“Anything else you’re interested in is not going to happen if you can’t breathe the air and drink the water. Don’t sit this one out. Do something. You are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet.

Carl Sagan

The Earth Bible Sermons have been prepared imagining how Jesus would respond had he faced such an ecological crisis in the Indian background. The Green Clergy Fellowship of CSI has been trying to bring out a Christian response to ecological issues, in the backdrop of the current ecological crises in India. The Department of Ecological Concerns is proud to present this novel and innovative work by the Green Clergy of CSI.

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad has been actively campaigning for the Green Church Movement since 1990. As the Hon. Director of the Department of Ecological Concerns of CSI, he has initiated the idea of Earth Bible Sermons and this is the third in the series. The CSI is the only Church in India which has an ecological wing functioning since 1992 and it is one of the mission mandates of the Church. The UNDP has honoured the CSI with an eco-award in 2009.
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The Department of Ecological Concerns would like to place on record the support of EMS for the publication of this book and to ISPCK for publishing this book.

Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad

Editor & Hon. Director of Department of Ecological Concerns.

Websites: www.drmathewkoshy.com (personal) www.csisynod.com

Mobile: 09847275754; office (044) 28521566/28524166
The earth is in peril. Our only home is in plain jeopardy. For the very first time in the history of creation, certain life support systems of the planet are being destroyed by human actions. We, as people of faith in God, still believe and hope in the future”. The so-called “ecological crisis,” by its magnitude and speed, threatens the very life of the planet Earth as a whole. The massive presence of injustice suffered by the majority of the world’s population, and the voracious use of the limited resources of the planet by exploitation and overconsumption, constitute a lethal combination that exercises enormous pressure on the carrying capacity of the Earth, to the point of threatening the whole web of life.

We must realise that well-being cannot be equated with material wealth. The quality of life is not dependent on the quantity of material things or growth measured by GDP. Instead, our standard of living depends on our standard of loving and sharing. We cannot sustain a world dominated by profit-seeking, rampant consumerism and gross inequalities, and an atmosphere of competition where the powerful take advantage of the weak without caring for the well-being of every form of life. Ecological crisis is thus a matter of international justice and inter-generational justice.

The urgency for the “spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem,” and the call of “commitment towards building a humane and caring global society, cognizant of the need for human dignity for all,” makes it abundantly clear that the ecological crisis is not merely an economic, social or political problem. It is fundamentally a deep moral and theological issue. Bold
actions are needed to tackle the problems head on with a political, social and individual will to change what needs to be changed, to undo trodden paths of destructive consequences and to correct injustices to people and to mother Earth. A new paradigm, for “a new way of engaging in dialogue with all beings and their relationships” is emerging.

According to its Greek derivation, the word ‘ecology’ means ‘the doctrine of the house’ (OIKOS). What does the Christian doctrine of creation have to do with ‘a doctrine of the house’? Renowned theologian Moltmann profoundly states that “If we see only a Creator and his work, there is no connection. But if we understand the Creator, his creation, and the goal of that creation in a trinitarian sense, then the Creator, through his Spirit, dwells in his creation as a whole, and in every individual created being, by virtue of his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life. The inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God, just as the inner secret of the Sabbath of creation is God’s rest. If we ask about creation’s goal and future, we ultimately arrive at the transfiguring indwelling of the triune God in his creation, which through that indwelling becomes a new heaven and a new earth (Rev.21), and at God’s eternal Sabbath, in which the whole creation will find bliss. The divine secret of creation is the Shekinah, God’s indwelling; and the purpose of the Shekinah is to make the whole creation the house of God. Existence can only become a home if the relationship between nature and human beings is without stresses and strains - if it can be described in terms of reconciliation, peace and a viable symbiosis.”

Thus the Bible calls us to conserve the earth in all its biodiversity, recognising the intrinsic value of all creatures. It is to understand the organic relationship between humans and all creation with due recognition that we are what we are by virtue of our internal and intrinsic relationship with the created earth in all its biodiversity. The Bible speaks of the whole creation groaning towards the emergence of a new creation, God’s new family.

The Earth Bible Sermons follow the well-conceptualised and articulated hermeneutical approach that the Earth Bible project offered to read the Bible from earth’s perspective. They are: The Principle of Intrinsic Worth; the Principle of Interconnectedness; the Principle of Voice; the Principle of Purpose; the Principle of Mutual Custodianship; the Principle of Resistance; the Principle of Incarnation; and the Principle of Promise. By doing so, the Earth Bible Sermons serve the purpose of bringing global theological discussions to congregational pulpits of the villages.

The Earth Bible Sermons are a form of pulpit advocacy; calling people to solidarity, networking and the envisioning of a “sustainable community”. They attempt to encourage congregations to articulate ethical bases and to promote transformation through theological foundations in terms of faith perspectives, ethical implications and spiritual engagement. They exhort congregations to understand and discuss the concept of “sustainable community”. What are the basic elements that are required for people to live lives characterised by health, social justice, ecological sustainability, security and spiritual fulfilment? Or in other words, how would we describe what would constitute “sustainable community” locally and globally? What insights do we gain about basic principles for “sustainable community” from Biblical, theological and ethical reflection?

The Earth Bible sermons thus not only help us to hear the Word of God but also enable us to

• hear the call of the Earth.

• believe that caring for life on Earth is a spiritual commitment.

• pray for spiritual support in responding to the call of the Earth.

The Earth Bible sermons are an invitation to our congregations to gather together in fellowship around one table, sharing our human realities and needs, hopefully also gifts of God – even the sacraments; and to discern the needs, the priorities, the values, the visions, the challenges to ourselves as churches, the common call God has given us to be one in our love for one another and the world that God loves so much. Let us share our wisdom, let us listen to the voice of God both in the Scriptures as well as in the words of the other. Let us be the protectors of God’s creation and every living being.

I congratulate the CSI Department of Ecological Concerns, its Hon. Director Prof. Mathew Koshy Punnackad, and the members of the CSI
The Bible Earth Sermons are readings of the Bible from the perspective of the Earth. The Earth Bible edited by Norman C. Habel has been brought out by Australian eco theologians 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 an interpretation from the ecological perspective.

The important contribution of the book is in its suggestion of eight 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 is part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.

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Rev. Dr. D. Rathnakara Sadananda

*General Secretary, CSI*
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.

7. The Principle of Incarnation

8. The Principle of Promise
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 the study of several passages making use of the guidelines given by the eco-justice principles.

The contributors of Earth Bible Sermon Project are the Presbyters of Church of South India (CSI). They studied the Earth Bible volume (four volumes) by attending workshops held at Ooty, Goa, Arogyavaram, Othara and Chennai. The Clergy of CSI have been trying to bring out a Christian response to ecological issues, in the backdrop of the current ecological issues in India, interacting with environmentalists and activists all over India. These interactions are primarily aimed at moulding a group of Green Clergy as eco resource persons in each Diocese and the Earth Bible sermons delivered by the clergy of CSI will reach the grass root level.

The Earth Bible Sermons are prepared imagining how Jesus would respond had he faced such an ecological crisis in an Indian background. It will be listening and responding to Bible texts from the standpoint of the Earth. We recognize Earth as a subject in the text with which we seek to relate empathetically rather than as a topic to be analysed rationally.

ISPCK and CSI jointly published the Earth Bible Sermons volume 1 and 2. This is the third volume. This book will be a source of inspiration for eco theological work.

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnakkad
December 2015, the whole state of Tamilnadu had been engulfed by torrential rain. Especially Chennai had received the maximum rain fall after nearly 100 years. Every year people used to offer prayers for good rain fall, but the result would be a failure. Exceptionally this year we have received the maximum amount of rain where all the ponds, lakes, streams and dams were over flowing by excess rain. Many lost their lives, household goods and vehicles etc. People were cast out of their houses as refugees. Millions of people had been displaced due to the floods. The people were struggling for food and drinking water. Many had been displaced to safer places and relief camps through heavy rescue operations. Even apartments were completely submerged by water. Mobile & internet network disrupted. Public Transportations like train and bus services were suspended, multinational companies and other industries were shutdown unconditionally, educational institutions were closed. Government administration could not function smoothly. Electricity supply was disrupted for more than 10 days and rescue Boats were launched for rescue operations. In the midst of all this calamity in Tamilnadu,
Kanyakumari was the only district that had miraculously escaped from the disaster, in which people have led a normal life in spite of the heavy rains. When we ponder upon the difference that had made such a possibility in that particular district the Biblical reflections in relation with certain specifics, helps us in understanding the entire scenario.

In Kanyakumari district people and administrations have maintained a well balanced drainage system which is natural and they haven’t disturbed the water bodies which have been located there for centuries. Whereas, when we look into the situation in Chennai and its neighbouring districts, water bodies have disappeared due to rapid urbanization. Chennai alone once had more than 100 water resources, however, only few are seen presently. At present the water bodies here have been converted into huge economic and residential zones. The size, depth and width of the water bodies have been reduced due to constant encroachment which ultimately paves way for the destruction of humanity and all living beings. At this juncture, we need to see as to what the Bible says about protecting the water resources? As believers in Christ, what message could we possibly share to the general mass?

1. Prioritize the water
Deuteronomy 11:10-12 clearly speaks how Yahweh teaches the importance of water, especially about the rain water to the Israelites, who are going to be the new inhabitants of the land. As we know, fortunately Egypt has escaped from the cruel clutches of the Saharan desert because of the river Nile. That’s why historians acclaim it as the gift of the Nile. Without the Nile, Egypt might have become a part and parcel of the Saharan desert. Throughout the Egyptian exilic period the Israelites had plenty of water from the Nile River. As the Israelites were going out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, there comes the message from the Yahweh about water consumption. Yahweh asks the people to prioritize water as par with other treasures. Land of Canaan won’t be the same like Egypt where you need to suffer for water. Land of Canaan relies upon the monsoon every year so they need water storage system like lakes and ponds etc… Yahweh teaches them to have a proper water management system by prioritizing it. When we look into our Tamilnadu issue we completely rely upon the monsoon. When we delve into the annals of history, we come to know that two thousand years ago the kings and princess have developed a proper system of water management in south India in order to save the people from severe drought. The ancient community had a marvellous understanding about water management and the great importance of water. The recent floods in Tamilnadu has revealed the poor water management by the administration and lack of understanding by the people about water. People lack knowledge about the importance of water and this could be due to the changing lifestyle where money making has become the main motive. The consumerist culture has fixed a price tag for the natural water and exploited the ignorance of the people on the importance of water and water bodies. As we know, water is a natural resource given by God just like air, but consumerism, commercialization and privatization of water have denied this basic God-given right towards the access of water. Those who can afford and buy have become the owners of water and the common man suffers due to lack of water, this is total injustice and unbiblical. We could not live happily at the expense of natural resources, here Yahweh makes his point clearly through Moses that without water the “so called” Promised Land can’t be the land of milk and honey. Yahweh hands over the responsibility to the Israelites to protect water in order to live peacefully. Through the message of Yahweh and the disaster in Tamilnadu we must learn the lesson that every drop of water is priceless.

2. Preserve the water
Here Yahweh extends the blessings and offers them water bodies as a nation can only survive through the protection of water bodies. Unless we protect the water bodies any empire will come down. It is for this reason, ancient societies considered water bodies as the gift from God. Soon after the conquest of Canaan, Joshua divided the land based upon the water bodies. The tribes have settled down as colonies on either sides of river Jordan which is the major water source in Palestine. The political history of Israelites confirms that people waged wars in order to protect their water bodies, at the same time they destroyed the water resources of others as well. Even in our own context, ancient people used to construct a well before constructing the house. The ancient society was well aware of the importance of water and they protected it. Unfortunately the modern society neglected safeguarding the water bodies. The illegal construction of industries and apartments located in the water bodies by the approval of the local government. The illegal construction of industries and apartments located in the water bodies by the approval of the local government.
legislators don’t understand the need of water bodies. Even they don’t come out with an alternative plan to construct projects without disturbing the existing water bodies. Recently administrator’s find an easy way by closing down the existing water bodies in order to make way for developmental projects. When we talk about developmental projects, we need to question for whose development, what sort of development, does the development include common people, how do we call it development when the larger section of society suffers due to cutting down of water bodies, is it for the development of the elites? When the monsoon comes heavily after a decade the entire rain water floods the residential areas and flows straight away to the ocean and make people struggle in flood and drought for drinking water. Through this, the struggles of the people continues and the policy makers are continually committing historical blunders for the future generations who have to face heavy drought. What is happening with regard to our responsibility towards future generations, if we keep cutting down water bodies? Through rapid urbanization, the water resources have been destroyed and polluted in almost every metropolitan city in India. Once again I call your attention to Yahweh’s blessing where he reminds the people about water bodies and commands them to protect it. Let us grasp the meaning of it and make others know about the importance of protecting our water bodies.

3. Peace with water
We as the followers of Christ must have the peace with God’s creation especially with water. Here I use the word peace which denotes the principle of mutual coexistence and mutual partnership between creation and humanity. We often talk about stewardship towards nature, but now we need to move beyond towards companionship with the nature. Live and let live, if you take care of nature, nature will take care of you, if you hurt and destroy nature, it will in turn hurt you , if you disturb the peace of nature, nature will destroy your peace in the form of natural calamities, for which again nature is not to be blamed instead it is we who are to be blamed for not having peace and reconciliation with nature. This is how we can connect to mutual coexistence. We are living at a time where the entire world waged war with water, society has been utilizing water for its development but refuse to give space for water to exist. As true followers of Christ we have the responsibility to annihilate the attitude of consumerism in order to bring peace with water. We must know the importance of water and must allow water to exist with purity. Jesus identified himself with ‘Water’ and proudly called himself as ‘life giving water’ Jesus mentions one of the high profile characteristics of water which ultimately gives life. Imagine an earth without water. Our earth has been called the ‘plant of life’ because it contains water. In Revelation 22, John envisions the river of life giving water to heal all depravities which indicates the power of water and its inseparable nature with humanity. It is the duty of humanity to protect and preserve water. Recently human conflicts with water have created an enormous concern for the very existence of life in this planet.

