we see that these fisher men left everything to follow Jesus. Normally even in our daily life, poor people share and give what they have so easily than the wealthy ones; likewise these fisher folk left back everything, which is not just boat and net, but their life and survival. This clearly denotes human greediness and amass of wealth is broken where committing towards God’s call is implemented. Overall this text enlightens human life to be disciplined, and obedient to the word of God. May God grant us grace and strength to grow in union with co-creations and commit ourselves towards God’s calling. Amen.
Honour, Care and Protect:
A Divine Agenda for Humanity

K. N. Bhushanam


One fine morning, an old man was planting a sapling in his garden. Meanwhile, his grandson came and stood beside him. He wanted to know why his grandfather was toiling so hard early in the morning. He asked, “Grandpa, what is the use of planting the sapling? You are not going to see the tree when it is fully grown. Why are you toiling so hard?” Now the old man looked at him and said, “My child, God has given responsibilities to each and every one of us as human beings. Our responsibility is to obey God’s word, to do good for the human beings and care the nature”. After a moment of silence, the old man added, ‘My dear, even if you did not plant a sapling, do not cut this tree’. The Old Testament passages taken from the creation account Genesis 1: 26-31 and 2: 15-17 also speak about human responsibility towards the creator and the entire creation with lots of dos and don’ts by assigning different obligations, duties, concerns and accountabilities. In the midst of diversities and rivalries, technologies and selfish interests, we, most of the times, forget about such responsibilities that have been assigned to us by our creator. Therefore the theme chosen for today’s meditation is “Honour, Care and Protect: A Divine Agenda for Humanity”, with a thinking in mind about our responsibilities towards the entire creation and can be comprised as having an obligation to do something for caring someone. Taking the parable of Good Samaritan described in Luke 10:25-37, as a model for acting our responsibility, I would like to turn your attention towards what are the divine agenda for humanity and how we can accomplish such assigned responsibilities responsively.

1. Honour God: Responsibility towards God:
The creation narrative clearly speaks about the bond between God and human beings. It is a covenant relationship between the Creator and creatures. The man and his wife were placed in the Garden of Eden to lead a life of response, not indeed in inactivity, but in fulfillment of the course assigned to them. God wishes human beings to be God’s collaborators in the work of creation, redemption and sanctification. The first area of responsibility is indicated by the Hebrew word, ‘Abad,’ which means, ‘to serve’, and the other area of responsibility is indicated by the word, ‘shamar,’ which means ‘to guard’ the garden. It is often used for “keeping” God’s truths, but even then it carries the idea of preserving them, by consistent obedience, from being forgotten. Here human beings have the responsibility to God to take care of the Garden and the entire creation. In the New Testament passage, a lawyer asks Jesus, what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus counters his question with the story of the Samaritan and thereby insists the lawyer to follow the same model of the Samaritan. In Luke 10:27, Jesus insists the lawyer to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength and with his entire mind. This includes the love which one shows to others. The Good Samaritan honours God by obeying God’s command by taking care of the wounded man. The Old Testament passage is a commandment to honour God in obedience, and the parable of Good Samaritan is a clear demonstration of it: honouring God by becoming a good neighbour for the wounded entire creation. In the present day context, are we obeying and honouring God? In corruption, discrimination, treachery, disloyalty, selfish desires, destruction of natural resources and all kinds of malpractices, we are doing harm to the entire ecosystem and thus disgracing the purpose of God. We have clear recent examples in front of us such as the 2G Spectrum and Common Wealth Games corruptions from the official side, and the destruction of human and natural resources of Narmada, Nandigram,
Chengara, Plachimada and so on. Friends, we all are called to be the stewards of God’s creation. We need to be transparent in front of God in all aspects of our life in order to honour God and it also involves the caring and protection of the whole creation.

2. Care Others: Responsibility towards Humanity

The creation narrative is also an institution of family life, a social life and thereby a community life which clearly explains about one’s responsibility in the living world. God makes a relationship between humans, which is a relationship of loving and living together, sharing and caring, and of mutual respect and concern. By creating human beings, God demands exactly the same thing from each one of us when we live in a community, to bring forth an attitude of love, care, sharing, concern and mutual respect. In today’s New Testament passage, Jesus tells the lawyer to love his neighbor as himself. Both the priest and the Levite saw the man’s need but chose not to help. Though they were responsible to take care of others and lead them into a better life, they went away from the needy because they were concerned more of ritual purity. But the Samaritan here was acting according to the need of the one who was on the road. In vv. 33-35, we see eight things which the Samaritan does to the wounded man. He came near to the wounded, took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, poured his oil and wine, put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn, took care of him and gave two silver coins to the innkeeper to look after him. He had interrupted his schedule to help this man. If Mother Teresa and Fr. Damian were the Good Samaritans for people affected with leprosy, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King were the real neighbours of the black people, as having known their responsibilities and responded on time as real neighbours. When there was a forceful land acquisition that took place at Muthanga in Kerala, a tribal woman called C.K. Janu acted her role very well against the ruling party as the leader for a tribal community in order to achieve tribal rights and thus it was a blessing for the whole tribal communities in Kerala. Friends, our society today is a cradle of injustice and inequality. We are living in a world of dominant values of caste, patriarchy, neo-colonialism and market oriented globalization, where Dalits, women, tribals, and children are being marginalized in the name of new economic zones, economic differences, sexual traffics, communal attacks and assault. As the image of God, what is the divine purpose for us? It is not as that of the Priest or the Levite, but as that of the Good Samaritan; by becoming the voice for the voiceless, help for the helpless, and console for the wounded. How should be our actions for fulfilling the divine agenda? The Good Samaritan was not at all caring about his own identity or the identity of the wounded; rather he was wholeheartedly willing to help the person. Likewise our responsive actions have to be independent of our identity and social status. It has to be a bridging up of gaps and barriers; it has to be a bringing up of real koinonia or sharing everything in common where mutual respect, concern and caring prevail.

3. Protect Nature: Responsibility towards Nature:

The creation story is not confined within the human responsibilities to humanity, but it is a wider expression of our responsibility towards the entire creation. In Genesis 1:26,27, the command of the LORD to human beings to have dominion and to subdue the entire creation describes the human responsibility to take care of the whole co-creation; and in 2:15, the placing of man and his partner in the Garden of Eden explains the responsibility of human beings to till it and keep it. The Hebrew terms, “kabash,” translated as ‘subdue’ and “rada,” translated as ‘dominion,’ are understood in terms of caring and nurturing, not exploiting. It is the nature of a shepherd who cares for, tends and feeds the sheep, upholding the principles of law and justice and promoting peace and prosperity for all the subjects. The Christian understanding of dominion and subdue is determined in the way of Jesus of Nazareth, and is demonstrated clearly through the account of Good Samaritan. Today the entire eco-system is wounded by human deeds. In our daily lives, we are disconnected from the rest of the creation because of our way of life, our attitudes, our preferences, and our selfish actions. Thirst for money and the development of certain mass of people cause the destruction of eco-system. Our attitude of acquiring money and possessions results in corruption and capitalistic globalization, environmental ruins like deforestation, endangering of various species of organisms, climate change, and displacement of the entire creation. In the parable of Good Samaritan, the man is wounded by robbers, which can be compared with the human destruction of nature. In the midst of human selfish desires, we need to act like the Samaritan. We have to be responsive towards nature. Though we have the freedom granted in the creation account, our motto has to be ‘freedom with
responsibility’ and we have to protect nature with a mind of love and concern towards the ecosystem. Friends, how can we be responsible towards nature in the present context? According to K.C. Abraham, “An alternative life style based on a prudent use of natural resources and a redirection of our social and economic structures are urgently required, if we were to respond to this crisis.” We need to be the agents of change in the society, especially in human attitude towards the nature. We can take a decision to avoid the usage of environmentally dangerous things and to use eco-friendly commodities; we can pledge to stop the destruction of our ecology for our selfish needs and also to encourage others to do so, as the model shown by Jesus through the parable of Good Samaritan. We can be good neighbours to our environment by bringing up an attitude of real stewardship and cure the wounds of nature with love and concern. We have a responsibility to keep and to be thankful to God for the wonderful gift of nature, and to work for the restoration of it. We need not do great things like conducting seminars, debates and all, but small things like stop throwing garbage outside, instead of putting it in the garbage bin, throwing waste behind the hostel etc. It’s not a matter of whatever we do, or however small it is. It might mean a lot for many generations to come.

Conclusion

Friends, both the creation account and the parable of Good Samaritan challenge us to do our mission with greater responsibility in a responsive way towards God, humans and the entire creation. The prominent Indian Christian Theologian S.J. Samartha felt that, “Mission is God’s continuing activity through the spirit to mend the brokenness of creation, fragmentation of humanity and to heal the rift between humanity, nature and God.” So today we are called to be responsible with a divine agenda. Our responsive action should be inclusive by communicating the salvific act of God to the entire creation and letting them to participate in it. Our responsibility is to act with a responsive action in obedience to God and by curing the wounds of both humans and the entire creation. It is our responsibility to bridge up the gap between God and humans, humans and nature, and God and nature which happened because of our disobedience. Though Jesus has taught and shown us the ways, we are still living in the old paths of dishonouring God and destruction of the entire creation; and thereby disgracing the purpose of our Creator. So our responsibility is to become the healer of wounds that happened in our relationship to God, fellow humans and the nature because of our disobedience and selfishness. Friends, this is the time to be responsive. Are we ready to be responsible with a responsive action in order to fulfill the divine agenda for the humanity?
Serenity in a strident world

K.M. Charles Wesley

PSALM 19; MARK 4:35-41; PHILIP 2:1-5

INTRODUCTION

Many of us have been immersed in noise, mostly in Cities and Towns for so long that we have even forgotten what peace and quietness sounds like. Our modern society is full of noise, which impacts our body, spirit and soul. Some sounds are considered as music but the same may be considered as noise to another. Undesired loud sounds are considered as noises. Noises like horn in traffic and motor vehicles, loud speakers, fireworks, and at times loud talking people contribute to noise pollution. What you feed your ears on can be the cause of your ill health like hyper tension, inefficiency at work due to lack of concentration, anger or annoyance and headache which leads to ill temper, mental disturbance and violent behavior in an individual.

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE: PS. 19

When our God created the Earth and its natural ambience, He included in nature the unique echoes to provide peace and tranquility to all the inhabitants of the Earth which produced a sense of harmony and peace. Model of this pattern in the nature includes sounds from brooks, rivers and oceans, waterfalls, breeze, and voices of singing birds, as the Psalmist says, There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Every sound that's made by nature is a voice sung to its Maker. On the other side, the best part of God's creation i.e., the humans are distorting the serenity of the beauty of sounds in nature and turning it to a deafening noise. How would our Lord approach such world?

SURROUNDED BY THE SOUND: MARK 4:35-41

The scenario that Jesus and his disciples were in, the great windstorm, pounding waves symbolically illustrates the present noisy world and its people. His disciples were restless, with no peace and were frightened and disturbed while Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. Interestingly we see in this passage that the disciples who have been fisher folk, spending their lives on the seas, knowing when a storm was approaching and who were in the midst of storm many times, themselves were frightened. The natural sounds when made loud, become a noise and disturbance.

Mark describes the action and response of Jesus to that situation. He woke up and rebuked the wind and said… Silence! Be still! When surrounded by storm, Jesus, by authority, rebuked the stormy winds and raging seas and brought peacefulness, calmness and serenity. Disciples were taken by surprise seeing Jesus' response to the storm. The passage says that the wind ceased and there was a dead calmness. Jesus' response made the disciples to realize the authority that he had over the seas and waters and its roaring waves. Pounding waves, though God's creation, when becoming a disturbing noise, was made still by the Lord. We are in the midst of these noises all through in the communitarian context but as Jesus responded we need to take a stand and rebuke and refute them to pave way for a peaceful and healthy life to the infants, children, the elderly, the sick and the creation at large. Any sound though familiar, that is unnatural and disturbing, need to be confronted and reduced. Sounds that frighten the little ones, sounds that are undesirable and hazardous to our health need to be refuted and silenced.