So friends we have quenched our thirst through the life-giving water which Jesus offers. We have the greater responsibility on our shoulders that we must pass on this life-giving water to pour over all evils which destroy water. We must ensure life on this planet by ensuring clean and enough water over our mother earth through our selfless faith and work.

Amen

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TN’s success story: Rain water harvesting , HT Correspondent, Hindustan Times, Chennai Updated: Jun 05, 2015 01:30 IST

The Lament of Hagar

Binu C. John

Text: Genesis 21:15-17

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.”

Environmental Profile and People’s Livelihood Aspects in the Vicinity of Coal Based Thermal Power Plant at Yellur Panchayth, Udupi District:

Conventional generation of electricity from fossil fuels based on sources like coal results in serious environmental problems (pollution of air, water and land) with far reaching local and global implications (global warming, climate change). Higher greenhouse gas emissions are the causes of global warming and resultant climatic changes. The environmental issues that directly affect people are: 1) Water contamination (ground and surface water sources): higher water salinity in the water samples; saltiness, greenish coloration and oily layer in well water near streams; changes in ground water table. 2) Air contamination: open truck transport and dumping of dry coal ash – blackish particles settle on leaves, clothes kept for drying, objects inside home, food kept open, etc. 3) Earth contamination: Drying of leaves and leaf burn, reduced paddy, banana, areca and coconut yields, poor flowering of jasmine; affected livestock (cattle and poultry) and biodiversity (decline in fish, crabs and frogs, snakes, peafowl, foxes wild boar, etc.), non-palatable grasses and other herbs. 4) Health issues: skin rashes, lesions, nail deformation and skin itching; respiratory ailments like asthma, alveolar infections, bronchitis, etc, eye irritation and skin itching, forced displacement without appropriate rehabilitation of native forest dwellers.

The life of Hagar and Ismail in the wilderness, reflects the lives of many people around us who cry out for their right to live on this earth. They represent people, uprooted from their native dwelling places or feel alien in their own lands. They have lost their natural sources of air, water and earth and are wandering in their new life situations. The empty water bottle symbolically represents the contaminated condition of the earth today, where the earth is denied the fullness of its life due to the injustice of human beings secure their vested interests.

1. SARAH AND ABRAHAM
(And the water was spent in the bottle)

Sarah, out of her anxiety to secure her son Isaac’s future, forces Abraham to displace Hagar with her son Ismail. To justify their action Abraham makes use of the oppressive element of their religion, by saying that God approves Sarah’s intention. Even though, Abraham does certain things in order to safeguard their life when abandoned in the wilderness, the bread and water supplied was inadequate to save their life. Like refugees, they wandered in the wilderness without food and water, an aggressive dominion over the life of a woman and her child. That was a plan that came out of Sarah’s greed to protect her next generation and implemented with the support of her husband and his religion. We wonder how unjust was this action of a master like Abraham to take for his dependents life!

This story resembles most of the present day development programmes initiated by Multinational Companies and Corporations. We hear a great deal of canard when some new projects are in progress. They promise “Magical Canaan’s” and attract innocent common people by explaining only the merits and benefits of their project. But when it starts
to function, we realize the terrific reality that all we thought and imagined was just a daydream. We see how harmful it affects our life as the earth and its inhabitants suffer in different ways as pointed out in the illustration above. The inadequate and inappropriate rehabilitation packages and non-effective environment regulatory mechanisms make life a struggle not only for human beings but also for the entire creation. Adverse environmental conditions lead to forced emigration of local people and affect the vegetation, livestock and biodiversity.

2. HAGAR AND ISMAIL – CRY FOR LIFE

(And she sat over against him and lifted up her voice and wept)

Hagar’s cry in the wilderness sheds an eco-feminist view on the reader of her story. They were deprived of their right to live on this earth with dignity. She was denied justice when her master threw her into the wilderness along with her son. Young Ismail represents all children living in life-threatening situations in our surroundings. We know woman and earth share the same experience and they understand each other very well. Both conceive, generate and nourish life and creatures are dependent on them for their sustenance. But today they are treated as a commodity to be exploited as a matter having no spirit and life. When they are exploited they cry out to restore the sacredness of their motherhood.

To some extent, as a mother, they can tolerate any kind of violence and certain level of damage inflicted by their children. If we are ready to listen we can still hear their cries for life as Hagar does when their life was threatened. Paul has this same picture in mind of a groaning creation (Romans 8:19, 22) when he discusses about the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption. As a result of the fall, the whole creation suffered and disease, pain, death and environmental hazards entered God’s perfect world, and now creation waits in eager expectation for its deliverance. The need is high in our times to resist this transformation of our mother into dead raw materials for industrialization and commodity production.

3. GOD AND ANGEL – RESTORES LIFE

(God heard the voice of the lad)

God heard the voice of the lad and cry of his mother. God’s response to the sufferings of Hagar opens our eye to the liberating element of religion. We see God being accessible to people in their helplessness and taking care of them. The angel of the God asks, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.” God opens Hagar’s eyes to see the provision of drinking water, which helps her to reclaim their life. She fills her bottle again and gives her lad a drink. She was assured of a better life by promising her that God will make her son a great nation.

Being created in the image of God, we are representatives of God, and thus called to be co-workers with God. God intended human beings to manage the creation (Gen 1:28), by keeping it in good health through the caring, nurturing, and protecting the life in it. The ecological crisis we face at present reveals clearly the magnitude of the challenge ahead. The excellence of our living space is gradually deteriorating. We all know that the air we breathe and the water we drink are impure. The climate that prepares a good living environment is troubled with greenhouse gases and aerosols. Unless we look back over the past retrospectively and try to understand the present day crisis on its basis, the future would not be so promising for us ecologically.

Clinebell’s Ecotherapy helps an individual or group to develop an eco-consciousness in the present context of eco-alienation and its subsequent consequences, through which we heal ourselves and lead a life of eco-friendliness by taking some time to reconnect with nature and one’s own mind-body-spirit. It will bring an eco-bonding in an individual’s life and we will learn to more actively participate with nature and love it by nurturing nature and being nurtured by nature. Hence, we will be able to analyse the present day developmental projects without bias and equip ourselves to respond to all kinds of injustice towards the creation. Let us pray and ask for God’s help and strength to lead an eco-friendly life.

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Let the Rivers Flow

R. Shibu Mayam

Text: Ezek. 47:1-12

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

3 Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. 4 Again be measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again be measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. 5 Again be measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. 6 He said to me, “Mortal, have you seen this?”

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. 7 As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. 9 Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. 10 People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. 12 On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

Introduction

Rivers, the dynamic face of the landscape, are God’s gift to the world, nourishing life in abundance like the veins of the human body. India is blessed with fourteen major rivers and innumerable little rivers. The Interlinking of River Project (ILRP) proposes to interlink these systems through link canals, tunnels and dams, and water from abundant river basins to deficit areas, thus causing ecological as well as human rights impacts.

History of ILRP

The history of ILRP dates back to 1881 with an infeasible proposal by Arthur Cotton under the British rule. In 1975 a revised proposal by Dr. K.L. Rao, Nehru’s Irrigation Minister, was also abandoned on technical and financial grounds, but an impetus came with Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam’s Independence Day message in 2002 and the Supreme Court’s special direction to complete the project in 10 years. The NDA and the two successive UPA governments were optimistic in completing the project. The project proposes to construct 30 inter-river links, 36 big dams, 94 tunnels, and 10,876 km of canals.

Environmental Impact

No serious study on the environmental impact has been conducted so far, but the following impacts may be expected.

i. Each river is unique with its diverse eco-system. The diversity of eco-system and culture has a value that cannot be measured in economic terms. All these will be destroyed.
ii. The surplus water utilized for irrigation will, in fact, lead to crop failure and waste in the short run and problems of water-logging and salinity in the long run.

iii. It will lead to the destruction of the bio-diversity including the flora and fauna, thus altering the country's geography.

iv. Interlinking of rivers may affect aquatic biodiversity. A study conducted by the scientists of Cochin University of Science and Technology and Kerala Agricultural University on the basis of 53 parameters finds that, fishes are very sensitive and any slight change in the aquatic system can entirely alter the breeding pattern of fish life.

v. The construction of reservoirs will open the possibility for pisciculture, but maintaining proper environmental condition is questionable in an artificial environment. The ecologists have expressed concern over the life cycle of fish in an atmosphere alien to natural river system, and about the possible changes in their life due to water development.

vi. The ILRP will lead to the submergence of agricultural land, the forests, and an increase in seismic tremors. There would be submergence of 79,000 ha of forest land.

vii. Dams pose a tremendous threat of extinction to the variety of biological species.

viii. Dams can diminish ground water recharge and reduce the river capacity to clean and rejuvenate itself downstream of the dam.

ix. Canals interfere with the natural flow of water. There is no compensatory afforestation in the context of possible loss of forest area for wild life.

x. Numerous varieties of rice and wheat are ignored due to over emphasis on high yielding varieties.

xi. It will be dangerous to link alkaline North Indian Rivers with non/less alkaline/slightly acidic waters of the Peninsular region.

xii. Water transfer through arid/ semi arid areas can adversely affect dry land ecology.

xiii. It can transform water to micro-climatic conditions leading to public health issues.

xiv. Inundation of forest, growth of aquatic weeds affecting the productivity of the dam, threat of dam bursts, problems related to the conversion of riverine ecology to stationary lacustrine ecology, are some of the related environmental problems created by the ILRP.

Social impact
In the material base the tentative cost of the project is Rs. 5, 60, 000 crore and the destruction of the traditional communities’ subsistence economy, and the resultant social anarchy would be the consequences. Since Independence, 50 million people have been displaced by damming. This displacement and resettlement will destroy the fabric of the tribal culture of sharing, mutual co-operation and relationship, resulting in migration to slums, begging, prostitution, petty or organized crimes, social tensions leading to militancy and even terrorism. In the collective international, inter-state, centre-state, state-people and people-people conflicts will arise on the issue of water sharing. No other people's movement except the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) under the dynamic leadership of Madha Padkar is vehemently opposing the project. In the symbolic representation the main stream religions are teaching the people to accept fatalism and to be submissive to authority. The ideology behind the venture is growth and development, and various promises of flood mitigation, drought control, equity and employment generation. Here one should rethink at whose cost that development is encouraged, and it is obvious that the developmentalists are ignoring the purpose and intrinsic value of creation.

1. Water: Elixir from Heaven
Water, transcending all scientific equations, is the elixir the composition of which to the normal human perception is mysterious. It bears God's signature. Rivers nourish the diversity of life. Ezekiel 47 vouchsafes it. The prophet is foreseeing the Millennium in which water gushes out from the Temple. Many a people spiritualize this downstream and take it as a 'symbol' of God's presence. Rather than a 'symbol' the river is to be considered as a 'reminder' of God's presence and blessings. The same
river is referred to in Joel 3:18 before Ezekiel’s times. The reason why the
Israelites considered water as the most important item was because water
is scarce in the area and the people depended on seasonal, sometimes
moderate rain from December to February, with extremely hot summers.
Hence rain is taken as a reminder of God’s special providence and
prolonged dryness is considered a result of God’s displeasure (1Kin. 8:
35, Amo. 4:7). Drought is a matter of death and rain a source of hope
and life in totality. God is the fountain of living water (Jer. 2:13). Water
is meant to be flowing like the water from the Temple, which is life-giving
while stagnant water will be life destroying. ILRP involves a network of
rivers turning the flowing water into still waters which will ultimately lead
to eutrophication, temperature stratification, and emission of greenhouse
gases from decayed organic matter. In this context, the intrinsic value of
water is to be taken into account and any attempt for altering the God-
given natural flow by artificial damming is to be abandoned so as to keep
the flow of water. Let the rivers flow.

Water: nourishes life in abundance
The River is a part of the ecosystem, a subject, not an object. The River
is the goddess in Hindu mythology. The Bible tells us that the spirit was
hovering over the waters. It instilled the imagination of many a poet, it
bonded the love of many lovers. Civilizations have prospered by the
riverside. The River and its resources provide and sustain life. In the vision
Ezekiel saw a large number of trees on its banks (47:7), hosts many fish
(47:9) and the fishing community gets their livelihood from it (47:10).
The River provides life to traditional fishing community and the adjacent
forests host tribal people. People on either side of the river are enriched
by the fruit bearing trees. Gen. 2:10 says, “A river flows out of Eden to
water the garden.” The river was allowed to flow freely and give life to the
earth and its resources. Hence ILRP will lead to inundation of cultivable
land and thus end up in the displacement of many. It will threaten the
aquatic biodiversity. Since the fishes are very sensitive, even the slightest
change in the aquatic environment will affect its breeding pattern. In
the words of K.R.Narayan, Former President of India, “Let not be said
of India that this great Republic in a hurry to develop itself, is devastating
the green mother earth and uprooting our tribal populations.” Thus all
forces that threaten life need to be identified and resisted at its very
inception so as to foster the flow of life.