SELFLESS SOUNDS: PHIL 2:4-5

Jesus sets a model for us not only to use the authority and refute but also to walk in humility and consider others better than ourselves. Paul says in his letter to Philippians, not to do anything for selfish ambition but in humility, to look into others’ interest. Many times we fail to remember
that we need to regard others better than ourselves and often are so caught up with our own self. So much needless stress from noise could be eliminated if people would just be considerate of others. Just plain unselfish consideration! Individually we are responsible and need to be watchful on our involvement towards the noise pollution. For a two year old, the sound of a pressure cooker is a disturbing noise to the delicate eardrums, while the same sound is a necessity for a cooking mother in kitchen to prepare the food. We need to be sensitive towards others and be thoughtful of them. We need either to reduce or refute it. As a Church we ought to consider if we are making any religious noises, any unwanted broadcastings etc. The values of the whole world need to be turned around. Stop honking a vehicle in a hospital area, reducing unnecessary noises and avoiding loudspeakers in residential areas are some of the things we can consider abiding by. When the society is set up and run in God’s way, there will be thoughtful planning against injurious side effects from human endeavours.

CONCLUSION
The real solution to the noise problem involves a fundamental change in the way the society functions. Rising above the situations and willing to take a stand against the issue, we need to rethink our view on noise pollution. We need to strive to maintain the serenity in the creation set by the Lord. As Christ rose above the storm and commanded it to stop, we need to address the undesirable sound. As the prophet says in Isaiah 32:18, My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. Therefore, being considerate to our fellow people, let us stop making noises and let’s strive that our body, spirit and soul may function in the quietness of peace and start spreading the serenity through the sound of sheer silence.

Wildlife: ‘the little ones’

Iniyän Joshva

Matthew 18:6-9

Ecological problem

Women killed by an elephant rampage”, “elephants demolished the public distribution shop building”, “A five year girl killed by a leopard while returning home”. These news are often heard where I am pastoring. Few elephant rampages and bear, leopard attacks in a year are common in Valparai, Anamalai hills, Coimbatore district. Valparai is a high range area, rich in bio diversity, part of Western Ghats, situated in the Anamalai Tiger Reserve forest. Almost 90% of the population is in plantation industry and there are more than 50 Tea Estates. Since the tea estates are near the core forest area, the animal attacks and human – animal conflicts are usual. Animals like Elephants, Bear, Boar, Gaur (Bison) and Leopards get into the settlements often, damage the houses and kill people sometimes. The major reason for these attacks and conflict is because of human interference on the animal corridors. Forest areas were deforested and tea plantations were introduced 150 years back, but the animals lived here over thousands of years. The animal corridors (passage) were used by the animals for centuries, but now, human race for its benefits, built roads, houses, tea plantations, factories, etc., disturbing the animal corridors. Whenever there is a human death in valparai, people protest for relocation of the animals, for their
were started only 150 years ago. During these 150 years, animals living here had very bad experiences; they were intruded, relocated and eliminated. From the animals’ perspective, some (human) species encroached and destroyed their home, took their livelihood and changed their routes. In Anamalai hills, wildlife is in a condition of not knowing what to do because of their lost identity. As Paul says to Romans in 8:22, the creation has been groaning in the pains of child birth. Here in Valparai, the wildlife is groaning in pains, because of human beings’ unending desire to destroy wildlife just to earn money. This is the time we have to realize that the wildlife is co-existing and its co-existence is very much needed for our existence; God wants us to live together. But our greedy minds are against God’s will and we don’t hesitate to destroy wildlife for our benefit. By our actions, we made wildlife vulnerable; this is the high time that we must realize and accept that the wildlife is a vulnerable section. Especially we should realize that God is with the vulnerable creation and not with the dominant group. Jesus says, it’s better for those who stumble the little ones (vulnerable section), to drown in the sea with the millstone tied to their neck.

The little ones
The chosen passage, Matt 18:6 – 9 states that those who disturb the Christ’s disciples or followers (little ones), it’s better for them to be drowned in sea with millstones tied to them. The ‘little ones’ is not simply the Christ disciples or followers, but includes all those who are vulnerable. Matthew uses the term, ‘little ones’, or ‘one of the least’ in three places, 10:42, 18:6 and 25:40. In all these occurrences, the little ones and one of the least, denote vulnerable community and those who are with the vulnerable will be in Lord's Kingdom. The little ones are meek, poor, weak, powerless, vulnerable, and can’t do anything without the assistance of others, like children, who cannot do anything without the parents’ assistance. The vulnerable people according to Matt 25:40, are those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or in prison. We can say all those vulnerable communities are little ones in the sight of Jesus Christ. And those who are a stumbling block to the vulnerable, Jesus says, it is better for them to be thrown in the sea with millstones tied to their neck.

Accepting as vulnerable
Like those vulnerable community, people living in Valparai and the surrounding estates are also vulnerable because they cannot confront the animals. They are prone to animal attacks on their lives and property. Especially the labour community is more vulnerable, because they live in estate areas and their houses are not so protected like the officer’s houses. But we view the issue from our side alone. It is necessary to shift our perspective from human beings to that of the whole creation. By looking in the human beings’ perspective alone, we forget to look from the wildlife side. The wild animals like Elephants or Gaur have their own corridors and they teach it to the next generation. Animals like Leopard and Tiger have their own boundary and they won’t go out of it. They can’t exist if they are relocated. Monkeys, squirrels, birds and small animals depend on fruit bearing trees and shola forest. Wildlife is not only the common wild animals we see, but it includes a tiny insect in a tree to a huge elephant and a tiny vine to a huge tree. In Anamalai hills, the tea plantation industries

Not as a stumbling block
We, human beings, are the stumbling block to the wild life in Valparai. The wildlife were living peacefully for centuries, but within 150 years, human beings changed the entire place which now is feasible for human beings, not for the wildlife. Some argue that the wild animals are killing people and so we must relocate or kill them. We are the reason for those killings; we are in their home, destroying their lives. We should not expect love from wild animals, but we human beings are created to love one another. Accepting the wildlife as a vulnerable section itself is a great change from human beings’ side. That love is expected from every human being towards wildlife. As we read in Matt 18:6 – 9, we should not disturb the little ones; if we disturb, then we are the stumbling block. Here in our context, wildlife is the ‘little ones’ in the sight of Jesus Christ and human beings are stumbling block to them. Jesus Christ says that it is better to tie a millstone to the neck and throw them to the sea for those who are stumbling blocks to the little ones. We the human beings, should realize our mistakes and pave way for the wildlife to live peacefully, so that the kingdom of God can be seen on the Earth always.
Jesus’ response

What would Jesus do, if he is living in Valparai? He certainly would groan with the wildlife. In the end of sixth day of creation, “God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31a). The ‘Good’ to God’s eyes is not perceived as good by human beings and sometimes seen as a hindrance to the human beings. Jesus surely would see the good in co-existence and as he taught the ‘then’ people, surely he would teach the people to love the wildlife and would teach how to co-exist with the wildlife. Jesus Christ is so compassionate with the meek and weak. Sometimes, like he took the whip to clean the church premises and the profit-motive minds, he would use the whip on those who are making money out of wildlife. As the disciples of Jesus Christ, let us follow His path and accept the wildlife as ‘little ones’. By accepting the wild life as little ones, we may not be the ‘stumbling blocks’ to them and be ready to co-exist with them. May God help us to accept the ‘little ones’ and make us instruments to change the world into ‘God’s Kingdom’. Amen.

Unheard Cry of Living Water

S. Samuel Livingstone

John 4:7-15

Water is the elixir of life. People in their mundane life depend on water for their daily living and this is a universal truth. But water has become a mirage to common people in the village, urban areas, townships and cities; they are at the mercy of water suppliers for their livelihood. There is water scarcity ubiquitously. Water bodies are polluted every second by Sewage water, Leather tanneries, cloth dyeing units, nuclear wastes, and other chemical wastes. Day by day the concern has increased about water being contaminated by these polluting agents. These wastages mix with the drinking water in the lakes, rivers and water reservoirs and affect the mother Earth. This also ruins the ground level water which is not good for drinking and daily usages. In Tamil Nadu, districts like Erode and Tirupur, are covered by leather tanneries, cloth dyeing units, nuclear wastes, and other chemical wastes. Some factories even run without proper license or avoid certain process in purifying the waste or used water. These wastages are directly channeled to the river Cauvery and river Noyyal, and the water in these rivers turn to black and are filled with chemical foam in certain river beds. This causes the ground level water to be polluted and in the surface level too it continues to affect water plants, soil and aquatic beings. People who depend on these rivers for cultivation are in a great trauma. Water which is a life giver to all creations
on the Earth causes diseases to human beings, plants and pollutes the soil. Water is a life giving resource to all living beings on the earth, but due to anthropocentric nature, human beings destroy water bodies. In future, the next generation people will curse us for our selfish attitudes. On the day of Judgment Mother Earth will be a witness against us for spoiling God's wonderful creation.

This passage speaks about a Samaritan woman who comes to the well to draw water and Jesus converses with that woman who is longing to get the living water. The woman can be compared to the society and the deeper water level can be compared to the scarcity in the present day situation and Jesus' responding to her to give uncontaminated water.

The Well Is Deep
You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep, Where can you get this living water? Is it a question from this Samaritan woman? People in the present day find it hard to get pure water and also there is scarcity in supplying pure water to people. The factories and industries take the ground water enormously for their process and the ground water gets deeper. During half the year people are not able to get access to water which is deep and contaminated and they protest in the streets with empty pots. This Samaritan woman represents the present day society, where one has to walk miles to fetch good drinking water. People are unable to get proper water in their area and the water supply is only once a week. Hence they have to store water in huge drums for the rest of the days. The bore well also fails in these places because people selfishly keep boring the ground deeper and deeper, comparing water level points of others. Here also Samaritan woman too travels from a distance to fetch water to satisfy her needs, people at present day move from one place to another for water. The Jacob's well is deep to draw water for the Jew (Jesus) who is without any vessel to drink water and the long journey makes him weary and tired. Jesus asking for a drink to fulfill his thirst represents the humanities thirst towards fetching pure water and water bodies' plea towards God to purify them. Hagar (Genesis 21:14-19) who in her journey wandered in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba got tired and the water in the skin was over. The child was dying because there was no water to quench its thirst. People cry for pure water to live in this world, water also groans to God to redeem it from these corrupt minded people. In present day water has lost its purity because of greedy and selfish people. They don't worry about their neighbours and they go to any extent to contaminate water for earning money. Water is affected, polluted and has lost its originality, and the common people who drink the contaminated water are infected with many harmful diseases. Water, the finest creation of all the creations, is affected by these types of harmful elements.