2. Water: riverine rights to be protected
Since the river is considered an organism/individual (anthropomorphism),
its rights can never be ignored. Most importantly its rights are the rights
to be pollution free and flow freely which we call as riverine rights say
Ashish Nandy, Ajay Dixit and Imtiaz Ahmed. They say the riverine rights
will be violated by the ILRP. Ezekiel speaks of the water flowing towards
the eastern region and going down to Arabah, entering the sea, making
the stagnant river water fresh (47:8). Here nobody dared to stop water
which is against God’s will and purpose. Rev. 22:1 also pictures the river of
the water of life flowing freely from the throne of God and the Lamb
through the middle of the city. The free flow has a cleansing purpose for
making the river pollution-free. River by itself is pristine and it is human
interference that makes the river polluted. The ILRP increases the chances
of polluting the entire river system. When linked, water from a toxic river
will flow to a non-toxic river, posing serious threat to human beings and
wildlife. All rivers are supposed to reach the sea. In Ezekiel the water is
flowing freely and finally reached the sea via Arabah. Arabah is the Jordan
Valley lying south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. What the
prophet means is that the Millennial River will merge with the Jordan
River at the northern side of the Dead Sea making its waters fresh. The
Dead Sea though its water being six times saltier than the normal sea, will
completely be salt free. At the same time the swamps and marshes will not
become fresh leaving it for salt which forms a major source of income
for the people, which means God is with those who support life. God favours the preservation of the riverine rights and opposes its alteration.
If the riverine water was not there the Dead Sea would have dried up. The
ILRP would divert the riverine water from reaching the sea. Similar
incidents occurred in the history of the world too. The virtual death of
the Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union was the consequence of the
diversion of two rivers which usually flows into the sea. In this context
we should be aware of the preservation of the riverine rights. Let the
rivers flow.

Conclusion
Justifying the hostile development Nehru said, “Dams are the temples of
modern India.” This attitude leads to the objectification of nature, ignoring
its diversity, delinking relationship, destroying the subsistence economy,
negating small scale initiatives, challenging riverine rights, creating social disharmony and the project would prove to be a gigantic economic disaster. Hence rather than an economic and profit centered capitalist approach, one should cultivate a bio-centric attitude which would eventually lead to the consideration of river as an organism, water as God’s grace nourishing life in abundance. Like Fancis of Assissi let us also call water our sister. Let the rivers flow.

Bibliography


Space for Life and Eco - Justice

Pratap Vasamalla

**Texts: Job 14:7-9; Galatians 5:16-17**

“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant. (Job 14:7-9)

“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. (Galatians 5:16-17)"

In the last two decades we have experienced the drastic climate changes in the Singareni Area. Year after year the temperature is increasing, which is very harmful not only to the human beings but also for all creatures. Only Rich people can afford Refrigerators, Air Conditioners (A/C) and Air Coolers, without which life becomes terrible during the summer season. On the one hand water scarcity becomes a vital issue, lakes and water beds like Murredu Lake and Kinnerisani Projects are insufficient for all people, most of the water beds and ponds disappeared due to climate change. On the other hand, deforestation has also led to the intensity of climate change. Thus, the Church should take on the prophetic role to think of all possible ways to overcome the dreadful climate changes and the creatures to survive in this unbearable temperature. We need to ponder on questions like what can we do for the development of afforestation and preserve the natural resources for both the present and future generations.

“I used to panic thinking about that terrifying moment God asks the question: Can you show me an evidence to prove that you have done at least something for the generations to come. Among the lakhs of hours you recklessly spent living on this earth, have you ever done anything other than for the pleasure of your own body and mind. I started to think. I ate, drank, enjoyed life and died. Just like lice on heads and lions in the jungle. Rather as a Human being I didn’t do anything exceptional. Definitely My answer to God was No.” - (Subhash Chandran- quotation is taken from his Novel of “Manushyanu Oru Aamugham”, Award winning Novel).

When we read the above statement, certainly it’s a thought-provoking statement to ponder on what we have done for the future generations and for all the creatures on the earth? This sermon will be focused on mainly two eco-justice principles. One is the Principle of Interconnectedness, where the Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. Secondly, the Principle of Mutual Custodianship: where 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.

“There is a hope for a Tree”: Relationship between Human beings and other Creation (Job 14:7-9)

Unless there is a peculiarity in a tree, one does not ordinarily attribute hope for a tree. However, this image establishes the contact between the nature of the tree and of human experience. John E. Hartley says that the book of Job clearly brings out the comparison between human beings and trees, when a tree is cut down; sometimes a new shoot sprouts from the old stump. If it is so, a new tree eventually stands in place of the old. Even though a stump may be dormant for a long time, heavy rain often spurs new growth. The stump has been waiting, for a chance to send forth new life. A farmer takes advantage of this characteristic of trees. When a tree in his orchard begins to grow old and its branches split beneath
the weight of its fruit, he cuts it down and grafts a new shoot into the stump. That shoot will grow into a tree that will bear fruit sooner than a newly planted sapling. This practice was implemented in the Near East for vines, figs, pomegranates, and walnuts etc., Thus, the tree possesses great vitality, whereas human beings have no root system that will infuse new life into his/her decaying body i.e., a dead man remains dead forever. Therefore a tree has great resilience to stand before mighty storms. Even then the images of tree show vulnerability, but hope is concretely imagined in the growth of new shoots from a cut-off trunk (v.7) and in the green response of dry roots to water (vs.9). Hope is that only the tree has the power of regeneration.

The Tree is a Symbol of Life

The Tree has longevity, the power of renewal (Pss1:3; 92:12-14) and the life-giving power (Proverbs 3:18) etc., all are expressed by the symbolism of the tree. The Book of Job presented that the capacity for regenerative life is possible only for trees and in that human beings are definitely excluded. Secondly, Job chooses the image of nature to represent the human situation, the drying of water from lakes and rivers is unexpected but perceptive (v.11). From the context of Ancient Near East, there are seasonal Wadis and other bodies of water which might give rise to an image of regeneration. Here Job is not talking about the seasonal dryness rather he stresses on the irreversible loss of water that occurs through the instances like earthquakes or drought that will cut off the spring that feeds a stream or lake. The main concern here is that human beings expect lakes and rivers to be permanent features. In spite of knowing that human beings will die, continue to think in ridiculous but deeply held conviction that they will live forever, yet death of each is irreversible. So through this text we can understand that we need to protect the forest and nature resources which are irreversible.

Vineyard becomes a Graveyard: The Need to Protect Life on Earth

The earth, on which we are living, will sustain only through the relationship between human beings and other creatures in the Creation. We need to have mutual custodianship on creation. God made earth “to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world.” (Job 37:12b), unfortunately the earth and Climate lost this intimate relationship and started to deteriorate. Thus earth became a farm house of malevolence. As we know earth is the only inhabitable place for human beings and creatures. Earth should produce its fruits but not the graveyards; which result because of the individualistic attitude, where indulgence and human greed take top priority. They had less concern about other creatures and climate. K.C. Abraham says that “the environmental degradation leads to threaten the very life of the earth. All living creatures are undergoing the dreadful condition and rapid depletion is taking place in the non-renewable resources and indeed of species themselves. Therefore, let us think about how we can regain the climate change that cares for the entire creation.

Desires lead to Dangers: A War between Spirit and Flesh

Paul says that let us walk in spirit (Gal 5:16-17) and you will not give way to the evil drive in human nature. Here Spirit and Flesh sets the two irreconcilable ways of living in sharpest contrast. The Greek word “eivpiqumi,an” means “desires” is that upon which human’s whole inner drive is set, so that human beings expends all his/her energies to obtain and enjoy it. Paul here talks about of the flesh. The word connotes all the sinful tendencies, impulses, inclinations, and desires implied in the common statement. Paul says that if you trusted in your spirit you would not go down to defeat in the civil war between the good and evil impulses. Since the Christian is the one who has been transferred from the realm of “flesh” into the sphere of “spirit,” walk in the spirit will change the conduct of human life toward God and his/her treatment of his/her fellow human beings. The purpose of the evil impulses is to oppose the good; the aim of the spirit is to eliminate the bad; and both adversaries are trying to keep human beings from doing what he pleases. Thus, these “two impulses” which are at war within the heart of human beings. Only the spirit of Christ can cure the weakness of his/her human nature.

Paul asks Galatians to get rid of works of the flesh which are obstacle for the sustenance of life. Paul’s recommendation is to overcome all such activities of the flesh which are a threat to human existence and the creation that concerns both the present and future generations. The dried up rivers, cut off trees, leveled hills, the starving people on the streets and other such realities around us are the upshot of life threatening activities of the flesh. What Paul insists us is to share life with all creation, since it has become the urgent need of the earth on which we are living.
Fight against Flesh: The Need to Stand for Climate Justice

There have been struggles in the world between good and evil, the strong and the weak. Today’s Biblical text (Gal.5:16-17) also gives us a description about a struggle between the flesh and spirit. This struggle is not temporal rather an ongoing one. In this struggle, it is easy for us to join the side of the flesh and fight against the spirit. But God wants us to be part of the spirit and fight against the flesh. Here, we have to make a deliberate choice to be either on the side of spirit or flesh. While money, power, pleasures are on the side of flesh, there are only poverty and subjugation on the side of spirit. Paul opines that we should make the choice without thinking about our own material benefits and by foreseeing the necessity of Eco-Justice. We understand our hunger as our material need and other’s hunger as our spiritual need. It is only by foreseeing our spiritual need and by joining the side of the just we can become a part of spirit centered society which stand for justice; where every human being and living creatures can live happily without subjugation.

Conclusion

Dear friends, are we seeing only the things that affect us? Until and unless the things that affect our existence on earth are eliminated we won’t feel the responsibility towards climate justice. God has made the earth inhabitantable to all the living creatures and human beings but earth become a threat to human beings and all the living creatures. Thus, we need to open our eyes to the contemporary Climate realities around us, so that we can protect the life on the earth. May the almighty God help us to act accordingly for Eco-Justice.

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(Accessed on 10.02.2016)
Impacts of Smart Cities

Devanand Subuddy Kummithi

Text: Jeremiah 32: 6-15

6 Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: 7 Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” 8 Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.” Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

9 And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11 Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12 and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. 13 In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. 15 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

In the book of Jeremiah, chapter 32 is a land issue under environmental crisis with a story to restore the family heritage on the earth at Anathoth in the country of Benjamin. The purpose of land here seen from an eco perspective shows the terms and conditions to posses the land with the purchase deed on behalf of the permanent settlement of family in protecting the creation. Moreover, a temptation of the community to shift from agric-culture to a culture of houses and fields and vineyards (in vs. 15) depicts a first step of urbanisation in Anathoth. Hence the Christian eco-centric message from this passage shall be to maintain the intrinsic worth of the land with the ownership of God and then to hold on to a primal vision of the land for a mutual care between the triad of God, Family and the Land. (vs.7, 8). In this regard the sermon provides a high light of the things to learn and things to delearn for the human beings to live in mutual concern with the creation and the creator. There shall be a need to learn Eco-Justice and delearn eco-degradation and destruction.

Primarily, in this sermon one finds the dynamics of Anathoth land for the family of Jeremiah given by God. Secondly the dynamics of land pooling in Andhra Pradesh for Amaravati capital city given by the government are understood and seen from an eco-perspective. And finally the dynamics of smart cities are being challenged to shift towards eco-friendly cities and villages.

Dynamics of Anathoth

The passage, Jer. 32:6-15 is an original autobiographical account of Jeremiah the prophet, who secures the vision of the land from his brother Hanamel and retains an intrinsic worth of ownership of their family estate to Yahweh. This was done because the land was given with religious significance under a set of terms and conditions for inheritance called nachalah and for possession called yerushahah. These were permanent settlement contract rules in an allotted land of Anathoth for a mutual care among the blood relations and close bond with redemption rights between the Israelite farming community from the post-settlement period. (Vs.8).

Hanamel, Jeremiah’s Uncle’s son comes to redeem their family land by asking his brother Jeremiah to buy it. At this juncture, Jeremiah was in a jail and he not only knew that the land was going to be captured by the Chaldeans and Babylonians very soon after the purchase but also he knew that the Lord will bring back the Israelites to this place and make
them dwell in safety again. Therefore, Jeremiah buys the land for seventeen shekels of silver not from his prosperity but from his poverty with both sealed and unsealed deeds preserved for the future in an earthenware vessel (Vs14). Primarily in the pre-settlement period Israelites were a pastoral community and they changed to an agricultural community in their post-settlement period with their allotted land. As settlers with primal vision of the land they might have learned using the land for agriculture from Canaanite culture of farming. The presumption of Hanamel to sell the land to his brother Jeremiah could be his inability to live gainfully with agriculture on the settled land affected with famine and pestilence (Vs.24) or he must be tempted to live an urban life with the money in selling the land. (Vs. 24, ‘Famine’ “in the city”). None of the views are eco-centric but anthropocentric.

The fundamental axiom of ecology may explain that ‘once the wanderers become the settlers, the exploitation of environment begins’. For example, wanderers walk for water to get them only when they need but settlers seek some systems in their settlements to get the water whenever they need and where ever they need. Thus in creating systems with wells, motor pipe lines, bore wells, dams and reservoirs the environment around the system could get disturbed or imbalanced. Anathoth was also famous for stone quarries, dug for building Jerusalem city, which was just two and a quarter miles away.

This makes one to understand that a balanced climate justice is never possible in post-modernity or in a society of systematic technologies that disturbs the balance of the environment. Nobody in the modern society can maintain a land or sustain it without application of systematic technologies on it that disturbs the ecological balance. Therefore, from an eco-perspective, Hanamel must have struggled to maintain the land with Canaanite techniques and other systems and give it up to selling but Jeremiah must have been tempted to see it useful after the Chaldeans and Babylonians develop the land into an urban base. (Vs.41-44).

Dynamics of Amaravati

Today another Anathoth in human temptation for urbanisation in this post-modern society is Amaravati the new capital in Andhra Pradesh. The enactments of Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) act of 2014 were also like the terms and conditions of Anathoth land deeds in making the farmers tempted to give away their owned lands for the building of Amaravati as a world-class capital city. This system of getting land has become India’s largest experiment in a process known as “land pooling”, which is being held up as an alternative to land acquisition.

What is land pooling?

Under land pooling systems, landowners voluntarily sign ownership rights over to a single agency or government body. This agency develops the land by building roads and laying sewage lines and electricity connections. Once this is done, it returns a smaller portion of the land to the original owners. But since the plot now has more amenities, its price has probably risen to match the market value of the owners’ original landholding.