Living Water
(V10) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” It was living water of which Jesus spoke. In common language, to a Jew, Living water was running water, the pure one to drink and to use for daily works. It was the water of the running stream as against the water of the stagnant cistern (contaminated water not good for the usage (V14) but whoever drinks the water I give them, will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Living water is a basic need and dream for everyone in the world. But we are forced to spend money on buying water. Twenty years earlier buying a bottle of water was uncommon but now it has been commercialized. The fateful thing in Tamilnadu Government is that liquor (TASMAC) shops are run by the government but it has not looked into the necessity of uncontaminated water. The expenditure for water has entered into our family budget. In India gold is preserved but water is wasted. Earth has had the same water ever since it was formed. Scientists understand that water cannot leave this earth. It just follows the water cycle – rain, flows into rivers or runs into the earth, joins the ocean, evaporates, forms a cloud and comes back as rain. But today the “available drinking water” is less and has to be used by a large number of people. Jesus at this situation will condemn and restore the water bodies which were contaminated for selfish use. Jesus would take this common cause as his personal issue; he will not be inactive by simply ignoring the cry of mother earth and the people’s cry for living water. As he cleansed the temple with a whip and through those polluted money collectors table, likewise he will invite all the common people who are thirsty to get the living water and stage a protest, whip the unlicensed factories, close those chemical industries which send its polluted water directly into the water bodies. It is high time for the Christian community
of educated people to think on ecological concerns and to safeguard the natural resources which are not recyclable. Isaiah 41:17-20 says that when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, the Lord will answer them. It is a consoling word from God to the people in ecological crisis who strive to get unpolluted water. It is the duty of every Christian to protect and live for the co-creation in the mother earth. Water is a God created precious resource and it is more valuable than platinum, gold, silver, or diamonds, which are kept in our cupboards and vaults. It is our Christian responsibility to preserve and to conserve for the betterment of the future generation. We are accountable to God in safeguarding His resources.

Then Water turned into Blood...

M. Prashanth Babu

II Samuel 23: 13-17

Ellampalli Project in Adilabad district of Telangana has submerged several villages. Most of the people living in these villages are mainly depending on agriculture. A huge dam was built in the recent years to meet the needs of industries around and for drinking water to be supplied to Hyderabad city. Many dams and projects in India were built with similar motives and the people who were living in the project area lost their land and livelihood. Many times the word rehabilitation is used to evict the people from the proposed dam area and hardly total rehabilitation is realized. It will be very hard for the people from these villages and tribal areas to opt for different and alternative living styles. Globally people in urban areas enjoy drinking water at the cost of the lives of several villagers and tribals.

13 During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim.

14 At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison
was at Bethlehem.

15 David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!”

16 So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord.

17 “Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty men.

Being Content with the creation is being faithful to the Creator

It is before the reign of King David over Israel during his wilderness wanderings. He is a leader of a group of mighty men. It is very common for soldiers and at times the rulers also to suffer during the war. Not only David, even his followers might be thirsty, they are somehow managing their thirst. Many times strong and powerful people demand to fulfill their desires irrespective of the scenario and the needs around them. David here wants water from a well in the town of Bethlehem. May be David is not willing to adjust with the situation or not willing to satisfy his thirst with the water available around them.

Earth has enough resources to meet the needs of the people, but not anyone’s greed. - Mahatma Gandhi

There are many like David in our present day times that are not willing to adjust or to live with the available resources. As Gandhi rightly said almost every village, town and city has its own water resource facility. But unfortunately by the greed of a few, many lakes were in extinct and to meet the needs of these urban areas many villages, tribal hamlets and forest land is drowned.

Present day charismatic spirituality does not preach or teach us to be content. The writer of the book of proverbs in chapter 30: 15 says that Leach always says, Give, give and it never satisfies. This kind of life is an abomination to God. Jesus during his earthly ministry fed the multitudes with five loaves of bread and two fishes. Jesus performed miracles with resources available. In John 6: 12 He says gather the left over bread pieces ‘let nothing go waste’. This shows how a Christian should lead his/her life with satisfaction and caring the needs of others.

Repentance a Sign of Kingdom of God

Three men risked their lives to satisfy the thirst of their leader. David realized the cost of the water and refused to drink it. He calls and names that water as the blood of those warriors. But there are many who drink the water at the cost of the poor farmers and tribal knowing that it is their life and blood. So many dams and projects in India were built at the cost of the life of the people, forest land and wild animals. The creation is groaning for redemption from the clutches of human greed and corporate sin. Subscribing the idea of development has become the trend and fashion of the day. David is struggling with the powers of monarchy during the wandering period. David realized and repented for what has happened. David chose an alternative style of leadership from that of the existing exploitative one.

Jesus’ preaching during his earthly ministry begins with the call of repentance. He says that the kingdom of God is at hand and calls people to repent to become part of the kingdom. We are called to be sensitive towards the cries of the poor and vulnerable communities around us. We need to repent for every corporate sin we have committed and should walk in the paths of righteousness. Amen.
Creation wasted by waste

D. C. Premraj

The issue

Progress has been one major driving principle for policy makers and development economies and one easy option taken was intense industrialization. The result of industrialization was mass production and the consumer buying potential was seen as a resource that will ensure generation of wealth. Industrialization was also seen as the way to generate employment and alleviate poverty and this option was considered without realizing the consequences. A major consequence of modernization is the generation of waste. Intensive industrialization brought employment and generated wealth but gave rise to industrial waste of various kinds, some just occupying space but some very hazardous, polluting the land and vital natural resources. Policy makers and planners never seem to have a clue about the enormous waste which they had to manage. Globally we find wealthier nations getting rid of their waste by paying a price to use the lands of poorer nations as their dump yard. This had huge environmental implications with impact of land and life supporting systems.

Modernization also brought about wealth generation by promoting aggressive consumerism. This fed into the greed of people as people started buying aggressively, some what they needed and some what they actually did not need. Consumerism also generates waste which is non bio degradable. The recent 20 years has brought in an electronic revolution and the outcome of this revolution is massive non bio degradable electronic waste. The affluence of people combined with availability of electronic gadgets is proving very hazardous as there is phenomenal electronic waste societies had to handle.

Some of the major issues that the earth and its atmosphere is facing are vast lands converted as waste dump yards. Industrial, electronics and domestic waste is dumped in lands and without any systematic way of disposing waste it is dumped outside cities. Industries such as tanneries and others who use hazardous chemicals do not have an ethical way of disposing of chemical effluence and they sink into the earth polluting the earth's vital resources such as ground water. People are affected and so are other habitations. All this has a major impact on climate. Some corporations and municipalities burn waste which includes plastic and rubber waste and that fills the air with hazardous gases.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO WASTE MANGEMENT

Sabbath Spirituality in Genesis 2.1-3
1. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.
2. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

The Old Testament writers speak of Sabbath spirituality in the book of Genesis, while God is ordering the entire creation, God is including a Sabbath regulation which is to say enough. Even God in His amazing power could go on creating, could say, “enough.” The writers say that ‘God finished the work that He had done’. God had a plan of what He was going to do and how much He was going to do and when that came to a completion, God seemed to be satisfied that what He had made was good. The problem with modern world is its inability to define how much. Waste could be curtailed if people could control the production – consumption – waste generation cycle by saying, “enough.”

Sufficiency Spirituality in Matthew 6. 25-31
The biblical witness to God always portrays God as the provider. God’s grace is sufficient to people. The entire scheme of the created order is the
sufficient blessing of God for the entire creation. The sin of humankind is the sin of reordering creation by manipulation. In the reordering of creation there is only one goal and that is wealth and not well-being of the human species and the entire creation. God's goodness and sufficiency in creation is plundered by science and technology, triggered by greed. Human intellect is amused and amazed by what they create by manipulation of earth's resources and they are not amazed or amused by the sufficiency in the created order where there is plenty to sustain and generate life. The amusement of technology leaves waste as the by-product which is such a burden for the entire scheme of creation. It is important to be amazed by God's creation and not by the manipulation of the creation.

Surplus Spirituality in John 6.5-13
We are left with such a lot of waste because society does not know the value of surplus. For our Lord Jesus Christ, surplus is sacred and it has to be collected and not to be turned into waste. In John 6th chapter there is immense need for food and there is the miracle of feeding the five thousand. People do not need bread anymore since they are full and the left over is irrelevant to them. For Jesus the left over is relevant and He orders that the remains be collected and they collect the fragments in 12 baskets. This is quite a quantity of food that could feed so many people. The sin of modern human being is the arrogance to waste the surplus instead of putting the surplus to use by sharing. Jesus teaches his disciples that food is so precious and that it cannot be wasted. The implication of the sacredness of surplus is to devise a technology that will find use for the waste and waste should be reusable.

The Sin of Waste
Waste left by humanity is impacting life support systems all over the world. Waste disposal has become the ugly side of technology and a greedy consumerist society. Earth's vital resources should be preserved for life to carry on. Unjustly so many people and communities are subject to hazardous chemicals and are becoming prone to diseases and death. Improper waste disposal is not only affecting people but even the oceans and the climate.

Change should begin with the individual person recognizing the sacredness of the creation as it is a sacramental goodness of God to all creation. It is not justifiable that human beings who are only one part of creation to destroy the well-being of the creation by the sin of wasting and generating waste to extent suffocating God's creation.
extinction of living beings. The whole issue that is to be discussed and practiced is why humans have been given an upper hand in creation. God might have thought that bearing His image, humans would do just as He does, creating and sustaining creation.

The rise of cancer patients in Kerala put an alarm on the ears of the authorities. It has led them to carefully examine various causes of cancer. One of the causes, they fear, that results in cancer is the food that people consume. It has been reported that food materials imported from other states are, to a large extent, poisonous because of the over usage of pesticides while planting, and other highly toxic preservatives used while transporting. What should become good for the health of the people results in health hazards due to callous nature of handling environment and its produce. Use of pesticide also damages the land, killing the natural pest enemies, thus increasing obstacles to cultivation and destroying other biodiversity.

What should be our response in such situations? What should we do in order to prevent ecological destruction and extinction of species including humans? Let us see what insights we can gain from our Holy Text, the Bible, to prevent such mass destruction.

1. God’s Choice and Fruitfulness (Gen 1: 27,28)

To begin with, we must start from the creation. In creation, humans became crown, not by virtue of our superior status, but by God’s choice. If it is God’s choice to be at the crown of creation, humans need to understand its role in relation to God’s overall purpose. God took special care in creating and ordering the ecosystem, solar system and other planetary arrangements before creating humans and humans are placed in this system so that they may explore and maintain the harmony of creation. In verse 28 of the first chapter of Genesis, it is written: “God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it”. Here I would like to bring your attention to the word ‘fruitfulness’. Traditionally it is understood that fruitfulness stands for numerical increase. But fruitfulness is not just a term to be understood physically. It can have lots of connotations, especially when Jesus has stressed to bear fruit in relation with Him and His Father (John 15:15, 16). Fruitfulness is a living...
condition where one comes to know about the Father's business. Jesus has made known His Father's business to disciples as far as they could grasp. In the present ecological crisis, in relation with Christ, it is our duty as Jesus' disciples to understand His Father's business in relation to our environment. God saw that all His creation was good at the time of creation and we cannot destroy what God had declared good by our careless handling of the environment for our selfish purposes. Environment was created not only for humans but for all living beings in it. Therefore we need to take care of all elements within the environment in order to do justice to God's overall purpose and be fruitful.

2. Limitation to Human Centered Growth and Development (Gen 11:1-9)

Development in the form of the story of Babel tower tells us that if the development is not properly focused it is better to stop than inviting danger. In this section of Genesis, after the floods, humans have decided to build a city that reaches to heavens using bricks instead of stone and bitumen for mortar. The substance used here for building shows human development and achievement. But their achievement did not focus on the fruitfulness part discussed above. It was said in Genesis to be fruitful and then rule over fish, birds and every living creature on earth.

In the story of Babel Tower, human development programme did not consider other living creatures on earth. They were trying to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4). In other words, their development programme was just human centered and not oriented towards God, who is the creator of all living beings. When God saved humans from the flood to continue their existence, it was not just humans that God saved but two of all kinds of living beings. As far as creation is concerned all major decisions of God included other living beings also as we can see in the creation story and the flood story of Noah. But today somehow we, humans, have lost that focus and invited ecological crisis, bringing a dangerous situation of extinction of all living forms by our developmental program, which we have planned only for our own well-being.

Today it has almost come to a point that unless a dramatic intervention of God takes place, we cannot stop building human centered Babel towers.