The lands in Amaravati are being pooled when the native farmers themselves came to the government for selling. The government in the name of post modern social development under land pooling system acquired 33,000 acres of the best land owned by individual farmers between Vijayawada and Thullur along the banks of the Krishna River. The CRDA is further planning to acquire another 7000 and more acres in this most equitable and profitable strategy for the government of Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, it plans around the capital region to seek another 20,000 hectares of additional reserved forest by requesting the Central Government sanction.

In 2014 A.P produced 128.95 lakh tons of rice from 46.96 lakh hectares of land at the rate of producing 3,146 kgs per hectare. When Amaravati becomes a smart city, the country will lose 6.30 lakh tons of rice, 10 million trees in few months on 20,000 hectares. This is not only a problem of food security for people, birds, and animals etc., but also a problem of environmental balance for the whole creation of God.

Dynamics of smart cities

Tempting the farmers for money and tempting the government for power at the cost of the mother earth, her natural resources and her eco-balance should be considered injustice to delearn. When Gujarat’s Dholera Special Investment Region pooled in the ratio of 40:60 between Government the buyer and farmer the seller, the ratio in Amaravati is 70:30. There were nearly 100 smart cities in the manifesto of the central government to
develop and in those one can expect the ratio further decreases for the seller. The Government wants to show development and acquire power and the people want to be ruled to earn easy-big-monies in developed societies. In this tempted-system of building smart cities, governments cannot show developments without acquiring or pooling lands of God set apart for rivers, forests, plains, hills, mountains and valleys with the variety of flora and fauna. Smart cities displace the ownership from God and replace the ownership to the partnership between the government and human beings.

Anathoth is a town which lies between Mishmash and Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:30), in the territory of Benjamin, assigned to the Levites (Joshua 21:18). It was occupied by the Benjamites after the return from the Exile (Nehemiah 11:32) and the name was identified with a small village called ‘Anata’ fifteen houses always tempted with the life of Jerusalem being two and a quarter miles away. This temptation led the people to go for easy money shifting their occupations to quarries and carrying stones to building Jerusalem.

Now coming to Amaravati, A.P. is one of the 29 states in India with a DGP around $80B that needs a capital to function but not a capital like Singapore whose DGP is $360B. Even India’s capital New Delhi with GDP $294 B does not have such world class infrastructures planned for Amaravati but still Andhra people wanted it because the government tempted the people for easy money at the investment of their land along with its natural resources. People can give their lands to pooling and have less work or no work but gain more money, because now they give 100% of their land to the government and get thrice the registration rate of the land. After the city is built they get 30% of the land back in which 20% could be used for residence and 10% used for commercial purpose. The farmers not only get back the 30% of land from the government but also get payments of INR 30 to 50 K from every acre given to land pooling for ten years to develop their 30% lands in the city.

Conclusion
Every attempt to build a nexus between climate justice and development of modern societies with present science and technology is a mangle. Today, human beings try an interstitial healing to uphold a triad of modern developments with science and technology, the ecological balance and human desire. In the text, Jeremiah in Anathoth buys the land and as a prophet he deposits it for the future investment of developments. In today’s context the government buys the land for Amaravathy as an investment to its power-show-off for a development of a number-one world-class city. Hanamel in the text and farmers in our context both were never for eco-justice. Therefore unless postmodernism travels back from modern societies to pre-modern societies to build eco-friendly cities and villages with pre-modern culture there shall be no salvation for the whole creation to wipe away the tears of the creation that groans with climate change and eco-degradation and destruction. Amen.

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Mission for the Water of Life

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1. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2. through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are the healing of the nations.
3. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4. they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. 5. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
6. And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, and the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”
7. “See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

The above text, the eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God is a revelation to John on the island of Patmos. Patmos is a rocky and barren place, almost without trees. Its unpleasantness made it a good location to punish popular people who were perceived as threats to the civil order of the Roman Empire. While John was enduring these
harsh conditions, he received several visions from Christ. And thus the book of Revelation is John’s record and commentary of his visions. There is a considerable disagreement on how the book of the Revelation should be interpreted since the book of Revelation is a product from a supernatural vision given to John and the cosmic symbols and imagery has made us to reduce the importance of this book. Hence the best way to view the book of Revelation is to allow God to say what He says and not try to spiritualise or allegorise the text. Through the inductive analyses of the text it shows us the ecological importance in the present context.

This eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God aims at the transformation for a better tomorrow and also demands an authentic response to the need of the hour. The Lord’s Prayer provides us with the basic ingredients for a holistic mission, the line “Your Kingdom come on earth” makes it truly ecological. Comparing this eschatological vision with the present reality is purely mystical and contradictory in the context of Ranipet in Vellore District of Tamil Nadu. Ranipet is known for its tanneries and chemical treatment units, the only Indian city to make it to the top 10 dirtiest and polluted industrial cities in the world. Ranipet, from India ranked the 9th position in the list of most polluted places in the world. (2006) Ranipet is the fourth largest urban area in India. Although Ranipet is a medium sized town, its problems also pose a potential risk to the population of the nearby city of Vellore. A factory in Ranipet manufactures sodium chromate, chromium salts and basic chromium sulphate tanning powder used locally in the leather tanning process. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) estimates that about 15,00,000 tons of solid wastes accumulated over two decades of plant operation are stacked in an open yard (three to five meters high and on 2 hectares of land) on the premises and contaminating the groundwater. The toxic wastes from the leather companies are directly dumped in to the Palar river beds, thus leading to the drinking water scarcity in Vellore.

One thing we have to understand at this juncture is that this eschatological vision had existed during the pre industrialization in Vellore District. The Palar River which was providing the water of life clean and pure is now contaminated and polluted and most of the time the river bed is dry because of less rainfall and construction of dams in other districts; Palar river which has given the water of life has no life. The tree of life which was standing on either side of the bank was cut and cleared for the promotion of industrial sectors. The water that gave life for the tree of life has made it barren because of the toxic element present in the water. Nothing accursed was there, but now the land is cursed with chemicals, plastics, leather tanning waste, pesticides and other harmful products which in turn pollutes the river Palar. Lord God rule was there but now the Vellore district is ruled by Globalisation and Capitalism and for its selfish gains it destroys the natural resources especially the water of life Palar. It is this vision which reminds us of the forgotten image of the Vellore district. It is this vision which promotes the people of the land to strive and to crave for the Kingdom of God on earth.

Eco-vision “Bitter water- Pollution of Water”
Exodus 15:23 ‘When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah.’ We cannot be sure what was the exact cause of how water in Marah was bitter, but a prediction would be that the water was bitter because of natural causes. Bitter water takes on a whole new connotation today due to the whole question of the pollution of water resources. The analysis of report from TNPCB of ground water sample collected downstream of Ranipet head works reveals that the values of Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), chloride and hardness are exceeding the standard. Even the underground water is polluted and has become unfit to drink. This water will cause skin infections, skin cancer, blindness and physical disability. It will be appropriate to state the words of Jesus on the cross, the two words “I thirst” in John 19:28 are the simple cry of a man in severe pain. Yet these are not only the words of Jesus so many years ago on the cross but are also the words of several people in Vellore and in the world. In this globalised world, people claim that the world is becoming a smaller place because of communication and transportation, but the real experience of women in search of drinking water in several parts of India as well as remote villages in Vellore who have to walk further and further away for water everyday, shows that the world has become a much larger place. The eschatological vision in Rev 22: 1-7 clearly states that the water of life plays a vital role in the kingdom of God that it brings prosperity and peace and the tree of life gets rich resource to produce its fruits and brings contentment to the subjects of the kingdom. Thus the water of life is essential in the ecological system but pollution has made it water of struggle. So let us strive to bring justice and do mission for the water of life.
Eco-centric “Search of an ecological mission paradigm”

The eschatological vision gives us insight of the Kingdom of God and also speaks to us about the character of water, which is coterminous with life and that water sustains life. It would not even be wrong to say that water is life. The words of Jesus in Acts 20:28, “Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving” applies to all aspects of life. If nature is cared for, it will never disappoint anyone. In fact it will bless all with its treasury of abundance. Ecology now finds a place in sustaining God’s gift of life.

The term sustainability is defined as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet its own needs”. Verse 2 “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” states about the sustainable development. In the case of Ranipet, Vellore Dist has exceeded rate of pollution in ground water and Palar River, and only the leaves of the tree that can heal the present crisis. Planting more trees and reducing the pollution level can bring sustainable development. The message of the eschatological vision is not meant to silence anyone but to act on the scenario. The concept of this vision makes it clear that God created the universe as an expression of love. When we ponder on this eschatological vision it means the standard that has been set by the creator for the humans to live and to act upon it for creating something beautiful for Him. In such a mission perspective we are called to look beyond ecological conservation.

Eco-Consciousness “Called to Reconciling and Healing Stewardship”

We all know how to save our material wealth but we don’t know how to save our natural wealth especially water that gives us life, if we are not able to save this wealth the future generations will struggle for existence. Our forefathers have left the land for many generations to come but our stereotype of developmental paradigms are responsible for massive ecological destruction and destruction of water of life at all levels. It is the time to awake we are the root and foundation to save our home. We have to globally warm our hearts, change the climate of our souls. One thing we have to embrace at this juncture to “betray nature is to betray us to save nature is to save us”, we are not apart from nature but we are a part of nature. This eschatological vision is a call on us not to pollute the water but to share the water with all of creation. To acknowledge this ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis, unless we bring reconciliation and healing to the nature we will not be at peace spiritually. We have to develop a new and simple lifestyle which can enhance sustainability for human existence in harmony with the rest of creation. Finally in verse 7 our Lord Jesus Christ states “See, I am coming soon!” states to the believer’s morale “Maranatha” our Lord come. John the Baptist states in John 1: 23 He is the one who makes straight the way of the Lord. It in His second coming we called to be prophets like John to make the world a better place for his coming. May the good Lord bless these words. Amen

Bibliography


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Thou shall not Covet

Vincent Rajkumar

Text: Exodus 20:17

“You shall not covet thy neighbor's property or land or anything.”

The Father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The world has enough for everyone’s needs, but not enough for everyone’s greed”. Creation is the precious gift of God, the ultimate action of God, “a sign of peace and harmony” which God gave human beings to protect, preserve and to use for the betterment and welfare of the people. The people instead of using the creation in a proper way frequently abused the nature which resulted in Global warming, climate change etc. In the name of science and technology, modernization the rich exploit the poor for their vested interests. This is well illustrated in the case of Tulluru a fertile land that had been declared as the capital for Seemandhra by the central government. The problem here is that the Chief minister of Seemandhra, Dr. N. Chandra Babu Naidu selected a fertile land for establishing the modern Hi-Tec world. The Seemandhra government forced 21,000 farmers to give up their land of 35,420 acres for building the capital city. How can the higher authorities claim the fertile lands of the poor farmers for their selfish ends? Don’t they have the right to cultivate in a fertile land?

In the Book of I Kings, an account is given of a man name Naboth, who owned a vineyard next to the palace of King Ahab. The King desperately wanted the vineyard for himself and offered to buy it from Naboth or trade a better piece of property for it. Naboth, however, recognized that God had entrusted this property to him and his descendants, and it was not something that he could sell or trade. (See I Kings 21:3.) In the end, Ahab killed Naboth so that he could possess the land. This story is a good example of covetousness and illustrates the importance of Jesus command: To covet is to wrongly want something that someone else has, without caring at all about the other person’s right to have it. God clearly says that coveting is wrong. In fact, it is the last of the Ten Commandments. Do not long for anything that belongs to your neighbor.- Exodus 20:17a

The Bible tells us that human desire is never satisfied. You cannot satisfy human nature; our desires of the flesh can be temporarily gratified but never satisfied. As soon as the initial excitement wears off, you will want more. In our desire for more, covetousness is born. The theological understanding of creation based on ‘human enjoyment’ or ‘material blessing’ of human beings has nurtured and continues to pave way for an irresponsible use of the earth, which would ultimately lead to death and destruction. Sadly, now God’s creation suffers, we hear of global warming and the extinction of species, societies and the groaning of the earth and the earth’s resources. So when covetousness begins to raise its greedy head, we must listen to what the word of God tells us. We need to hear this warnings about what happens to the covetous and how serious it is to covet. And we need to hear His promises that can give great contentment to the soul and overcome all covetous cravings.

Warning Against Covetousness

1. Covetousness opposes the Mutual Custodianship of Creation

God is the creator of the whole universe, of Earth and all its creatures (Gen 1:1). The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalms 24:1) God is the land lord and we are God’s Tenants (Lev 25:23). The Lord blesses us and keeps us, and we in turn are expected to keep the earth. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). Everyone is accountable to God
as the responsibility of being a steward is given to us. As a steward we are
called to be friendly and do justice to nature and also to our fellow beings
in all perspectives. Man's greed leads to covetousness.

Ecclesiastes 5:11 “He who loves money will not be satisfied with
money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity.” This is
God's word on money: it does not satisfy those who love it. If we believe
him, we will turn away from the love of money. Jesus put it like this in
Luke 12:15, “Beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist
in the abundance of his possessions.” The Word of the Lord is confirmed,
in the many miserable rich people we see in the world that proves that a
contented life does not come from possessions. The greed for material
goods opposes mutual custodianship of God's creation.

2. Covetousness opposes universal responsibility towards God's
creation
Each and every human being is endowed with the responsibility of
protecting God's created order. The first parents were called and endowed
with the responsibility of protecting, preserving, using and also having
dominion over the created order. This was a complete failure from the
human side and God Yahweh was very much grieved over the creation
of human being. Covetousness is a basic sin (1 Tim. 6:10) that leads to
stealing, adultery, murder – almost any other sin. If the first and great
commandment is to do with love, covetousness stands opposite the great
commandment. Covetousness is interested in getting, on the contrary
love is interested in giving. We are responsible for the food, water and
comfort of animals under our care. A covetous person builds up inner
tension, which often leads to emotional illness, as materialism is a very
frustrating way of life. The more you get, the more you want.

Ahab the king misused his authority and killed Naboth the farmer or
keeper of vineyard. Whether it's administrative power or ultimate power
of life and death, the power we have comes from God and must be used
according to his will. King and queens, emperors and prime ministers,
dictators and generals, parents and teachers - all of them are accountable
to the Lord and will one day answer to Him. Covetousness is a breeding
ground for a thousand other sins. And that heightens the warning to flee
from it and fight it with all our might.

3. Covetousness opposes contentment:
In the Garden of Eden, Eve coveted the forbidden fruit and brought sin
and death into the world. Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard and committed
murder in his attempt to grab what belonged to another. David coveted
Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife, and as a result brought the sword of God into
his household for generations. Judas was motivated by a covetous heart.
Annanias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost because they were covetous.
Even the great Apostle Paul was plagued by thought covetousness - Rom.
7:7. Covetousness is a problem that remains as long as man is in this
world. Even in these last days, men still want that which belongs to others.
Covetousness lets you down in the hour of death. 1 Timothy 6:6-9 says,
“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For We brought nothing
into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world, but if we
have food and clothing we will be content with that.”

The fruitfulness and grace of the Garden—the gifts of creation—did
not satisfy our first parents and their succeeding generations (Gen 3:11).
Even though God promised not to forsake them nor leave them, they
chose to go out their own way — grasping more and even more from the
creation for selfish advancement. The result is an over exploitation of
creation—a pressing of the creation to produce ever more, without limit.
We are told by the scripture: “keep your lives free from the love of money
and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I
leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb13:5)

To conclude Epicurus has written, “If you want to make a man happy,
add not to his possessions, but take away from his desires.” It is time for
all of us to amend and eradicate the polluted mind. The sustenance of
the earth and an earth centered view must be manifested in all our sayings
and doings. The ten commandments of earth ethics taken from Rally,
volume 86, No.6, November 2009 it is worth mentioning here.

1. Love and honour the earth since it has blessed you with life and governs
your survival.

2. Keep each day sacred to earth and celebrate the changing of its seasons.

3. Should not hold yourselves above other living things and have no
right to drive them to extinction.
4. Be grateful to the plants and animals which nourish you by giving you food.

5. Limit your offsprings because too many people will over burden the earth.

6. Do not waste your resources on destructive weapons.

7. Do not run after gains at the cost of nature.

8. Do not conceal from others the effects you have caused by your actions on earth.

9. Do not steal from your future generations their right to live in a clean and safe planet by polluting it.

10. Let your need have priority over, your wants and consume the material goods in a moderate amounts.

Let us live without coveting others properties or land or anything.

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8

Water Crisis

P. Victor Paul

Text: Lamentations. 5:4-5

We must pay for the water we drink…. with a yoke on our necks we are hard driven.

Introduction

The average human body is 70 percent of water. We start our life being 99 percent as fetuses. Throughout our lives, we exist mostly as water. Yet, human beings have neglected to maintain its natural reservoirs and safeguard its purity and turned it be a commodity. Almost all Indian cities face chronic water shortage, lack of access to safe drinking water, lack of water for cultivation, constant fluctuations in rainfalls and danger of unexpected floods and untimely rains. Water crisis and water pollution are major problem in the global context today. It has been suggested that it is the major universal cause for death and disease.

Water is a precious gift of the Creator, to be preserved as a mark of respect to the giver. Water is one of the most fundamental and essential ingredients of life and the most uniting reality of all life on the earth. Water is one of the primordial elements in the Bible, “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of waters” (Gen. 1:2). Water is the precious resource upon which terrestrial life depends for sustenance; an essential element for life. The universal significance of water is an undeniable truth for the existence of all that breathes. But sadly this precious water has been polluted.
Water pollution is the contamination of water bodies such as lakes, rivers, oceans, and ground water, which affects organisms and plants that live in these water bodies and in almost all cases, the effect is damage either to individual species and population or to natural biological communities. In addition to the acute problem of water scarcity, and pollution, the developing counties like ours continue to struggle with pollution problems such as raw sewage, industrial waste discharge into the rivers, devastating effects of mining, nuclear power facilities and toxic waste dumps, e-waste and the rise of temperature in the planet’s atmosphere. There is no equality in the distribution of water and thus the whole creation is facing the negative effects of this water crisis, which is a sign of degrading the capacity of the earth to support life. Never before have human beings wielded so much power over creation, exploiting its resources by means of a ‘flow-through-economy’. It is a process of abusing the creations wealth and exploiting nature’s resources without replenishing them and polluting the surroundings. This is the status of our planet in the present context.

While creating the universe, God created everything in a balanced manner and it was found good. God blessed the human beings and God said to them, “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over everything that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). We know that subdue here does not mean exploit, rather it means responsible stewardship and ability to live inter connectedly with the creation. God and human beings are mutual custodians and each element has its intrinsic value to sustain life in it. However, we, human beings have developed and continued to nurture a culture of destruction or exploitation of the earth which in turn is moving closer to total destruction.

In the light of the above introduction, such a contextual ecological issue is prevailing in my own State, Telangana (a newly formed State bifurcated from the state of Andhra Pradesh). News related to rampant water shortages, controversies over the control of water and its legal implications have often been in the limelight. The present scenario of conflict over the legal issues of water in the Telugu States prove that in future, world wars may happen in order to get the control of water resources. Today drinking water is to be bought even in the rural set up and it is a common phenomenon because no safe drinking water is available. During the last one month about 256 suicide deaths of the young farmers in the districts of Telangana State have been reported. The prime cause for committing suicide is the lack of normal rainfall and shortage of water for cultivation and loss of hope of getting a good harvest. The farmers had made big investments but unexpected crop failures left them with heavy debts. The farmers who depended upon the earth for their sustenance found it difficult to cope up with the sudden crop loss due to scarcity of water for cultivation and failure of the earth to produce naturally without the aid of pesticides. This crisis has to be perceived and reflected from the perspective of inter connectedness of the human beings to the earth and their attitudes and relationships with the creation. Further, it has its impact on the whole of the ecological crisis and climate change and the earth and its resources. This year, farmers are disappointed because all rivers, canals and village tanks have dried up and there is no water at all. Only a big question remains: how to survive? Thus, the young farmers psychologically were pressurized by heavy debts and loss with no hope to continue cultivation, found suicide as the only alternative. This situation clearly indicates that the earth has been wounded and plundered and if this continues, the situation will worsen and severely affect the entire environment and the inhabitants of the earth. Now, let us reflect on this ecological issue from the biblical text (Lamentations. 5:4-5).

**Human transgression and the Divine retribution**

The book of Lamentations deals with the lamentation of Israel in Babylonian captivity and about their bad fate in the foreign land. They were lamenting saying that they had to pay for the water they drank. It was the divine retribution for Israel's transgressions committed against God. It depicts a political funeral and disaster of the human community. The lamentations of Israel and Judah remembering their past glory and prosperous life is a process of crisis management seeking to set right the broken relationships. Israel's cause of lamentation was the divine judgment for the injustice and sin committed against God. Sin committed against God is also a sin committed against the creation; hence, it brings suffering on the human beings. The cause of their suffering was being indifferent to the warnings of the disaster. The warning came to Israel in the form of various disorders in the life and the nature around them. They suffered due to infertility, adversity, and desolation, and being forsaken by the
neighboring nations. Israel was destroyed, torn apart and doomed with no sign of hope as they seemed to be even forsaken by God. Their suffering is compared with the bereavement of a woman who was separated from her husband, children and from all her majesty (Lam. 1: 6), loss of joy of bounty in vintage or harvest, crushed like wine-press due to famine and sufferings, their temple, the forts, the palaces, dwellings of people, plight of innocent children and the young beautifully depicts the consequences of injustice meted to the nature (Chapter 2).

We often blame God for every disaster which we face in our lives and never realize the fact that we are the real cause for the disaster. We need to understand that, God never intends to punish, or bring disaster on the land, in the nature, on people and even on the creation, which was created by his hands (Lam 3: 33-35). It is the wickedness of human beings, their sinful activities, greed and selfish nature, that are the causes of destruction of the earth and the depletion of all the resources in it. In this book we find that, though human beings are the prime cause for the disaster, the punishment is not experienced by human beings alone but sadly all the other innocent creations and prospective generations (5:13) also who have to face the bad effects as they are inter connected with nature. Unfortunately, the lament of Israel saying, “we had paid for fire-wood, water, suffered loss, failure and disappointment by the earth and failure of natural resources and degradation of productive capacities of the earth” has become the lament in the present context. The present scenario of the young farmer's suicidal deaths stands as the best example of human selfish attitude towards the creation and its treasures. Whenever injustice, violence and destruction are done to the earth by human beings, God intervened with creation by bringing judgment. The present ecological crisis is the result of the injustice meted out to creation by the human community and God’s intervention on behalf of the creation. Israel's crisis management process involved remembering their past, the wonderful relationship which they had enjoyed in relation to God and with the other living communities of the earth and lamenting over the ill fate that had befallen them due to their injustice and unhealthy relationship with God and fellow beings in the creation.

Human Repentance brings Divine Restoration
The chapters 3: 40-41 & 5: 20-22 calls for repentance and turning back to God in forgiveness for the transgressions committed. God in His mercy never intends to destroy the creation, but always wants to be in communion and fellowship with his handiwork. In this book, we notice that, although God is responsible for the calamity, yet it is to him the sorrowing people instinctively turn for help. It was He, who has given them the inheritance (5:2). Their lamentation refers to their present forlorn state, in which they were compelled to purchase the bare necessities of life from their captors (5: 4) and to seek their bread in the wilderness at the peril of their lives (5: 9) was a plea to God to restore them. The plea for restoration was for God's own name sake and to their rightful position in the land so that they would be no longer under the pressures of the power and authority of these captors and their calamity.

God is merciful to all who repent and turn back to Him. Only in God, there is hope for the stricken people and the wounded earth. God of mercy regretted over the cosmic destruction and established an everlasting covenant with creation in order to have fellowship and restoration of the broken relationship. The restoration of broken fellowship takes place when there is realization and repentance. The present ecological crises are a warning and punishment for the disastrous exploitation of the creation by human beings. God's intention in it is not to bring everything to an end but desires to do justice to the creation because God is able to feel the pain, grief of His hand work, for He is in solidarity with the earth. The issue of climate change is almost a metaphor for all that has gone wrong in the human relationship with the totality of creation. It illustrates simultaneously the totality of the ecological impact of an industrial life style of overconsumption and injustice inherent in the present structures of global economy and life styles. As a result, we face severe problems such as, ecological threats, the impact of intense productive modes and high levels of water consumption, pollution, deforestation, population explosion, urbanization, inequitable use and distribution of water resources, effects of changes in agricultural patterns and so on which needs the urgent attention of the world community. If it goes unchecked it will aggravate the problem. The present ecological crises are calling us to lament and set right our relationship with the earth before it becomes violent. The calamity and catastrophes which were part of Israel have surely now become ours today. We need to learn how to read the signs of the time and alter our behavior and predatory nature in order to live and let others live.
Therefore, when the reason says that destroying creation is impractical; faith ought to say it is blasphemous. Commoditization of water in the present times raises ethical questions like the author of the book of Lamentations raises. The world is endangered by changing rainfall pattern, fast melting of permanent ice due to climate change. There is a growing recognition that care of the environment is a moral obligation and that pollution and other forms of environmental degradation are sinful. Environmental degradation is frequently the result of greed and selfishness, something that says that everything other than oneself is something to be used. For too long we have been blinded by our anthropocentric focus. We are called to participate in God’s mission of restoring the broken relationships in repentance and be the friends of the creation.

Conclusion

Let us recognize that we are a part of a larger creation, called to exist in relation to all living things and beings and serve as agents of care for the suffering earth so that earth is restored back with all its goodness. It is imperative for us to live in mutual support of each other, give more attention to the most vulnerable. The water crisis in our country has damaged the natural eco-system and posed a threat to the peaceful co-existence of different flora and fauna. The need of the hour is to be eco-conscious to create the right relationship in God’s order of creation and be mindful of conservation and share the usage of water among the communities of the earth. Let us be friends of nature; friendship with nature is not just a social or political or economic question but a profoundly moral issue. This is a time to join our hands together to strive for harmony in creation.

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Call to Appreciate God’s Creation

Emmanuel Koilpillai

Text: Matthew 6:25-27

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Illegal sand miners allegedly attempted to kill a team of five officers, including an assistant, by ramming their tractor into a car in which the officers were travelling in a village in Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu in the wee hours of Sunday. Similar incidents were also noted in other parts of Tamil Nadu where sand miners kill officers, which have created greater apprehension in the common people. The impact of mining includes depletion of groundwater; lesser availability of water for agricultural and drinking purposes; destruction of agricultural land; loss of employment to farm workers; threat to livelihoods; human rights violations; and damage to roads and bridges. There has been a significant increase in sand mining in Tamil Nadu since the year 1990 following a boom in the construction industry, and the activity reached alarming proportions in several areas, particularly in the southern and western regions of the State, even after court restrictions on sand mining came into effect in neighboring Kerala.
in 1994. The question of the hour is: Why does sand mining happen without any control? Although the government has taken necessary steps to prevent this illegal sand mining, this menace does not seem to have been eliminated completely. The most distressing fact is that the people who are involved in this illegal activity are mostly politicians and elusive business people. Enforcement of law often fails to stop them. We as Christians must have a commitment not to engage in such activities; but rather take up the responsibility of protecting our earth from destruction. Theological and ethical formulations are the need of the hour. At this juncture, we cannot afford to keep ourselves away from this issue. Let us look into the Bible for what it offers to us in this regard. In Matthew 6:25–26, Jesus initiates a paradigm shift in His Good News where He calls His disciples to observe the creation of God. We must take this principle to our fellow beings in order to equip them to work against sand mining and other ecological disaster which have been taking place.