3. A Lesson to Control Our Desires

As God was leading Israel out of Egypt, in order to fulfill their desire, God gave them bread and meat to eat (Exodus 16). It is written that the Israelites ate manna for forty years until they came to a land that was settled. When God provided food, it was according to the needs of the people rather than their greed. Israelites said that in Egypt, they sat around pots of meat and ate all the food they wanted (Exodus 16:3). There was plenty and variety of food in Egypt as Israelites remembered. But when God provided them, sufficient quantity of same food was available for forty years. People were supposed to take only what is needed for the day. Those who gathered more did not find it useful since it got infected with maggots the next day.

There is a lesson we derive from this passage that earth's resources are only for our need and sustenance and not for our greed. Today environmental degradation happens because of the modern day development slogan, which says: Maximum production, Maximum consumption and Maximum profit. According to this slogan, development is measured in terms of money and profit making. More profit means more benefit and more developmental scope. So productions of goods are not according to the need of humanity but according to their wild irrational wishes and desires. We must know that desires would never be fully met in our life unless and until we decide to put a bridle on it. Buddha was right in identifying desire as the root cause of all sufferings. As desires multiply, we tend to do more ecologically destructive acts. Comfort and luxury have reached to a maximum level that we steal away comfort of the future generation by destroying their ecology. Therefore our responsible thinking on any human enterprises must take into consideration human need before addressing developmental ideas.

Are the development agenda useful for our sustenance? How many are getting benefit from it? Does it relate to the common need of humanity or only cater to the needs of a few individuals, who are rich and influential? Here is where we need to curb our selfish interests in order to save earth's resources for our future generations. For that we need to have a concentrated effort from all quarters of the world. Human need must be
considered in proportion to every one’s needs rather than the needs of economically and politically powerful.

May God help us to be ecologically oriented in our thoughts, actions and needs in order to be fruitful and fulfill the purpose of God on earth in relation with His entire creation!

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**“The New Heaven and the New Earth”**

*D. Jeyasingh*

**Rev. 21:1-7**

**Introduction**

The very word ecology is an umbrella term in which the earth, environment, the whole atmosphere comes in. Hence we would like to look forward an eco-balance in the planet where we live in the nearest future. This can be achieved only by the change in our attitude towards ecology (nature). For the past two decades there are many warning news comes like this, on this day the earth will vanish! On that day the earth will perish! But we should realize the fact that the earth will not be smashed/disappear just on a particular day but it has been started destroying already and may lead to the worst if we do not think appropriately and act immediately. As we all knew, in the beginning God created the whole creation including earth in its order and found everything as good. God has not just created the earth and everything on it but most importantly God dwells in it Jer.23:24. Above all God so loved this world and it is the reason that God made an everlasting covenant between all creatures on earth and Him (Gen. 9:13-17). In the recent past the exploitation of natural resources by humans by using/misusing/overusing leads to several other disasters naturally which brings disorder in ecological balance.

We all like new things, new clothes, new house, new culture and everything to be new than the old things. Here in Rev.21:5 God said “see I am making all things new”. We have to be very watchful in these words, God did not say “all new things” rather “all things new”. That means the present/existing thing will take a new way/order. And the words “making” in v.5 and “coming down” in v.2 all are in “present continuous tense” insists/ refers that God is not going to create new things, but instead God is started “creating all things in a new way/manner”. Keeping this central theme in our minds let us meditate the selected passage in the following three points to achieve an eco-balance in the eco-system where we live in.

1. Earth: A place to “Worship God”

V.3 – “See the house of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his people and God himself will be with them”.

And also we read from Hab. 2:14, Num: Nu14:21 and Is 6:3 “that this whole earth is full of his glory”. Hence it is very clear that God created the whole universe and dwells in it and fills with his glory. But humans’ voracity to exploit the nature keeps on increasing in an alarming rate by destroying God’s glory of harmony, peace and order which was there in nature. Every face of nature and its resources has been looted in all the means. That is the reason the Bible calls us to turn our ways from gluttony to Rev. 14:7 “…worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water”. Because earth is the only planet where we mortals can exist and experience God’s glory. So let us withdraw from wasting every resource and “worship God” with His fullness of glory, on this beautiful planet “Earth”.

2. Earth: A place to Experience the “Will of God”

v.4 – “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more...”

Not only by reading this but we can say that all through the history God’s Will is always to be along with the oppressed, suppressed, exploited, untouchable, least, lost and the last ones to bring justice, peace and harmony. Furthermore, in Matt.6:10, Lord Jesus Christ is very clearly teaching us to pray “…Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

Again this earth where we all live becomes a central place to experience “God’s Will” hence as God’s people (Laos) we are called to safeguard this beautiful earth to experience God’s Will, not only in our lives but to the generation after generations to come. That is what we read in Heb. 10:36, “when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”

In a way to realize the eschatological promise of new heaven and new earth (Rev.21:1-7), we have to do the will of God (i.e., to safeguard the perishing earth and protect it)

3. Earth: A Place to “Work with God”

v.5 – “See, I am making all things new”

The whole Bible from Gen.2:2 till Rev.21:5, God is found to be intervening in human history/experience as a worker to heal, strengthen, reconcile, save and lead His people/any creation/creatures. The same God who revealed in Lord Jesus Christ, calls us to do the same work in Jn. 9:4, “we must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; night is coming when no one can work”. Hence, this is the right time to think and act when the repair/damage that we brought in the eco-sphere in a small level but when it crosses the control-limit then even if we wish to stop we cannot face the consequences at all. Because the work that we are all called / involved is not the human will but as Paul says in Phil.2:13, “For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and at work for His good pleasure.” Always remembering this, let us make up our minds and join our hands with God to work out His Will and worship Him as it is said in Eph.6:10, “whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all”

Conclusion

The human ravenousness has grown up in a way to acquire anything and everything to accumulate for its self-pride. All the resources have been scratched deeply to injure the eco-sphere. The Bible says in Matt.5:35 and in Acts 7:49, “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool”. Today both the universal space and the living space (earth) have been smashed up. By damaging the face of the earth and universe we are spoiling God’s glory on this planet. That is why Paul while writing to Romans in chapter 8: 22, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now...” once again remembering that this earth is the only place
Climate Change

Paul Francis

Joel 1:6-20

The last couple of decades have witnessed alarming changes in climate. The changes seem to intensify and suddenly there is a great alarm about the future of the planet. By the year 2050 one fourth of the earth's species may be facing extinction. Such is the great alarm that is gripping the planet. Climate change is already beginning to transform life on Earth. Around the globe, seasons are shifting, temperature is going up and sea level is rising. And meanwhile, our planet must still supply us – and all living things – with air, water, food and safe places to live. We are now realizing that if we don’t act now, climate change will rapidly alter the lands and waters we all depend upon for survival, leaving our children and grandchildren with a very different world.

Heat-trapping gases emitted by power plants and automobiles, deforestation and other sources are warming up the planet. In fact, the five hottest years on record have all occurred since 1997 and the 10 hottest since 1990, including the warmest years on record – 2005 and 2010. High temperatures are to blame for an increase in heat-related deaths and illness, rising seas, increased storm intensity, and many of the other dangerous consequences of climate change. During the 20th century, the Earth’s average temperature rose one degree Fahrenheit to its highest level in the past four centuries – believed to be the fastest rise in a thousand

filled with God’s glory to worship Him and this is the only place to realize/experience God’s will and to work with God hand in hand. Let us join this great venture to bring God’s dream in reality and to save the nature as it is in Rev 11:15. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rain forever and ever. Let us know make up our minds to work with God to bring back the harmony, peace and justice to prevail over this beautiful planet – earth. God would like to work through human hands... Are our hands ready to join the venture? Amen.
years. Scientists project that if emissions of heat-trapping carbon aren’t reduced, average surface temperatures could increase by 3 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. The planet’s oceans are also warming, which is causing dangerous consequences such as stronger storms, coral bleaching and rising seas.

While these changes are alarming, it is more painful to realize that human activity is a major contributing factor for this destruction. Warming of the atmosphere is not a natural process but it is an impact of human activity which is based on consumerism and aggressive industrialization. It is a vicious cycle of affluence bringing about ability to buy and this tendency would open up new levels of industrial production. The carbon footprint that people leave behind is destroying life systems that are so graciously and wonderfully created by God. Human activity that is causing global warming is the sin of our time. All activities that destroy life is sin to the creation.

THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Climate change and global warming are a major threat to God’s creation. Creation reflects so much of God, God’s goodness, God’s love and God’s graciousness. Life within this created order is a spiritual experience as there is so much of God in creation. As people live their lives with this understanding, life is nothing but an experience of encountering God each moment. The present catastrophe that we see is the consequence of unspiritual and ungodly living. The self is God and the entire creation and the fullness of creation are offered to please the self by manipulation and this only ends in destruction. People still use technologies as ecological enemies, in fact as enemies of God. Global warming has brought about disastrous changes. St. Paul would tell the church in Rome that the entire creation is groaning for redemption. Salvation is not only personal but very inclusive and whole, including the entire creation.

Enormous damage has been done already – So many species have been wiped out – there are others who are endangered. There is so much of vagaries of climate leading to failure of agriculture and agricultural economies leading to breakdown of food production systems. There is a crisis for water, scarcity for food. Now is the time for a change and it is now the time for the healing of God’s creation. There is more to protecting God’s creation than merely planting trees. The present situation calls for a total change of our life style. There is no way for an improvement without people having a new eco-friendly life style. All over the world there is a great awakening.

Sin and Ecological Consequences

The sin of society has a huge bearing on the entire created order and Prophet Joel in chapter one agonizes over the way the entire eco system is affected by human sin. When people and social institutions are corrupt and defy God, the result is the disturbance of the entire created order. God is so much in creation and people defying God’s commandments becomes people’s condemnation. When God’s expectations of people are not fulfilled, it makes people suffer and along with people economy suffers and all aspects of creation viz., plants, animals, birds and even the ocean creatures suffer. The Global warming is an alarm that God is giving people to recreate social institutions and that is possible when people return to God and live according to the pattern that God has ordered the creation to be.

Salvation and the Rebirth of Creation

Our Lord Jesus Christ in Mark Chapter 13 speaks about changes in atmosphere and calls them as signs before the end of the created order. The prophets of the Old Testament also speak about changes in the atmosphere. Prophet Isaiah writes (Isaiah 13:10) ‘For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.’ God gives people an opportunity to restore the beauty of creation and the abundance of the life giving aspects of creation. This would mean that people have to change in the way policies are formulated and in the way science is understood and used. It is a fact that valueless science and technology only acts counter-productive to God’s goodness and graciousness.

Doom to Deliverance

Jesus Christ invites people to a new life style inspired by the birds of the air and the flowers of the field (Matthew 6.25-34). A life without anxiety or undue worry but with total confidence in God endures. A spiritual perspective of life and sources of life will ensure the well-being of the human beings and the entire eco system. What Christ calls for is a radical
change in lifestyle and total turn in the way to live. Only such repentance will deliver the world from doom and destruction. People struggle for their needs and some people worry for their greed. People are possessed, we are possessed by possessions and we end up wanting and wanting more of material things. This is a problem because sufficiency comes from what one possesses and not from God. Life is about having – people toil and struggle that they may have and possess. This style of living has created a great danger for God’s plan for the entire creation. The entire created order is facing a crisis of destruction due to global warming. Consumerism and human greed has led to the overuse and the misuse of the earth’s resources. Wealth which should be a blessing becomes a curse for people. The people and societies suffer. Is there a way out? Jesus invites us to a new way of living, to celebrate life when we live according to God’s purposes.

Genetic engineering:
Handling technology with Christian modus operandi

(Concerns about genetically modified foods and genetic pollution)

Christopher Dharmaraj

Scripture: Genesis 1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25

Introduction

Genetic modification is a contemporary ecological issue which is crying for our churches reflection on creation. The church has to advocate the integrity of creation with the present technologized sphere. The deliberations of the Church shall integrate the scientific understanding of genetic modification with the theological awareness of God as Creator.

Genetic engineering allows the Christian community to care for the world, by increasing the amount of crops and plants and protecting them. Christians are in the position to necessitate ensuring that no human can starve in their privations.
We may argue that humans are given control by the Creator God over the world and everything in it, including the genes of plants and animals. Subsequently, Christians are in the situation to accept the genetic engineering such as genetically modified foods and are acceptable provided that it does not cause harm to the environment. We further thrash out both the positive and negative consequences of the genetic technology to the environment and how it relates with God-Creation-Human beings.

**Definition: What the Genetic Engineering Entails to the Environment?**

The Genetic engineering is acceptable when it is to cure a painful disease or disorder. It allows Christians to follow the teachings and actions of Jesus by helping those who are sick and in pain. Genetic engineering is a science of making changes to the genes of a plant or animal to produce a desired result. It is a technique of genetics which applies to cut up and join together the genetic material. This is a kind of biotechnology which applies to DNA from one or more organisms and to introduce the result into an organism in order to change one or more of its characteristics. To understand the technique is that the crops were made resistant to disease by genetic engineering.

The term initially meant any of a wide range of techniques for modifying or manipulating organisms through heredity and reproduction. This technique used to produce new genetic combinations that bring value to the science, medicine, agriculture, or even in industry. It is done by the artificial manipulation, modification and recombination of DNA or the nuclei and molecules in order to modify an organism.

Particularly in the environment of agriculture the plants have been genetically adjusted to perform nitrogen fixation and facilitate to produce their own pesticides. It helps to produce the bacteria that is capable of biodegrading oil that has been produced for the use in oil-spill cleanups. All nations are having substantial agricultural systems to develop new varieties that increase the yielding, disease resistances, tolerance to drought, salinity and water logging. The slip-ups of the humanity to care the creation bring the urgency for the new varieties of crops but at the same time the methods which are used to produce these varieties must be carefully evaluated.

**Biblical view of genetic manipulation: the newly developing genetic technology vs. the Old Testament creation technology narratives.**

God tells us He personally created all the kinds of organisms individually. He allows us and said that they were to reproduce according to their kind. When God saw that each kind was reproducing according to their own kind, He said that it was good. From one He multiplies them. We can understand God's technology by reading Genesis 1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25 in the Old Testament. Most creationists believe that the word, ‘kind,’ referred in the book of Genesis was equivalent to our genus or family taxonomy classifications. God created each kind in specific order and He used similar genes for similar functions throughout many kinds. He tells us to till and care for His garden (Genesis 2:15). God forbids the cross-breeding that is one shall not crossbreed two sorts of animals. One shall not sow your field with two sorts of seed. Nor shall a garment made of two sorts of mixed material come upon (Leviticus 19:19). One shall not sow your vineyard with different sorts of seed for the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard will be unholy (Deuteronomy 22:9).

**Are the Genetically modified foods/ crops / plants are sustaining God’s Creation?**

GM foods are most commonly used to refer to crop plants created for human or animal consumption using the latest molecular biology techniques. The plants have been modified in the laboratory to enhance desired traits such as increased resistance to herbicides or improve nutritional content. Plants are genetically enhanced and GM plant will gain drought tolerance. The bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is a kind of toxic to certain insects which affects the particular crop. Scientists incorporate the gene from this bacterium that makes it toxic to insects.

**Recompenses of genetically modified crops**

The world population has topped 6 billion people and is predicted to double in the next 50 years. Ensuring an adequate food supply for this booming population is going to be a major challenge in the years to come. But, genetically modified foods are a gift to meet this need in many ways. Through the genetic technology pest resistance crops can be helpful to the farmers from the financial loss. God has given the authority to His...
people to till and protect the land (Genesis 2:15). So the technology now helps to fulfill God’s vision on human kind. It helps the people those who do not wish to eat food that has been treated with pesticides. Growing genetically modified foods such as BT. Corn can help to eliminate the application of chemical pesticides and reduce the cost of bringing a crop to market.

- The plant biologists are working to create plants with genetically engineered resistance to these diseases. The GM (Genetically Modified) foods are disease resistant from viruses, fungi and bacteria that causes plant diseases.
- The GM foods are producing the climatic tolerant seedlings like, cold tolerant, drought tolerant/salinity tolerant plants. Because of population growth the famers are forced to grow crops in the land which is unsuited for plant cultivation.
- GM crops are aimed at improving the nutritional properties of the crops to enhance human health. The carrots which are being engineered to have higher calcium content with the intention of developing betterment of human health.
- Farmers can use less pesticide on insect-resistant GM plants. The pesticides may be one of the causes for the environmental damages
- GM crops are better protected by, and they are not so susceptible to diseases, insects and herbicides and it allows to a more consistent yield.
- Pest resistant GM crops reduce the need to blanket spray on entire crops which impacts the entire insect population. It targets only the pest insects that eat the crop.

In the field of environment, genetic engineering plays a vital role as a technology. The bio- scientist can engineer the metabolic capabilities of the micro-organisms and then these micro-organisms will help the humanity in coping with environmental problems. The genetic engineered microbes will help in the mining industry of minerals and also in the cleaning up of highly toxic mining wastes.

Is Genetically Modified Foods a Disagreement with Bible?
Environmental activists, religious organizations, public interest groups, professional associations and other scientists and government officials, all have raised concerns about the GM foods.

Environmental hazards
The BT. corn caused high mortality rates in monarch butterfly caterpillars. This kind of caterpillars consumes only milkweed plants not the corn, but the pollen from BT. corn is blown by the wind onto milkweed plants in neighbouring fields, the cater pillars could eat the pollen and perish.

The gene transfer or the weeds cross-breeding to make disease resistant plants can be possible in genetic engineering. For example creating a vitamin rich Tomato with a Carrot gene. The Bible questioning this process with Leviticus 19:19.

The hybrid (mixed) vegetables are with the ability to repel soil bugs. The genetic scientists broke the pollination barrier by combining their germ cells and nurturing them in a laboratory tissue culture. A question raises here. It may be convenient for the farmer, but how they are safe to consume?

The toxic effects of insect resistant plants could potentially kill beneficial insects like Bees.

Genetic pollution
Genetic engineered crops contain genes which have been transferred from foreign species like, bacteria, viruses. This may bring the contamination or pollution of the natural gene pool. The flora and fauna growing nearby are pollinated by genetically modified crops. The organic or conventional agricultural fields may be affected by Genetically Modified crops/plants.

- The globalized organization like ‘Monsanto’ urges the farmers and consumers to consume the GM foods in order to eradicate the starvation across world.
- A genetic engineered crop grows and at the same time, the risk also grows. The pollens of GM crops will spread and damage the agricultural environment.
Unlike other forms of pollution, genetic contamination has the potential to be a problem that multiplies as plants and micro-organisms grow and reproduce. The genetically modified organisms cannot be confined to the original habitat in which they are introduced.

The Church - the Genetic technology - the environment: a modus operandi

The scientific technology and theology relationship is therefore complementary rather than competitive. A positive debate is necessary. The Genetic modified technology contains within it the capacity to re-design creation at the heart of life, in accordance with human desires and preferences. Let me rise a question, to what extent the re-designing be possible in accordance with God's will? Since, we are made in the image of God and given the dominion over creation have the responsibility to God to care for creation. The gift of freewill of the humankind has to play a vital role to deal with the technology to save the environment. Therefore, in the field of genetic modification, we need to apply great wisdom.

The human responsibility towards the creation has been challenged in our anthropocentric pre-occupation of well-being of humanity. It is our God given responsibility to protract the creation, nature and the environment to the next generation. We are called to commit ourselves to continue the creating act as like God used his technology for the betterment of His creation including His image bearers. We are created as His co-creators with the intention of retrieving the Creation.

The creation of the world is the first of the majestic and gracious acts of the triune God. The bible proclaims this good news in its very first verse: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen1:1). Affirming their faith in the creator God, Christians confesses Him as the “maker of heaven and earth” as it is in the Apostle’s creed. Most of all, a right understanding of the affirmation of faith in God, the creator, is perhaps need to be realized more today than ever before. Because critics accuse that Christianity is the primary source of the ecological crisis as historian, Lynn White. Jr., wrote, ‘what is considered the classic indictment of the Christian tradition’s attitude toward nature, concludes that Christianity bears a “huge burden of guilt” for our present ecological crisis.’ Accusing fingers are pointed especially at the teachings that human beings alone are created in the image of God and that they are commanded by God to exercise “dominion” over all the other creatures. Thus human beings’ wanton destruction of nature is sanctioned in the name of fulfilling the divine command. Intensely, the fact is that in our time every exposition of the doctrine of God as creator and of the world as God’s creation is profoundly challenged by the ecological crisis. Therefore the gravity and scope of the ecological crisis give unprecedented urgency to the task of rethinking the Christian doctrine of creation.
Scripture presents nonhuman creatures as the inseparable companions of humanity in creation, reconciliation, and redemption (Gen 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31). God values and takes delight in all creatures (Matt 6:26, 28 – 29). All creatures are able in some way to give glory to God their creator (Ps 19:1). And for all we know, they do this with a spontaneity and consistency far greater than our own. As God takes delight in all the creatures, and as they are all called in their own distinctive way to praise and glorify God, non-human creatures cannot be mere subordinate figures in a Christian doctrine of creation. Above all God owns the earth (Ps 24:1). Human beings are stewards, who are entrusted with the greater responsibility of caring for the whole creation. Hence when the creation narrative states that human beings are created in the image of God and are given the command to have “dominion” over the earth, this must be understood in the context of the distinctive identification of God as the God, not of arbitrary power but of free grace and covenantal love. It is a “dominion” of care and protection rather than of domination and abuse.

Realizing this, if we see the whole creation story, Water occupies the primary place for the existence of all other creations. We began our lives in the womb surrounded by water and our lives come to an end when we lack water. It is the life-blood of our ecosystem that supports the survival of both humans and non-humans alike. Water forms the very basis of life, embracing all things and existing in all things. Numerous religions use water as a symbol of the cleansing, freedom and new life. However water is being polluted in every aspect of our lives today. Water pollution has become a pressing ethical issue that requires immediate attention from all human beings in every stripe, especially from Christians.

Let us see the biblical description of water and the possible part of solution for the Water pollution in Jesus’ way of resolving the crisis.

1. **Water: Abundance of God’s Providence**

Water is a central component in the biblical stories and ancient people’s lives. The abundance of water, the availability of water, the nourishing substance of water is representative of God’s blessing. Whether in ancient cultures or today, this life-sustaining capability of water is central issue. Bible reveals the prominence of water, its blessing and nourishing capabilities in several of its accounts.

Remarkably, as in Genesis, throughout Psalms water is depicted as a symbol of God’s blessing. Psalm 104 celebrates the function of water as that which sustains and nourishes the earth. Here in this account it is clear that the flourishing of the earth is connected with God’s command over water and the watering springs, animals nourished by waters, and the grass and trees sustained by water. Thus this hymn praises God for the beauty of the earth and depicts the power of water for maintaining and blessing all life as the life source of all creatures on earth. The familiar Psalm 23 also reveals a blessing connected with water as the psalmist recognizes the gifts of “green pastures” and “still waters.” The centrality and abundance of water is noted as one of the distinguishing features of this particular Psalm. The blessing of God is also revealed in Psalm 1, which says “happy are those who are like trees planted by steams of water.”

In the selected periscope, Psalm 65:9, David declares that it is God who visits the earth and waters it. This brings about the grain from planting. Further, God brings the showers on the earth to soften it for farming, by which people receive the blessing of growth from their harvest and God has made the earth profitable. One of the key points in this description of bountiful yielding of the earth is God’s abundant blessing on earth and all creations through water.