Call for Contentment

One of the famous soft drink company’s slogan goes like this: ‘Dil mange more’ means “heart needs more” naturally, the discontented soul of human beings constantly yearns for more. The issue of sand mining is also connected with this attitude. The contractors mine more than their allotted volume of sand for more profit and money. Politicians also involve in this shady business mainly for two aspects: making easy money and establishing power zones to threaten locals. Even though they are likely to be aware of the hazardous factors of mining, they unlimitedly mine and destroy the mother earth because of their discontented nature. In Mathew Chapter 6:25, Jesus speaks against the stance of the ‘survival of the fittest,’ a concept where one always cares about oneself and never bothers about the other. In his book “Transforming World Views,” Paul Hiebert points out that “in the twenty-first century, the consumerist culture has become universal and supreme, where it stimulates the human heart to long for more. Actually this attitude predominantly comes from the western world and spreads all over the world; then it gets localized based on the local culture”. Consumerism makes one to worry more about oneself than about the others. Jesus focuses on three areas of anxiety common to man: eating, drinking and clothing, which reveal the innate human temperaments of survival, satisfaction and need for more, which are interconnected and create anxiety in human hearts and make them yearn for these comforts and pursue them. Jesus instructs His disciples not to follow the worldly who always give importance to material goods and worship money. Jesus introduces faith as the paradigm to contradict the human desire for consumption. The only way to lead a contented life is that one must taste Jesus Christ through faith, which is the ultimate truth and reality to obtain satisfaction and eternal life. Birds, the creation of God teach us God’s wisdom. Jesus breaks down the human monopoly over wisdom where He calls for humanity to look at the birds for a better understanding of God’s creation, where they never live with worries or fear for their survival. Let us come out from the stance of fear and embrace God who is our provider and lead a life that is filled with God’s peace. They set the best model for a contented life without any worries and to live with what we have.

Call for a Communitarian life

Jesus portrays the life of birds as an example of a communitarian life, where they always share their food and other resources with their community. They never accumulate anything for themselves but everyday wait for God’s providence. They never destroy the eco system but rather help to sustain it. This is quite contradictory to what happens in human life. We human beings indulge in accumulation of wealth all for ourselves and we are not ready to share it with others. Profit making becomes the main motive, which forces human beings to stoop down to any level to obtain it, an attitude which threatens, the safety of our earth and where no one is willing to consider the well-being of others. A self-centered lifestyle goes against the teachings of God who is bound to human community with a strong fellowship. When a person becomes self-centered, he forgets God who is the provider and never thinks about his fellow-human beings. The reason for clashes and riots between humans is rooted in this attitude of individualism that makes the human mind self centred. This self-centered attitude of humanity results in the destruction of the earth. The earth provides everything for our need but not for our greed. We forget our needs and start chasing our greed, and this hastens the destruction of this earth. We ignore the fact that the earth belongs to everyone, to even the tiniest creature like viruses. It is unjustifiable when a small group of humanity takes control over the larger creation of God, which belongs to the universe. Here comes the message from the cross where Christ stripped Himself out of His nature of “self” and set up the model for the world to pursue. The challenge from birds and the cross of Christ provides an
opportunity to break down the layers of self-centeredness in us and to uphold a meaningful relationship with God; a mutually benefitting relationship with God and the people of God.

Call to appreciate God's Creation

Jesus’ emphasis on “look at the birds” calls for a constant progression in our faith journey which highlights absolute dependence on God for our survival. The birds never worry about their survival and they never store up things, because all their needs are continually fulfilled by God. We don’t have time to look at the birds because we are grown-ups and we have lot of things to do. We are so busy that we do not have the time to look up and see the sky for changing weather. We never care about the tree we lost—the tree on which we spent our childhood; we do not care about the animal that has gone extinct—an animal that was common in our school days. A bird that we named in our childhood is out of existence and we never care. We have a lot of things to do other than this which is to think all about ourselves and our existence. Somehow the motive of being successful human beings has been effectively injected into the human mind set where we always crave for the apex position. Society crowns the victor and the loser is never acknowledged which instigates the human soul for a constant struggle to be victorious by losing one’s peace of mind, relationships and ultimately life on earth.

These are the main motives behind the illegal sand mining or any other ecological issues. We must draw a renewed line of victory where there will be no loser; everyone will be a winner on their accord. Here again let us remind ourselves about the cross of Jesus where He defeated the nature of self by His own suffering. So victory is not about the gain of a single man but a victory that should inclusively accept everyone, which will be considered true victory. One must know the fact that no human can alone be crowned as victor. There are various factors including earth and ecosystem that is involved in it. We must be always ready to pay reverence to our cosmos. Unfortunately, we forget the fact that only when the eco system remains sustainable, can we sustain ourselves here; otherwise our livelihood would end up miserably. In order to emphasize this truth, Jesus calls us to put our trust in God because human beings have the tendency to trust in their abilities. Realizing our incapability and knowing our dependency on earth are the glimpses of heavenly wisdom. Unaware of this fact, human beings tend to have tall claims, which basically originate from the attitude of dominancy. Geological catastrophes and man-made calamities reveal the human weaknesses from time to time. We must understand that we should not go against nature but to go along with it. Instead of keeping our hopes on human wisdom, let us put our hope on God who is the creator, sustainer and liberator of this universe. When we put our trust in God, we will be able to resist the temptation of striving to be victorious all the time. Let us learn from the birds the lesson that we must cast our worries on God and to have a mutual sustainable relationship with the earth and wait for God who is our provider. Amen

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The Lamentation of Our Earth

Devanand Subuddy Kummithi

Text: Genesis 21: 22 – 34

“...Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and the land where you have resided as an alien.” Vs. 23.

The passage is an oath-deed between a native Abhimelech and an alien Abraham to settle a dispute regarding a Well dug in the land of the Philistines. It is an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) to declare the ownership of a Water-Well to the alien by the native with seven ewe lambs along with some sheep and oxen as an exchange or consumer price. Both the parties swore an oath and made their voices heard; the alien to own a well of water and the native asking the alien not to deal falsely but loyally as alien. They called this place Beersheba as a sign of the covenant between them. But, the unheard or suppressed or silenced voice of lamentation behind this ‘Beersheba covenant’ is that of the Earth’s, who was wounded by the alien in the process of digging the well and by the native selling that wounded part back again to the alien without any consideration of her pain.

In this sermon, I would like to make the human beings hear the unheard or silenced or suppressed lamentation of the earth by the anthropocentric activity of digging wells. Unless one understands the total value of the intrinsic worth of the creation of God by the whole interconnected purposefulness of every aspect in the creation, it shall be impossible to listen or sense the ‘Voice of the Earth’ and its groaning. Listening to a voice of the earth then again becomes a human subject of communication and it becomes necessary for us, the common human beings, to understand it in an illustrated human body and their language.

The Silenced Voice of the Earth’s Lamentation

Lamentations may result from a bearable or unbearable pain. In Gen. 21:22-23, we see the pain of Abhimelech regarding an Alien who is dealing falsely with him, with his offspring and with his generations. His pain is unbearable for he comes with a commander of his army to face even a fight with Abraham residing as an alien in his land. But, he has to bear and tolerate the pain because he finds the Alien Abraham was blessed by God to be rich and stronger than him. The wisdom to hear is nothing but understanding the pain of the Earth caused by the alien in digging a well. Talking about the pain of the earth in bringing out water to a person in dire need of water is utter foolishness. Water should be considered as a baby in the womb of pregnancy so that as the mother and child both become important, the same way the earth and water as well become important for a perusal. No doubt that Water is life and no human could survive without water from the earth. Water exists in such a way for the creation to provide “the life-livingness” to the human and other beings through the earth alike the mother, who feeds life-giving milk to her baby.

Yes! Digging wells become an anthropocentric activity to pain the mother earth because she loses the ground water table balance which results in global warming. It is an unnatural way to dig or break-open or drill-in to open the ground for waters than to draw them from natural fountains, cisterns, rivers, ponds, rains and streams. Mother earth may tolerate that unseen pain but loses the balance of intrinsic worth that God maintains for her in something called universe. Therefore a Well is not a god-given source for water because God’s creation knows how to store, where to store, and what form to store the water better than any human being.

The Pain of the earth in its water-distribution

“Water is one of the cosmic hierophanies” along with the others being Sky, Earth, and Stones etc. All these elements exist along with water and
have relationships and interconnected purposefulness with each other. The eco-balance in our environment is also maintained by water, which is sacredly distributed to sustain life of all the humans, the flora and fauna and the whole creation. The water science school studies bring out their audit for water by the finding: How much water is there on, in, and above the Earth? The Earth is a watery place. But just how much water exists on, in, and above our planet? About 71 percent of the Earth's surface is water-covered, and the oceans hold about 96.5 percent of all Earth's water. Water also exists in the air as water vapor, in rivers and lakes, in icecaps and glaciers, in the ground as soil moisture and in aquifers, and even in you and your dog. Water is never stagnant. Thanks to the water cycle, our planet's water supply is constantly moving from one place to another and from one form to another. Things would get pretty stale without the water cycle! This magnitude of water helps one to understand, the balanced distribution of water-movement in the creation from one place to another and from one form to another. Disturbing this balance with a well or human activity is obviously the pain of the earth because wells and bore wells drill the earth and promotes townships for living by cutting down trees. Such deforestation can't preserve the waters while the earth boils with heat.

Human beings are constantly in need of water from on, in and above earth but water does not need human beings. Therefore, as the waters and the earth can't express this to human beings in their languages, it doesn't mean that human beings can take it for granted to disturb the earth and its balanced water cycle distributed on, in and above the earth as moisture, clouds, glaciers, icebergs, snow, fresh water, flowing water, still water, salt water and ground water and water in the human body and animal bodies and so on.

The Voice of the Earth in Water Wars and Owning Waters
For maintaining the balance of the eco-system it is important for human beings to dwell where waters are naturally placed rather than to make futile attempts to bring waters to their dwelling places. Moreover water wars and owning waters began in the perception of “waters for humans but humans are not for waters”. We have inter states, inter areas and international disputes with water for example; Cauvery water dispute between states of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Telugu states, fishing area of sea waters disputes between India and Srilanka. Human beings are so preoccupied in the fight for dams and the storage of waters that they are not concerned about the place of water for earth and eco-systems. Human beings own the waters of the earth and the sands under the waters in such a way that they don't allow the riverine canals to flow, grow trees with its waters and do not allow the earth again naturally to store its own waters in its grounds above or water tables underneath or in ice and snow of the mountains or glaciers in the sea and in the moisture of the sky above. Every decade we see a change in villages, towns and cities in the name of development of dwelling places that harm the earth.

The Proddatur is a good example to hear the lamentation for water. Proddatur is one of the divisional headquarters of the church in Rayalaseema diocese. Etymologically, the name Proddatur means “day town” because besides the Rameswaram temple in Proddatur there is a river called Penna which passes from east to west. Therefore the town always has the sun with both its sunrise and sunset for the people to watch and measure the time all through the day. Three or four decades ago, the banks of this river on either side were innumerable heaps of sand hills 20 to 50 yards high in thousands of acres. Also thousands of acres of laterite and black soil as agricultural lands used to be along the banks of these sand hills. After the construction of Mylavaram Dam over the river Penna at Gandikota, in the name of development of township and colonies all the sand was used and now we have valleys of brown soil instead of huge sand hills. All the cultivable lands have been replaced by colonies like Eswar reddy nagar, Maruthi Nagar, and sand heaps’ colonies so on. Three or four temples were built on the banks of the river and recreation clubs and auditorium have come up. The sand hills full of palm trees, eucalyptus, flame of the forest and fire-stick trees on the sand banks all have been lost. Now less than 100 acres have been preserved for the forest where short shrubs have replaced the tall trees. It is named ‘Rajeev Park’ and we need to buy a ticket to enter.

All though Abraham did not construct a dam or cut the trees or utilize all the sand for the construction of temples, apartments, recreation clubs and real estate's and so on he too harmed the earth. Instead of going to the place where naturally water flows or where there is a natural cistern or where there is a fountain or where there are rains, rivers, lakes or oases he chooses a place where there is no water and digs a well there. (vs. 30).
By digging this well he not only harmed the ground water of the earth unknowingly but might have also made the natural sources of waters for Abimelech to sink and dry up because the servants of Abimelech fought and seized the well that was dug by Abraham. (vs. 31).

**Anthropocentricism vs Ecocentricism**

In an anthropocentric understanding of the Bible the voice of Abraham is justified in having a well dug but it is always an unjust act and an unjust demand in an ecocentric understanding. Earth has a natural way of growing food and supply of water to all those in need of them. There is no need to dig the ground for water and even for growing food crops. Masanobu Fukuoka introduces no-digging as a major innovation of his natural farming method. This is not a new idea at least for Indians.

A perusal of the Sanskrit literature revealed that …many Rishis grew their entire food without ploughing. They considered food grown in this manner to be healthier. Also they believed ploughing to be harmful to the soil. In fact, Manu discusses this in his famous *Manusmriti* and asserts that deeper the digging, the more harmful it is for the soil. Fukuoka not only wrote but also became a farmer and produced good crops without digging, weeding, composting and without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He proved our conventional method of digging and ploughing as worthless and harmful because “it has hurt the soil, weakened the plants and poisoned the environment.”

Therefore, understanding the act of seizing a well of water by the servants of Abimelech as a good thing in Gen 21: 25 and the act of Abraham saying, “I dug this well”, in Gen. 21:30 as a bad thing brings an Eco-centric understanding to the Bible to hear the voice of the earth’s lamentation. Moreover to make the Bible more eco-centric, the reader can read the voice of Abimelech to Abraham in vs.23 as the voice of the earth and her lamentation to all the human generations saying, “Now therefore [O human beings on me] swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, [of waters in, on and above me or everything that is connected to me including you] but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and the [place of] land [on me] where you have resided as an alien”.