2. **Water Pollution: Taken for Granted of God’s Providence**

Nevertheless the blessing of God through water is distorted by self-centered human beings by polluting the water resources. Water pollution is a life threatening issue that scares the health and well-being of all human and non-human creatures. As rivers and sea are used as primary sources of drinking water by populations all over the world, pollution of sea and river water are more harmful to the health of the human and animals. As the world became more industrial and smaller due to communications and trade, accidental and purposive hazardous dumping has contributed to the problem of water pollution.

As Colossians 1: 15-20 teaches, since the days of the early church, the followers of Jesus Christ affirms God as the creator, who holds everything together and reconciles all things through Jesus Christ. In view of the fact that Lord possesses the earth, humanity’s responsibility to
“serve and keep” (Genesis 2:15) God’s creation had been part of the belief of God’s people for millennia. Now this exclusive claim that Christianity instructs care for the environment has been challenged from both outside and inside the church. By those from outside the church, the Christian faith has been accused of holding to a theology that falsely deals with nature as subsidiary to human and encourages exploitation of the environment.

Exodus 7 evidently documented the first historical event of the beginning of water pollution. It is written that “Aaron raised his stick and struck the surface of the river. And all the water in it was turned into blood. The fish in the river died, and it smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink from it.” This is the first documentation of human disturbance of the natural aquatic environment. From since till now water pollution endangers the human and non-human creatures of the earth. Our incautiousness about science and economics and the way it works, leads the creation economy to suffer. The earth is Lord’s blessing for His people to subdue and to use for profitable purposes. Now the blessing of God is mishandled and abused by human. Therefore it is necessary to realize the importance of the material world to its creator as well as disciplines for knowing and caring for it, through which we can maintain, refine, and employ it in our service to God’s economy.

3. Water Justice: Rebirth through Water

Christianity is often viewed as sacramental, rather than elemental. We give more importance to the unseen, intangible things like grace or the Holy Spirit, about the rituals of communion and baptism. And yet the elements do factor into our Christian tradition quite prominently, particularly water. Obviously water takes hold of a prominent role in our sacraments especially in Baptism.

Besides, water is symbolic of our relationship with God as it carries the image of holiness, renewal, promise, and hope. For that reason it is through water that we are baptized and welcomed into the Christian community. It substantiates the essentiality of clean water to all life that connects us with the rest of creation. As one resource from the National Council of Churches declares, “We recognize clean water as a priceless gift of God, but too often we don’t realize the global water crisis is ours to reconcile.” In fact more often we Christians, with our self-centered attitude are thoughtless about our part of reconciliation in making the world to obtain pure water.

Just as the physical body needs water to continue living, so does the spirit. Jesus is the water, needed by the spiritual part of man (John 4:14). The only thing that can truly quench the thirst of the spirit is the holy living water, Jesus Christ (4:10). Without Him the soul will eventually die. Therefore, Jesus is what our spirit needs in order for us to be able to live eternally with Him. Water is used as a symbol for Holiness that gives life as Jesus demonstrated in John 7: 38 – 39 and signifies Holy Spirit with water. Without the Holy Water our spiritual body will die. Similarly our physical body would die, if we are in deficient of pure water.

God does provide water to all His creation as Isaiah says that when the poor and needy are thirsty and seek water, but have none, God will not forsake them; God will provide rivers, fountains, pools and springs. While it may not seem like it, that is still true today. It is possible only if we seek for the way to keep it pure and make sure that all have access of pure water. And this is where we as faithful Christians come in. We Christians are given power over earth, but exhibit it rightly without being destructive. God’s economy is always the context and framework within which the human economy works. As such the Biblical idea of economy about earth is serving and keeping creation, not oppressive or devastating domination. Jesus Christ, our perfect ideal, reinforces this. His life and reconciling ministry takes the very nature of a servant. He could be marked for not using His dominion over Human. He came not to be served but to serve. And we Christians, who follow the creator – Servant, will join Him in His reconciliation work of all things to God and for the goodness of His creation. We join hands in giving rebirth to the creations, which are in the summit of death due to water pollution. Keep the water pure, instruct the ways to prevent pollution and give rebirth to God’s creation. We as the people of God, as Christians, should join together in empowering the people to fight against the industrial pollutants and other pollutants of water.
INTRODUCTION

Environment is becoming a matter of concern for the people around the world now a days. There is a tremendous increase in the development activities all around the world and their impact on the environment, in the last few decades, has been very alarming. The world was subjected to many kinds of pollution. The environmental pollution may be described as the unfavourable alteration of our surroundings which occurs mainly by human actions. The effects of pollution on our biosphere are numerous and increasing tremendously. The issues such as light pollution and noise pollution also make a tremendous effect in the day to day life of human beings.

God created this world and He saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31). But human made unnatural things. Then the Lord said “My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh (Gen. 2:3). In this eco – sermon I would like to highlight something about the issues in pollution, such as light pollution and noise pollution and their effects on human health and behaviours.

LIGHT POLLUTION

There are certain symbolic names used in the Bible to explain the Good News to the people. Light is very important among them, which shows the presence of God, the Nature of God and Glory of God. In the creation account, “And God said, let there be light: and there was light (Gen. 1:3), and God saw the light, that it was good (1:4). In New Testament Jesus said to the people that, I am the light of the world: He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (Jn. 8:12). But human’s greed polluted God’s creation.

The pollution which is caused by excessive and misdirected light is termed as light pollution. It is also known as photo pollution or luminous pollution. Light pollution is the introduction of artificial lights, by humans, directly or in directly into the environment.

Light pollution is largely the result of bad lighting design, which allows artificial light to shine outward and upward in the sky, where it’s not wanted. Where ever this happens, the reproduction, life – migration and feeding occur in that region.

Types of Light Pollution

There are 2 two types of light pollution. They are,

- Unpleasant light
- Excessive light

Here, excessive light leads to ill health and discomfort.

Source of Light Pollution

Light pollution could be caused through various sources. The sources of light pollution include light in factories, offices, interior lighting and the lightings used in advertising. Light pollution has a tremendous increase nowadays. It is most severe in highly industrialized nations. It affects humans and all other living things.

Categories of Light pollution:

Light pollution has five categories.

- Light trespass
- Over illumination
- Glare
Sky Glow

Sky glow occurs from both human and human made sources. Sky glow refers to the glow effect that can be seen over populated areas. It makes the situation worse for the astronomers, as it reduces their ability to view celestial objects. Sky glow also has drastic effect on human beings and the environment.

Effects of light pollution

- Light pollution is a serious threat to the nocturnal wildlife.
- It affects the plant and animal physiology. Migration of animals is also affected.
- Over illumination constitutes wastes of energy.
- Light pollution threatens the human life. In other words, it is a threat to our health.

Effects on Human Health

Light pollution has drastic effects on human health. It affects the habitats of the world. When the human beings are exposed to light while sleeping, melatonin production can be suppressed. This leads to sleep disorders and other health problems such as increased headache, stress and lack of sleep. Research has shown that decreasing nocturnal melatonin production increases an individual’s risk of developing estrogen related malignancies. Light pollution leads to the formation of cancer. It also affects the regulation of cells.

The light pollution can be reduced by limiting the usage of outdoor lights and lighting on other places when there are people. Thus light pollution could be, at least, controlled.

NOISE POLLUTION

Every day we hear different kinds of sounds. Some of them are pleasant to us, but others cause irritation. Noise is a normal feature of life and acts as an effective alarm that is usually defined as any unwanted sound. The unwanted sound includes the sound which irritates the people such as sound of loud speaker, horns of vehicles, barking of dog etc. It is reported that noise inside factories can become a health hazard, causing deafness.
Industrial noise, particularly from mechanical saws and drills is unbearable and a sort of nuisance to people.

Noise from road transports, particularly from heavy diesel vehicles and motorbikes affects the human health through noise pollution.

Causes of Noise Pollution:

1. **Industrialization**
   Most of the industries use huge machines which are capable of producing large amount of noise. Apart from that, various equipments like compressors, generators, exhaust fans, and grinding mills also contribute to produce loud noise. You might have seen workers in these factories and industries wearing ear plugs to minimize the effect of noise.

2. **Poor Urban Planning**
   In most of the developing countries, poor urban planning also plays a vital role. Congested houses, large families sharing small space, fight over parking, and frequent fights for basic amenities lead to noise pollution which may disrupt the environment of the society.

3. **Social Events**
   Noise is at its peak in most of the social events. Whether it is marriage, parties, pub or place of worship, people normally flout rules set by the local administration and create nuisance in the area. People play songs on full volume and dance till midnight which makes the condition of the people living nearby pretty worse. In markets, you can see people selling clothes by making loud noise to invite the attention of people.

4. **Transportation**
   Large number of vehicles on roads, aero planes flying over houses, and underground trains produce heavy noise and people feel it difficult to get accustomed to that. The high noise leads to a situation where in a normal person loses the ability to hear properly.

5. **Construction Activities**
   Construction activities of bridges, dams, buildings, stations, roads, flyovers etc., and mining take place in almost every part of the world. These construction activities are going on every day as we need more buildings, roads and bridges to accommodate more people and to reduce traffic congestion. The down point is that these construction machineries are too noisy.

6. **Household Chores**
   We people are surrounded by gadgets and use them extensively in our daily life. Gadgets like TV, Mobile, mixer, grinder, pressure cooker, vacuum cleaner, washing machine and dryer, cooler, and air conditioner are minor contributors to the amount of noise that is produced but it affects the quality of life of your neighborhood in a bad way. While this form of pollution may seem harmless, it in fact has far reaching consequences. The adverse effects on the health of the environment are quite severe. Not only is the local wildlife affected by the pollution, but humans also face a number of problems due to effects of noise pollution.

Effects of Noise pollution

1. **Hearing Problems**
   Any unwanted sound that our ears have not been built to fit, can cause problems within the body. Our ears can take in certain range of sounds without getting damaged. Man made noises such as jackhammers, horns, machinery, airplanes and even vehicles can be too loud for our hearing range. Constant exposure to loud levels of noise can easily result in the damage of our ear drums and loss of hearing. It also reduces our sensitivity to sounds that our ears pick up unconsciously to regulate our body rhythm.

2. **Health Issues**
   Excessive noise pollution in working areas such as offices, construction sites, bars and even in our homes can influence psychological health. Studies show that the occurrence of aggressive behavior, disturbance of sleep, constant stress, fatigue and hypertension can be linked to excessive noise levels. These in turn can cause more severe and chronic health issues later in life.

3. **Sleeping Disorders**
   Loud noise can certainly hamper our sleeping pattern and may lead to irritation and uncomfortable situations. Without a good night sleep, it may lead to problems related to fatigue and our performance may go
down in office as well as at home. It is therefore recommended to take
a sound sleep to give our body proper rest.

4. **Cardiovascular Issues:**
   Blood pressure levels, cardio-vascular disease and stress related heart
   problems are on the rise. Studies suggest that high intensity noise causes
   high blood pressure and increases heart beat rate as it disrupts the normal
   blood flow. Bringing them to a manageable level depends on our
   understanding of noise pollution and how we tackle it.

5. **Trouble Communicating:**
   High decibel noise can put trouble and may not allow two people to
   communicate freely. This may lead to misunderstanding and we may have
   difficulty understanding the other person. Constant sharp noise can give
   us severe headache and disturb our emotional balance.

6. **Effect on Wildlife**
   Wildlife faces far more problems than humans because of noise pollution
   since they are more dependent on sound. Animals develop a better sense
   of hearing than us just because their survival depends on it. The ill effects
   of excessive noise begin at home. Pets react more aggressively in
   households where there is constant noise.

   They become disoriented more easily and face many behavioral
   problems. In nature, animals may suffer from hearing loss, which makes
   them easy prey and leads to dwindling populations. Others become
   inefficient at hunting, disturbing the balance of the eco-system.