Let us at least take comfort that when we can’t wipe out all the tears of our mother earth in her lamentation, let us through advocacy and possible practices, be loyal to the earth on which we live. Let us also make our fellow human beings understand that the earth is our lamenting mother by shifting all the theologies from anthropocentrism to Eco-centricism. Let us also tell our own human mothers that the earth laments by relating them as a co-sister so that human beings pray for the earth and love the earth as they pray for and love their blood-relatives. Amen.

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Text: Amos 8: 1-2

This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the Lord said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by.”

Introduction

The Sun is God’s precious gift to mankind. In Genesis 1:17-18 ‘God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, and God saw that it was good’, the sun is essential for the whole creation to produce vegetation, to irrigate crops, to provide vitamin D to give strength for the bones etc, but on the contrary the sun has become a great threat to the Earth.

Spring, Summer, Autumn and winter all the four seasons are the gift of God for the whole creation. Psalm 74:17 ‘You have fixed all the bounds of the earth, you made summer and winter’, but summer season has become a great threat to the Earth.

In this book we see the abuse of the land and the peasants by the wealthy and elite of Israel. Basket of summer fruit is one among the five visions. These were the oracles and visions of eighth-century prophet Amos. He was a shepherd, herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees in Tekoa, a small town in the north. His daily life was in the midst of animals and creation. He was intimately acquainted with all the seasons, green pastures, deserts and streams. Amos also had a global and urban view of things, history, recent events and about his people. God showed visions to Amos to warn a specific class in northern Israel, the powerful and dominant, who committed atrocities against the poor, consequently, the resources of the earth were depleted from the land, through natural disasters. Perhaps what is most important in the whole book of Amos is, ‘but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’ in Amos 5:24. There is a link between eco-justice and social justice, abuse of economic and political powers has made an impact not only on the poor people but also on the environment. Because of the atrocities of the dominant, creation has been destroyed.

Summer fruits

For example, Watermelon is a summer fruit that has high water content, nutritious, refreshing and keep us hydrated during the summer season in the Indian context. This fruit also has vitamin C, vitamin A, protects the skin from summer stroke and improves immunity. But for Amos, the vision of summer fruit does not look pleasant. Amos was a gatherer of sycamore fig fruit. Does God show a vision of rotten summer fruits in the basket? Through this vision God’s purposes were also ripe with regard to his people Israel. The Nation had become ripe in its sinful nature, so ripeness of sin must be eradicated. It teaches in our times, that fruits are ripened artificially for our selfish attitude. The Lord reveals that Israel’s end is near and is ripe for judgement, because of the human abuse of environment. Today many fruits in India are ripened with chemicals like calcium carbide.
that contains phosphorus, an agent having ability to make the human cells cancerous. Ultimately, this results in skin allergies, rashes and skin cancer.

**Beat the heat**

Summer 2015 was a disaster in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. Many elderly people, differently abled, infants, birds, animals were killed because of sun stroke, its temperature was above 45 degrees in the Celsius scale. Most of the daily labourers were unable to work in summer. How to take care these families? How to prepare for the coming summer 2016 and beyond? A provisional preparation to face summer helps us. We can see in Proverbs 30:25 “the ants are a people without strength, yet they gather their food in the summer”. Proverbs 10:5 says “A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame”. This verse makes us prepare for the summer season not only to conserve food but also to take care of creation and safeguard our children, senior citizens, differently abled and animals from extreme heat waves.

Our village Churches in Yerraguntla rural pastorate in Rayalaseema diocese are blessed with many big trees on the church campuses spreading canopies that provide shade during summer. Many people come together to take shelter under these trees. Our previous generations had planted those trees which have now become big trees. Our village churches provide water and buttermilk freely to people every summer season. This is also a time of fellowship. Wearing loose fitting clothes, avoiding heavy meals and oily food, drinking plenty of fluids and water to avoid dehydration, eating watermelon helps us in summer.

**Drumbeat the heat**

There are a number of folk songs and folk musical instruments in Rayalaseema region. Folk songs evolve gradually as they pass through the minds of different people of different generations. These songs are mostly from the common people. Folk songs are naturally in the village dialects. They never rise to the level of set literature but still they are dynamic compositions. It develops spontaneously. These songs express hope, disappointments, struggles, Gospel and also give lessons to people, like telling them about the impacts of summer heatwaves.

For example: There is a folk song to remember sixty six books of the bible, folk song to remember ten commandments, folk song to remember Psalm 23, folk song to instruct children on clean habits, folk song on Lord’s prayer etc. So these folk songs help to memorise information for illiterate people. These songs sung by old people of Rayalaseema describe the incidents of great epics, expressing some of the best and most pathetic emotions. Now these songs are no longer in use among the present generations.

There is a secular folk song & dance with folk drum by name ‘rommu palaka’, the meaning of this song goes like this, (Dear brother and sister, awake and rise up. We lost green nature, water got dried up, air got polluted, fertility of land began to fail. Pond in a town by name Badvel lost its beauty. We are struggling by heatwaves, summer is burning us, animals are dead, birds are dead. Please rise up and restore our mother earth)

Kolkole kolanna kole, Kolkole cheliya melukolanna……bbey
Pachadhaname poyeroy, Nillu yendi poyeroy(2), Gaadi kalashithamayeroy, Boomi yendi poyeroy, ooo oooo oooo ooo
Baddibela chervunolana vancha kattel dhaka(2), Vancha katte dhaka,
Gaadi koselbhaka, Inti koselbhaka ooo oooo oooo ooo
Yendalona mandipova, yesavilo kaalipova(2), Pasuvullani sanipova
Pakchulinani raalipova ooo oooo oooo ooo
Kolkole kolanna kole, Kolkole cheliya melukolanna……bbey…thalli bhoomini kaapadanna.

This folk song energises and sensitises people and also gives information and awareness on ecological crisis and especially to face summer in Rayalaseema context. These songs are under process to christinise in the soil of Rayalaseema, especially for illiterate members in our rural village churches.

**Conclusion**

Summer is a gift of God but human beings have abused mother earth, and now summer has become a threat. God has made this creation in an order, but human beings upset the balance and order of creation for selfish motives. It is a call for us to repent and restore. Summer heatwaves can be included as a disaster in the list of National Disaster Management - Government of India. So that together we can have a concrete preparation to face next summer and beyond. Working for eco justice has both inclusive
and sustainable development. Fruits in India are ripened by chemicals, it is also a call for us to educate people about the danger of eating fruits with chemicals, also educate them about the benefits and importance of naturally ripened fruits. We also take part to plants saplings, they will grow larger and help our next generations. Folk musical instruments, folk songs and dance touch our hearts and minds, transforms our attitude towards eco friendly living. Dance and music play an important role in social life. Let these ‘melodies of summer’ bring a positive change in the minds, hearts and sentiments of Rayalaseema people to face summer and also to take care of mother earth. God in the book of Amos was a God of discipline. It is a call for us to discipline our eco sense.

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**The Silent Screaming of the Earth**

*Jason K.*

*Text: Genesis 4:1-12*

“The Earth has music for those who listen it” – George Santayana

Human beings tend to sense their breath, thought, feelings and emotions as something separated from the Earth and fail to hear the music of the earth. This indifference prevents human beings to acknowledge the Earth and nature as living subjects and to have affection and care for them and consequently there seems a negligence to heed to the voice of the Earth. Unfortunately the erroneous theologies also misguide us to take pride in the fact that humans are the crown of creation, which makes human beings contemptuously. The literary works ‘This Sacred Earth’, ‘The Sacred Universe’ and ‘Meeting the Sacred in Nature’ demonstrate the sacredness of the earth. The concept of sacredness of the Earth emphasizes the concept of earth as subject by setting apart and keeping them close to the divine. The sense of sacredness which we attribute to the earth brings an end to our delusion that human beings are the crown of creation and prompts us to feel the life which God has given to Earth and human beings. In accordance with God’s plan, Human beings and Earth have an intertwined dependency as a family system in which the careless treatment of one another disrupts the emotional bondage and peaceful life. In the present scenario this interdependency is disrupted by the human beings careless treatment of Earth as an object/lifeless
The Earth is crying out to the creator God seeking justice. The indifferent ears of the human beings continue trampling the Earth ignoring the groaning of the Earth.

Machilipatnam is a coastal town in the outskirts of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh. In 2008 the then chief minister late Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy laid the foundation for the port project in the coastal area of Machilipatnam. Since then the government has been calling upon the people to give up their 20,000 acres of private land for the port project and related activities. And there was no progress in the project and it has been pending for several years since 2008. One of the main reasons for this is the fishermen’s confrontation for the acquisition of the coastal lands, which will affect the sea kingdom and their occupation. Therefore the issue of acquisition of coastal land for the Port and shipping industry project at Machilipatnam, in Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh is a controversial issue for which the fishermen are filing their resistance. And also there were protests from the farmers for grabbing their agricultural land for the capital at Amaravathi. As reported in the Hindu Business Line the state government is still trying to ‘win them over by resorting to land pooling system as it did in the case of acquisition of lands for the capital at Amaravathi.’ Despite the protests by the farmers and fishermen against this issue the Earth remains as silent sufferer in many parts of India. Pathetically neither the NGO’s nor the farmers and fishermen are engaging in resistance activities taking into consideration of the Earth as a subject who suffers because of these industrial projects.

In this scenario I would like to reflect upon the scripture portion Genesis 4:1-12, in which the whole story of Cain and Abel is metaphorically related to the human and earth. The groaning of the blood of the Abel is shown as the “Silent Screaming of the Earth.”

1. The Earth’s Breath: Right to speak

“Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against.” This Eco justice principle of voice attempts to analyze the Biblical text from the geocentric view point by paying heed to the voice of the earth which in a way focuses on the concept of sacredness of the earth. The eco justice principle of voice is derived using the hermeneutics of retrieval. The hermeneutics of retrieval demands the reader and interpreters to recover the voice of the Earth from Biblical texts. It follows the hermeneutics of suspicion and identification. The interpreters’ anthropocentric view of the biblical texts and the sense of ignoring the experience or the interests of creations other than human are criticized by the hermeneutical tool of suspicion. Rather the tools of suspicion and identification require the readers to consider the voice of the other creations and experience their ‘kinship with Earth’. While reading the biblical text from the ecological perspective it is necessary to apply the hermeneutical tool of identification to identify our indivisible bond with the earth, and have an ecological conversation with the Earth. Regarding this Vicky Balabanski argues that the hermeneutical tool of identification involves the readers to exercise imagination to represent the voice of the Earth, self reflection and criticism and transcends the self to move from the individual self to the other as sharing habitation. David Horrell substantiates the claim of using the hermeneutics of retrieval to recover the Earth voice of the most distinctive and innovative part of the Earth Bible Project. And he puts forward a concern that the concept of ‘an’ or ‘the’ voice of the Earth should not ignore the plurality of the earth community and he states that the voice of the Earth are not singular. Furthermore Kalinda Rose Stevenson in her article “If Earth could speak…” she gives voice to the Earth and made a point that the Earth does not exist for the benefit of human beings nor do they exist as objects to YHWH’s supremacy, rather the earth should be regarded as subjects to respect.

All the above claims arise from the awareness of the Earthly cries of oppression. But the voice of the earth is not limited to the notion of cry or lament; instead the Earth can raise its voice to celebrate or to propose an alternative vision. But when human beings considered the Earth as the subject and co – beings, they can tune their ear to heed to the voice of the Earth especially from the Biblical Texts. In the chosen text Genesis 4: 1-12, Abel’s blood cries out in agony striving for justice. Here applying the Hermeneutics of identification and creative imagination we metaphorically imagine and identify Earth with the suffering Abel and the human with greedy Cain. As Abel’s blood took rights to question the injustices against him, the earth raises her voice looking forward for her right to survive as a subject.
2. Earth’s Cry: Seeking Justice

In the ecological history, the life of the Earth is shortened by the human errors. As silent killers human beings have slowly taken away the breath of the Earth for their greediness and self comfort. Ignoring their sibling relationship with the earth as we are all part of creation and one in the family of the creator along with the earth, human beings tend to treat earth as a consuming disposable object. Such a kind of indifferent treatment of brother, which ended up in the murder of the one, can be seen in the selected portion Genesis 4: 1 – 12. It displays the story of two brothers, Cain and Abel: one as a shepherd and one a farmer. Both bring offerings to God and acknowledge Him as the provider. God accepts Abel’s offering and rejects Cain’s. There are various reasons noted by the theologians for God’s rejection of Cain’s offering. Even though the reason is not recorded in the Bible we can assume that its God’s sovereignty to accept or reject which does not have to operate by any standards that human set for Him.

The refused Cain reacts with anger. His anger is not with his brother Abel rather it is with God who rejected to bless him. The real issue is not the rejection of Cain’s offering but it is about how he treated his brother inhumanly to attain what he wished. God blessed them both with the occupation but the greedy Cain out of ignorance about that and greediness to get more blessing from God expresses his anger on God towards Abel. Here the conflict between Cain and Abel may not look like that it was created in a day. They seem always to be in conflict that reaches its culmination when God denied blessings to him. Now the voice of Abel’s blood cries out to God seeking justice for the ill treatment against him.

As we metaphorically interpret Abel as the Earth and Cain as human, the cry, agony and pain of the Earth can be heard. The greedy human beings illtreats the Earth and stab it to death to make their life comfortable. The usage of agricultural land for the non agricultural use mainly causes this issue. For industrial expansion the industrialists convert the agricultural land to the highly value generating industries. These industrial productions could generate more value than the productions produced by agriculture. Beside the fertility of the land will collapse and unfortunately no one has concern for the decaying Earth. Even the farmers are demanding compensations as money rather than bothering about the injustice done to the Earth by the capitalists. As the life of the Earth has been taken away by the greedy human beings the voice of the Earth screams out to God seeking justice. The silent scream of the Earth asking for human consideration of them as respectful subjects cannot be realized by the mute indifferent human beings.