   Species that depend on mating calls to reproduce are often unable to
   hear these calls due to excessive man made noise. As a result, they are
   unable to reproduce and cause declining populations. Others require sound
   waves to echo-locate and find their way when migrating. Disturbing their
   sound signals means they get lost easily and do not migrate when they
   should. To cope up with the increasing sound around them, animals are
   becoming louder, which may further add to the pollution levels. This is
   why understanding noise pollution can help us lower the impact it has on
   the environment.

As of now, there do not exist many solutions to reduce sound pollution.
On a personal level, everybody can help reducing the noise in their homes
by lowering the volume of the radio, music system and the television.
Listening to music with headphones is also a good step forward. Removal
of public loudspeakers is another way in which the pollution can be
countered.

What happened to the environment protection Act which was passed
in 1986? Although the noise pollution rules 2000 under the Environment
protection Act 1986, it is a boon to us. Daily we are pushed to hear 'bla-
bla' created by the loudspeakers and blowing of horns on the roads.

People seldom think that sound pollution leads to hearing loss or
impairment. A study says, it “increases stress levels, behavioural and mental
problems, insomnia, heart ailments, hypertensions and many more”.

WHO (World Health Organization) says for a sound sleep, the noise
in the room should not be more than 30db and for maintaining
concentration in any class room, it should not exceed 35 db.

**CONCLUSION**

1. Are you assaulted by sound and light?
2. Do you feel comfortable when your church is loud? Or would you
   react to it?
3. Am I a steward of God's creation? (Gen 1:26-28; Ps.8:5, 6)
4. Would you support this quote “no light trespass”?

An honest examination of these question may lead us to the right path
or it will continue to cause grave problem for generations together.

The Hindu, New Delhi, April 30, 2008 carried an article titled “Level
of light pollution in India causing concern”. The writer’s intent was to
prove how light pollution is harmful to life forms.

Research on health effects of light pollution is still dwarf! But it’s our
obligation to eliminate unnecessary light at night that reduces production
of our own photo sensitive hormone, melatonin and has been linked to
breast cancer. It seems like people have a major perception about safety
that they think, bright lights improve safety but the seldom think, bright
lights and dark shadows don’t improve safety but reduce it. Instead of
directing lights and help them illuminate where it is really wanted, human
behaviours are absurd, where they glow light in people’s eyes. Do you feel
high about LED lamps? The truth is that it generates more light pollution
due to the blued cast of the light.

Each and every one should understand that environment is the priceless
gift of the nature. To protect our environment and maintain the ecological
balance, we should strive hard and take steps to control pollution. And
be a steward of God’s creation so that God’s intention will be fulfilled
(Gen. 2:15)

Text: “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”
I Timothy 6:8

Introduction

Earth was created from chaos into a beautiful and enthralling place
for human existence. However the greed of human consumerism
is slowly driving it back to the state of absolute and irrecoverable
chaos through over use of resources, use and litter attitude and unmanaged
wastage. Here we cannot look at all the issues regarding waste management
but will look at waste management from a biblical perspective. Timothy
throws before us the challenge of living a simple life which would
necessitate the following attitudes

a. The Attitude of Prevention:
Waste management is a grave challenge in today’s world. The modern day
world is engrossed with the effects accumulating waste in cities. Nations
in transition experience exhausted waste collection services, inadequately
managed and uncontrolled dumpsites and the problems are worsening.
Governments struggle due to the weakness of institutions, chronic under-
resourcing and rapid urbanization. As Christians we should educate
ourselves and others not to create waste. We should be satisfied with what
we have. It is enough to have just food and clothing. Preventing waste is an important Christian duty.

b. The attitude of Minimization

Yet another thought that is put through by Paul is minimization. Minimization can be achieved by using and reusing what is already extracted to the maximum so that what is left can be saved for the future. Incineration is a method in which solid organic wastes are subjected to combustion so as to convert them into residue and gaseous products. Recycling is still another method of recovering resource practice that refers to the collection and reuse of waste materials such as empty beverage containers. The idea of creating minimum waste is a confrontation with our need for much.

When the Israelites were given manna in the wilderness God gave them just enough for a day and when Jesus taught us to pray, He insisted us to pray for just the day’s food. As Christians we should learn to minimize.

c. The Attitude of Reusing and Recycling

Waste is not something that should be discarded or disposed of with no regard for future use. It can be a valuable resource if addressed correctly, through policy and practice. With rational and consistent waste management practices there is an opportunity to reap a range of benefits. Those benefits include:

| Economic benefit of Improving economic efficiency, Social benefit by reducing adverse impacts on health by proper waste management practices, and Environmental benefit in Reducing or eliminating adverse impacts on the environment through reducing, reusing and recycling, and minimizing resource extraction. It also can provide improved air and water quality and help in the reduction of greenhouse emissions. It creates Inter-generational Equity providing subsequent generations a better economy, a fairer and more inclusive society and a cleaner environment. Preserving the available resources for the future generation is also a Christian priority. |

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d. The Attitude of Energy Recovery

Energy recovery is another technique is the conversion of non-recyclable waste materials into usable heat, electricity, or fuel through a variety of processes. This process is often called waste-to-energy. Energy recovery from waste is part of the non-hazardous waste management hierarchy. Using energy recovery to convert non-recyclable waste materials into electricity and heat, it is the processing of recyclables to extract or recover materials and resources, or convert to energy.

When Jesus fed five thousand people, he asked the disciples to collect the left over so that it could be preserved for another day. God created day and night so that energy could be recovered. The science of the life cycle teaches us the principle of energy recovery. It should be a Christian commitment.

Conclusion

The present generation can save the earth for the next generation by learning to use only what we need. Being wise in using our resources, we actually show our concern and love for others. Mahatma Gandhi once said, ‘This world has enough resources to supply the needs of all the people, but not to supply for their greed’

As people of God we should cultivate the attitudes of prevention, minimization, reusing and recycling and of energy recovery. Only then can we fulfill the wish of Our God in making us human beings to be the caretakers of this earth. Let’s call up our stewardship instinct for the blessing of this earth our home away from our home in heaven. May God help us to waste no waste!
Climate Change, Development, our “Prisoners’ Dilemma” and Oikos Theology

David Reichardt

The Glocal Ecological crisis

It is now broadly accepted that Planet Earth is suffering a multi-faceted, acute ecological crisis whose effects require drastic action simply to limit, let alone reverse. The British economist Sir Nicholas Stern put this well some years ago:

“...scientific evidence is now overwhelming; climate change is a serious global threat, and it demands an urgent global response.”

He reinforced a call made by ecofeminist Sallie McFague to fellow theologians in 1991 to attend to ecological crisis in general:

“The times are too perilous and it is too late in the day for such games. We need to work together, each in his or her own small way, to create a planetary situation that is more viable and less vulnerable.”

Global in scope, climate change in particular has the potential to overwhelm both ecosystems and human societies, but it is only the most comprehensive of many forms of ecological degradation that are affecting local landscapes. To use Roland Robertson's composite term, introduced to theology by the Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter, ecological crisis is “glocal”; it is both global and local in character.

But just as day-to-day variations in the weather often mask long-term trends in the seasons or the climate itself, the very glocality of climate change produces such varied effects that it is difficult to convince many people that climate change is real, and that we must all change our way of living, and the standard of living we aspire to.

“Oh, so you mean this is global warming?” ask many Americans, shivering as the latest polar vortex plays havoc with their beloved way of life, even as, year after year, that extravagant lifestyle pours more and more greenhouse gases into the earth’s atmosphere.

In Australia a good example of the ‘glocal’ nature of climate change is the ecological degradation of the Murray-Darling Basin, our continent nation’s most important food and fibre-producing region. In the “Garnaut Climate Change Review Draft Report,” economist Ross Garnaut illustrated the sheer complexity of climate change. He reported that rainfall declines in some parts of the country, such as south-east Australia, had not been definitively attributed to climate change. By contrast, the higher temperatures that have accompanied and exacerbated drought conditions have been so attributed.

The uncertainty resulting from this complexity has made it more difficult to achieve global consensus on what to do about climate change. Professor Garnaut described this as a “prisoners’ dilemma” each nation faces:

“Each country benefits from a national point of view if it does less of the mitigation itself, and others do more. If all countries act on this basis, without forethought and cooperation, there will be no resolution of the dilemma. We will all judge the outcome, in the fullness of time, to be insufficient and unsatisfactory.”

This prisoner’s dilemma also applies to stakeholders of regional and local areas such as the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Prisoner’s Dilemma

This concept, “the prisoner’s dilemma”, helps us to understand why so many humans are responding to the issues of climate change and
development with such reluctance. It is actually a game that shows why two purely “rational” individuals might not cooperate, even if it appears that it is in their best interests to do so. Albert W. Tucker, who formalised the game, presented it as follows:

Two members of a criminal gang are arrested and imprisoned. Each prisoner is in solitary confinement with no means of speaking to or exchanging messages with the other. The police admit they don’t have enough evidence to convict the pair on the principal charge. They plan to sentence both to a year in prison on a lesser charge. Simultaneously, the police offer each prisoner a Faustian bargain. Each prisoner is given the opportunity either to betray the other, by testifying that the other committed the crime, or to cooperate with the other by remaining silent. Fig. 1 shows the possible outcomes:

Fig. 1: Classical Prisoner’s Dilemma
- If A and B each betray the other, each of them serves 2 years in prison.
- If A betrays B but B remains silent, A will be set free and B will serve 3 years in prison (and vice versa).
- If A and B both remain silent, both of them will only serve 1 year in prison (on the lesser charge).

Here, regardless of what the other decides, each prisoner gets a higher pay-off by betraying the other (“defecting”). The reasoning involves an argument by dilemma: B will either cooperate or defect. If B cooperates, A should defect, since going free is better than serving 1 year. If B defects, A should also defect, since serving 2 years is better than serving 3. So either way, A should defect. Parallel reasoning will show that B should also defect.

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Fig. 2: Prisoner’s Dilemma in business

The prisoners’ dilemma also has applications in other areas of human life. Consider two firms, say Coca-Cola and Pepsi, selling similar products. Each must decide on a pricing strategy. They best exploit their joint market power when both charge a high price; each makes a profit of ten million dollars per month. If one sets a competitive low price, it wins a lot of customers away from the rival. Suppose its profit rises to twelve million dollars, and that of the rival falls to seven million. If both set low prices, the profit of each is nine million dollars. Here, the low-price strategy is akin to the prisoner’s confession, and the high-price akin to keeping silent. Call the former cheating, and the latter cooperation. Then cheating is each firm’s dominant strategy, but the result when both “cheat” is worse for each than that of both cooperating.

Arms races between superpowers or local rival nations offer another important example of the dilemma. Both countries are better off when they cooperate and avoid an arms race. Yet the dominant strategy for each is to arm itself heavily.

So how does the prisoner’s dilemma to explain why cooperation between nations on climate change, which would seem to be an obvious thing to do on the face of it, is proving so difficult to achieve?
The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Western Development and its ecological Cost

For more than five centuries the small, competing nations of Europe and the settler societies they gave rise to, have exercised a remarkable influence over world affairs. Science and technology have played an important part in this dominance, which was extended economically and militarily by the Industrial Revolution. Beginning in Great Britain, the Industrial Revolution spread first to other European nations and their settler societies - most notably the United States - then to other nations of the world. One of the features of the Industrial Revolution was the replacement of human, animal, water and wind power with machines powered by burning “fossil fuels”, first coal, then oil.

Mechanization has brought great advances in standards of living but, as in the medieval, European story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, there is a terrible cost which the world is now bearing. As early as 1824 the French physicist Joseph Fourier postulated what is now known as “the Greenhouse Effect”. He calculated that the earth would be much colder if it had no atmosphere, because while this readily admits energy in the form of sunlight, heat cannot so easily escape back into space. In 1859 the Irish physicist John Tyndall identified carbon dioxide and water vapour as heat-trapping gases. In 1896 the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius concluded that carbon dioxide emissions from industrial-age coal burning will enhance the greenhouse effect. Guy Stewart Challendar, a British steam engineer, noted from his systematic study a significant upward trend in temperatures for the first four decades of the twentieth century and a continuously rising concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide since the pre-industrial era. In the mid-twentieth century the American scientist Charles Keeling confirmed the rise in atmospheric CO2 by precise measurements above Hawaii.

Fig 3: Carbon Dioxide released from the mid C19 until now, in millions of tons

From this historical summary two observations can be made:

- at least some humans have been aware of the likely dangers of burning fossil fuels for most of the time we have done so on an industrial scale;
- and most of the carbon dioxide released into the earth’s atmosphere through the activity of humans has been put there by industrial activity in the western nations. See Fig. 3.

Development of the Rest and the Question of Justice: Does it have to be according to the Prisoner’s Dilemma?

This graphic shows that the so called western nations are responsible for most of the world’s climate change problem. However, the rest are rapidly catching up! Many countries have sought to develop along western lines, and have seen industrialization and the exploitation of natural resources as important means to power and wealth. Like the western nations before them they are paying a heavy ecological price. Ominously, the populations of the largest of these nations, which of course include India, dwarf those of all the western nations except the United States.

Fortunately, there are those who have learned from western experience and mistakes. The Indian Nobel Prize-winning economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen, wisely distinguished between economic development and economic growth. Sen defined the former as:

“the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. Economic development can also be referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy. Such actions can involve multiple areas including development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health, safety, literacy, and other initiatives. Economic development differs from economic growth. Whereas economic development is a policy intervention endeavour with aims of economic and social well-being of people, economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and rise in GDP. Consequently economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development.”
Nevertheless, countries typically prioritize economic growth. Bhutan is perhaps the only nation that even on the face of it prioritizes Gross National Happiness over Gross National Product! And GNP is achieved by the provision of adequate, reliable sources of power, which has mostly been provided by burning fossil fuels. Consequently, the specter of environmental degradation, and most acutely, a species extinction event and massive threat to humankind caused by anthropogenic climate change, grows each year.

Professor Garnaut’s depiction of the world’s situation as being like a prisoner’s dilemma is apt. If developed and developing countries cooperated to meet the challenge of climate change, as they have done to successfully meet the challenge provided by the thinning of the ozone layer, the ecological cost would be less than if each country sought its own advantage by waiting for others to bear the economic cost of transitioning from old to new carbon markets and energy technologies, and bearing the risk of whether these are necessary.

**“Intralia”: India’s Energy Need & Australia’s Energy Greed**

The dilemmas the world community faces are multiple and complex; the issues of economic justice and development make the global prisoner’s dilemma still more pointed. To illustrate, I have chosen the following current situation that binds together India and Australia as a case study: “Intralia”: India’s Energy Need & Australia’s Energy Greed.

Australia is a country of relatively low population that has developed and become rich largely by mining and selling mineral resources. In particular, Australia is the world’s leading exporter of coal, and currently plans to greatly increase its coal exports to India. Neglecting to include Australian coal that has been exported to other nations, some Australians argue that since Australia is responsible for only 1.5% of the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by human activity annually, what Australia does to counteract climate change would be of such little significance that it would not justify the economic cost to Australia. Apart from conveniently neglecting the huge profits Australia makes from selling coal, this argument also neglects how much carbon Australia has emitted into the atmosphere historically, the total greenhouse gases emitted per person, and the matter of moral influence. If Australia decided to forego huge profits by leaving all that coal in the ground, that would send the world a powerful signal in one direction. However, that a very rich country continues to sell and burn coal in the face of clear evidence that this ecologically imperils the world sends a completely different signal to the world’s developing countries.

**India is in a different but connected situation**

Though your greenhouse gas emissions per person are much lower than Australia’s, your total emissions are almost 10 times as high as Australia’s, and they are rising fast. Your huge, rapidly growing and developing population has great energy needs which traditionally have been, and still mostly are being met, by burning fossil fuels. India now has to import much of its coal, and that is where your need meets Australia’s greed. Both the Adani Group, based in Gujarat and the JVK group, based in Secunderabad are currently developing the infrastructure to mine coal in the Galilee Basin in the Australian state of Queensland, and to ship it through Australia’s iconic Great Barrier Reef to India.

**Should these massive projects go ahead?**

Mining coal causes its own environmental devastation. In this case transporting the coal will also devastate a section of particularly valuable, sensitive marine ecosystem - the World heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. Burning coal will release more CO2 into the atmosphere.

On the other hand, “King Coal”’s supporters in industry and government argue that Galilee Basin coal is relatively low emissions-intensive, and that the environmental impact of these projects will be small, and outweighed by the economic and employment benefits to Australia. India needs the energy, and although the country has announced plans to build the world’s largest solar energy facility, King Coal’s supporters continue to argue that “renewables” cannot provide “base load” power, at least in the near future.

So if Australia refused to allow this coal to be mined and sold to India, many Indians may feel that Australia would be hampering India’s ability to develop as it has done. How dare a developed country such as Australia, still associated racially and culturally with the imperial British, do such a thing, especially when Australia has previously also refused India’s access to Australian uranium!
Oikos theology: God’s House, Our House

Does economic development necessarily result in ecological degradation? In a newly published paper in the Swedish environmental magazine Extrakt the veteran Norwegian climate activist and professor of climate strategy at the Norwegian Business School, Jørgen Randers, concluded soberly, almost sourly, that

“It is cost-effective to postpone global climate action. It is profitable to let the world go to hell.”

He argued that democracy is unable to deal effectively with this short term profit motive, and consequently with the threat of climate change. To address climate change properly humans must work not for short term profit, but for long term restoration.

But Amartya Sen rightly distinguished between economic growth and economic development. Chasing the former may well take the world to hell; the latter leads us, by way of contrast, to the biblical theme of the Earth as God’s House, and Our House and what South African theologian Ernst Conradie calls “Oikos Theology”. The Greek word “oikos” meaning “house”, “household”, has provided the root for 3 English words of great relevance to our discussion.

- “oikonomia” has given rise to “economy”, meaning, originally, the ordering, or law, of the household;
- “oikologia” gave us “ecology”, “the study of the household”.
- And “oikumene”, meaning “the whole inhabited world” has given us the word “ecumenism”, so dear to the heart of CSI and my own Uniting Church in Australia.

Conradie argues that

“Oikos theology is built on the recognition that economic injustices and ecological destruction are deeply related to one another. The power of this metaphor lies in its ability to integrate especially three core ecumenical themes on the basis of the Greek word “oikos” (household) – which forms the root of the quests for economic justice (the “nomoi” or regulations within the household), ecological sustainability (the “logoi” or underlying principles of the household) and ecumenical fellowship (“oikumene” – participating as members of the whole household of God). One may therefore suggest that the household of God may serve as a metaphor to integrate a number of concerns, including the integrity of the biophysical foundations of this house (the earth’s biosphere), the economic management of the household’s affairs, the need for peace and reconciliation amidst ethnic, religious and domestic violence within this single household, a concern for issues of health and education; the place of women and children within this household and an ecumenical sense of the unity not only of the church, but also of the whole of humankind and of all of God’s creation, the whole inhabited world (“oikumene”). This begs many further questions regarding the architect and owner of the house (God) and the place of the church within the larger household of God”.

Both economy and ecology are vital aspects of God’s house and household, this inhabited earth. For liberation and eco-theologians Julia Esquivel Velasquez and Leonardo Boff, the conflict is not between economic development and ecological care:

“Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they stem from two wounds that are bleeding. The first, the wound of poverty and wretchedness, tears the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people all over the world. The second, systematic aggression against the earth, destroys the equilibrium of the planet, threatened by the depredations made by a type of development undertaken by contemporary societies, now spread throughout the world. Both lines of reflection and action stem from a cry: the cry of the poor for life, liberty and beauty (see Exod. 3.7) in the case of liberation theology; the cry of the earth groaning under oppression (see Rom. 8.22-3) in that of ecology. Both seek liberation: one of the poor by themselves, as organized historical agents, conscientized and linked to other allies who take up their cause and their struggle; the other of the earth through a new alliance between it and human beings, in a brotherly/sisterly relationship and with a type of sustainable development that will respect the different ecosystems and guarantee future generations a good quality of life. It is time to try and bring the two disciplines together, to see to what extent they differ from or even confront one another, and how, basically, they complement one another.”

And I shall give the last word in this paper on Climate Change, Development and what I hope I have demonstrated is an unnecessary “Prisoner’s Dilemma” to the Indian ecotheologian Sarojini Henry:

“So we have the urgent challenge of achieving environmental sustainability, on the one hand, and a fairer and more equitable distribution of resources and life opportunities in the human communities, on the other. The call of eco-justice is premised on the view that the human degradation of nature,
of which greenhouse gas emissions and global warming are but a symptom, is fundamentally linked to the social patterns and social institutions that oppress human beings. We cannot address one without the other. Poverty is an ecological problem.”

Conclusion
Ecotheology has much more to say about the relationship between climate change and development. Not least, given the widespread, deliberate obfuscation of scientific truth so well documented by Naomi Orestes and Erik M. Conway, my colleague George Emeleus’ work on a theology of truth and reconciliation is important. In the scientific and technological sphere, the imperative is to move as quickly as possible to renewable energy sources. As Sheikh Yamani memorably put it, “The Stone Age did not end for lack of stone, and the Oil Age will end long before the world runs out of oil.”

At a theological level “Oikos theology” may help humankind to move beyond the age of oil, and to make caring for humans and for creation features of caring for God’s House, this good earth.


Endnotes
1 Life and Work Feb 2015 author Rev Russell Moffat.
2 http://www.teachingtheword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=5433&view=post&articleid=What-is-New-Atheisms-Eschatology-View-of-end-times&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0.
3 Leviticus 25. 8-13.
4 Genesis 2. 15.
6 Since 2007 warnings by expert individuals and bodies about the seriousness of the threat posed by climate change and the importance of acting to mitigate this threat have grown more strident. Until late 2014, however, action taken to meet the challenge of climate change was not nearly sufficient.
10 A polar vortex is a large pocket of very cold air, typically the coldest air in the Northern Hemisphere, which sits over the polar region during the winter season. The frigid air can find its way into the United States when the polar vortex is pushed farther south, occasionally reaching southern Canada and the northern Plains, Midwest and northeastern portions of the United States.
13 India and China, traditionally the world’s largest powers, were in relative decline for much of this period.
14 Lynn White Jr., the “father” of ecotheology has explored some of the reason for this western dominance in his famous paper: Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Science 155, no. 3767 (1967).
15 To take an example not related to climate change, Sanjeev Sanyal has argued that the quality of maps and mapping played a vital role in establishing Great Britain’s domination of the Indian subcontinent. Sanjeev Sanyal: Land of the Seven Rivers (New Delhi; Penguin Books India; 2012) Chapter 6, “The Mapping of India”, pp.176-210.
16 Sarojini Henry, We’re one Earth Community (Delhi: IISR/ISPCK; 2013) pp.28-29.
18 Jared Diamond’s chapter on Australia in Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed (Viking Press, 2005) is aptly entitled “Mining Australia”. The “mining mentality” has characterised the small Australian population’s approach to the exploitation of the continent’s vast resources, but its fragile ecosystems.
19 Jørgen Randers “Demokratin oförmögen att hantera klimathotet” Extrakt: Aktuell Forskning för ett hållbart samhälle” Debatt & Opinion 15/01 2015. Randers is one of the authors of the famous “Limits to Growth” report of 1972.
20 Ernst Conradi: Climate Change – A Challenge to the Church in South Africa (SACC: Marshalltown; 2009) pp.36-37.
22 Sarojini Henry, “We’re one Earth Community” (IISR, 2013, p.187).
23 Naomi Oreskes & Erik M. Conway Merchants of Doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming (London: Bloomsbury; 2010).
24 George Emeleus Chapter 8, draft PhD thesis.

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