3. Earth’s Expectation: Human consideration

Justice for Earth is an uncertain notion as long as Earth remains as an invisible object. For establishing the consumerist power and expanding the commercial value human beings attempt to destroy the Earth. Thus the Earth becomes the innocent victim who suffered the human discrimination even after providing them their needs. Kalinda Stevenson validates this claim saying that the Earth condemns the anthropocentric attitude of God and Human beings treatment of Earth as commodities to prove their supremacy and to accomplish self advantageous productions. The victimized Earth cries of oppression and sets forth her expectation demanding human consideration to treat Earth as a living subject. As human beings start to consider Earth as subject they handle them with care. In Cain's materialistic eyes, Abel appeared to appropriate Cain's blessing and an obstruction between Cain and God. Therefore Cain took courage to make that object invisible by killing him for his own benefit. The God who heard the cry of the Abel's blood calls Cain and interrogates his dealings with his brother. There may be chances of continuous conflict between Cain and Abel and on no account Cain took care of his brother Abel or respected him and appreciated him for his efforts. With that attitude Cain asks God “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Now God breaks his silence for injustices against Abel and calls Cain to act responsibly and curse the ground in which Cain tills. Similarly, God calls us to act responsibly to stop our inhumane attitude towards the Earth and to rectify it. As Cain himself is responsible for the curse on him, we ourselves are responsible for the natural disasters we face. God and Earth broke their silence against our unjust acts against Earth. The cursed ground has stopped yielding healthy harvests and raised their voice. The only way to rectify it and safeguard Earth is tuning our ears to the silent scream of the Earth and responding to it with our responsible deeds to keep the Earth’s inhabitants as the subjects of living. The day that the Earth's silent scream will burst out is imminent and Human beings will become an endangered species if we continue treating the Earth as object and killing the Earth.
Harmonious Creation

B. Silpa Rani

Text: Psalm 66: 1-4

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
2 sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.

3 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
   Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
4 All the earth worships you;
   they sing praises to you,
sing praises to your name.”

Praise is generally considered only in relation with human beings, between individual and God. But when we realize that we too are a part of God’s creation then we consider praise not just in terms of the individual but with the totality of creation. Psalm 66:1-4 encourages us to examine our individualistic nature of praise. Psalm 66 offers a fitting litany of universal praise. Psalms 66 and 67 are not attributed to any specific author. Psalm 66 is the first non Davidic psalms after Psalm 50. The only anonymous psalms prior to this are Psalms 1, 2, and 33. Several commentators believe that the setting for this psalm might be during the time of Hezekiah. Perhaps Hezekiah himself might have written Psalm 66. This psalm insists that each element of creation exists not primarily...
for our consumption, but to praise its creator. Let’s reflect upon what the psalms have to say about creation’s unique capacity for praise, as well as the psalms’ implicit critique of any attempt to stifle creation’s song.

1. **Praise is an affirmation of collective diversity**

Our Christian faith calls us to revere all creation. God teaches us much about great compassion and great love for all life. So being fully human means first, learning to be creatures among other creatures. Second, and related to that, it means recognizing our unbreakable bond with the land, the material base of life. We cannot have a full and complete relationship with God apart from our relationship with creation. So as human beings we can’t praise God in isolation. When we praise we are making praise along with the entire creation. Psalm 66 verse 1 and 2 says shout for joy to God all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. We share the habitats of the earth with other species and our praise is meaningless if we don’t care about the diversity of this earth. We human beings have a spiritual problem in our relationship to Earth for we tend to think that we live on Earth rather than that we are embedded in it. Spiritually, we need to re-root ourselves on Earth and return to our sense of kinship with animals and plants and with other creation. When we think that we are embedded on Earth then our isolated individual perception will change and we will recognize the diversity and its splendid praise all together. One of the most striking things about the biblical understanding of nature is that all creation is expected to worship God. This does not mean that each animal and plant and land and sea have special sounds to do that, although that may be a part of it. It means that these created things praise God by doing what they were created to be and to do. Our pollution of land, sea, and air, and our threat to species of animals and plants is to realize that we are thereby diminishing their capacity to praise God. As we seek to restore Earth and rescue endangered species, we are enhancing their collective worship of our creator.

2. **Praise is a harmonious symphony with creation.**

Often we humans assume that we are praising God by singing a solo rather than playing in a symphony. Psalm 66:4 says “All the earth worships you. They sing praise to you, sing praise to your name”. Despite the fact that we are created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27) it doesn’t mean that we are the only ones who get to express our gratitude to God for giving us life and being. We simply express it in different ways. We need to give room for other creatures also to praise God in their own way and we have to recognize their voice of praise. We are committed to transforming our relationship with the planet and with each other, again and again until the whole Earth community lives in life-giving, sustainable harmony. Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other. All creation works as God ordains it to work. 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.

Sixteen centuries ago, St. Basil talked about the “ruthless cruelty” of human beings that prevented “the voice of the earth” from rising to God in a song. Basil’s words remind us that when human beings pollute or otherwise fail to be good stewards of the environment, we are inhibiting or even silencing creation’s capacity to praise God. 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. 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. Eventually we have destroyed the harmonious symphony of creation and its unique way of praising God. This observation should heighten our sense of both the sin and its consequences. What account will we give to a Creator who asks why forty two species of birds have disappeared in the last 280 years? It means that the music and praise forty two species were expelled from the orchestra permanently. It forces us to contemplate the day when the sound may thin out to such an extent that we will be singing a solo after all. We need to work together to restore God’s symphony.

Now let us listen to the sounds of 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 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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**God the Green Gardener**

Grace Christina

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**Text: Amos 9:11-15**

On that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen,
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of old;

in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,
says the LORD who does this.

The time is surely coming, says the LORD,
when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;

the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant them upon their land, 
and they shall never again be plucked up 
out of the land that I have given them, 
says the LORD your God.

The state of Karnataka still preserves the beauty of greenery in its abode and the green grandeur is visible in bits and pieces now. Bengaluru the capital city of Karnataka was known as the coolest place among the capital cities in South India. The plantations in the city was a charm to the green bed. Uttara Karnataka towards the north is a hilly and forest area. The southern coastal belt of Karnataka is covered by the aqua splendor of the seas/rivers. The charm and beauty of the state has been rapidly turning into a concrete jungle. The beauty began to diminish 37 years ago slowly and until today 1/3 of the total forest area is in danger. The destruction of the forests by cutting the trees is a burning issue and of great concern. Endangering of trees by the process of deforestation has impacted adivasis and tribals. Displacement of the adivasis and tribals (inhabitants of the land) is the main issues which we need to take into consideration. The adivasis and tribals are not the only human lives that suffer but other living creatures such as the flora and the fauna are also disturbed as well. The adivasis and tribals have resisted and raised their voice against the right of livelihood and safe-guard of both themselves and the natural habitat.

For example, the city Davanagere is planned to be tagged as “smart city”. To make this tag a reality, trees have become a target. Trees have been cut down in order to widen the roads, to make broad-ways and to construct multi-storey buildings. In such a case, the question arises: what does development really mean? Can a city be smart without the green life? How can we measure the development with the scale of deforestation?

Hence forth it becomes a need to redefine our idea of development from the Biblical perspective. Israelites identified a very important attribute of God, that is: God the creator. The affirmation of God as the creator was their beginning of their faith. They saw the revelation of God in and through nature. The revelation of God for them was based on nature or ecology. Therefore people of God were nature-friendly and eco-centric in their approach. Israelites recognized and witnessed the work of God in nature as a Green Gardener. Thus they became Theo-Eco centric people in their faith affirmation.

Nature became an element of revelation of God and their faith. The main component of confession of faith revealed God to be the Creator or Creator God. This concept of revelation of God as Creator is understood in a broad sense. But in particular they confessed and believed that God is a Gardener and Israel to be God’s vineyard. Irrespective of people’s inclusive and exclusive understanding of the faith about God, the imagery of God the Creator and a Green Gardener is an unanimously accepted factor of faith. The very initial book and chapters of the Bible (Torah) begins with the revelation of God as Creator of Universe and a Gardener of Eden. In the garden we witness that God “planted trees” and “he made to spring” these verbs clearly express the Image of God which is portrayed as Creator and a Gardener.

Both the Elohim and Yahweh traditions also imprints: “God as a Green Gardener”

In Isaiah 5:1, the prophet reminded people about God’s nature of work, “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel”. In the NT Jesus said, in St. John 15:1 “My father is a true vine dresser (Gardener)”. These verses remind us of the role of God as a Green Gardener. As co-creators people of God imbibed the work of God in their nature and have taken keen interest to work in God’s creation/environment as stewards/managers to protect and preserve.

The passage taken from Amos 9:11-15 highlights God’s work as a Green Gardener. The text talks about the day of the Lord; on this very day God brings in a hope of restoration. The work of restoration is performed in a Gardener’s manner. In BC 8 the prophetic voice of the Prophet Amos was a voice of the contemporary condemnation/Judgment and in chap. 9:11-15 particularly it is a voice of restoration. The literary criticism is that the pericope has been added in later days. The concept of refining and restoration brings the eternal hope for human generation through eco-prosperity and prolificacy is revealed in the text. Let us examine the nature and work of God the Green Gardener:
1. Refining the land

The foremost basic duty of the Gardener is to prepare the land before sowing the seeds. In a concise vineyard is a place where Gardener has to be very careful before planting. Raising up the booth, repairing the branches, raising up the ruins and rebuilding the booth (Amos 9.11,12) is an imagery and a metaphor from nature which is used to denote the uplifting of David's generation. Generally the booth or the lodge is built in the vineyard and cucumber fields to guard the land or crops (Isaiah 1:8). The metaphor is used to indicate the human generation which represents a very close relationship with creation and an expression of awareness for ecological concern by the Israel. Booth is built to refine the generation which reveals that the refinement will be done in an eco-centered manner. Thus refining the land mainly means the restoration is based on the ecological restoration. The prophetic voice of rebuilding of the booth and repairing of branches clearly talks about the restoration of the human generation.

2. Transforming the land

After refining the land, now the land is prepared to yield. Amos 9:13, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treaded of grapes him who that sow the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it". This metaphor puts an ideal enrichment of the land which demythologize the restoration of the Davidic generation. There will be no gap in sowing and harvesting. The fertility of the land will be long lasting. There is no need of gaps for the lands to be exuberant. Mountains shall drip sweet wine brings to the understanding that: the waste land or the lands without water will turn into the land with sufficient water for the plantation, as the vineyard is to have sufficient water. The restoration of the human generation suffixes in the prosperity of the nature or creation. The yield of the harvest is a symbol of the restoration of the human beings.

3. Restoring the inhabitants

Inhabitants of the land refers to Israel, but in a broader meaning inhabitants are the real or primitive occupiers of the land, not only to human beings but animals trees and other creatures as well. As in the Garden of Eden all the living creatures reside on the same ground, sharing the land as their home. So the understanding of human beings the original inhabitants of the land needs to be broadened. Restoration is drinking their wine from their own vineyard, eating the fruits of their sweat and labour from their lands. Restoration is having their rights to plant and yield and enjoy their harvest. As the Green Gardener (9:15) God will plant them on their land which nobody/no structure/institution can uproot or dislocate them. The final word of restoration by God the Green Gardener is peaceful and prosperous co-existence of all on the same ground. There is no hierarchical existence but mutual existence.

Earth is the body of God, human beings have the elements of Earth through the image of God. So human beings are an inseparable part of the body of God. We are created by God but out of the dust which is an element of earth, but we have the image of God. Thus we are inseparable from the earth. We have mutual custodianship to take care of the body of God because we have the elements and essence of the earth in our being. We have no rights and morals to corrupt and demolish or to destroy our own body. By hurting the earth we are hurting ourselves. Nobody wants to hurt one's own body. So definitely it becomes our responsibility to nurture and nourish our self as well as earth is part of us. When earth is restored and flourished invariably we are restored and begin to flourish. The damage of the earth, is our self-damage, so we can never be silent victims when the earth is being destroyed. Hence we need to raise our voice, to resist against the deforestation and be responsible towards reforestation. We humans need to express our sensitivity as earth's voice, to save our body, the land of green.

Human prosperity and development is so interconnected with the prosperity of the green land. Let us start planting trees on a small or huge scale. Let's bring awareness to the future generations. We need to raise our voice against the silent victim- the Earth and plan for the betterment of our body the earth. God the Green Gardener has placed us on the earth with the task of refining and restoring. Let us begin the task of the Green Gardener now!
The Need for an Eco-Centric Life

J. Vedamuthu

Text: Amos 7: 4-6

This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord God was calling for a shower of fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land.

Then I said, O Lord God, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small. The Lord relented concerning this; this also shall not be, said the Lord.

(Amos 7: 4-6)

We try to save the earth by our minimal usage of natural resources but again we do it because we want to sustain the humanity for a longer time and not the outward concern and the responsibility towards the nature. We believe in God who is the source of every creation, and among the created beings humanity was given the responsibility of caring for the co-creation. The web of life is interconnected and if we exploit the particular area of the nature the impacts have to be faced by every creature. The planet is warming and it’s common to hear about the death due to the heat of the sunlight which has become part of the everyday news. Signs are appearing all over the world and some of them are surprising to the human eyes. The increasing temperature is unbearable to every living creature of the earth.

The places of scenic beauty are also in a critical state. Hill stations also feel the impact of Global warming. In the same way when we consider kodaikanal (A hill station of Tamil Nadu) the impact of Global warming has gone into the critical state and initially known as high ratio of cold, rain and sunlight. The people who lived a decade before are witnessing these multi impacts. The density of the oxygen that people breathe today is being highly polluted by the increased use of fuel of tourist vehicles. God has endowed us with the beautiful nature which we exploit through deforestation in the name of development. Most of the land for cultivation has been turned to land for constructions and the acres of vegetation has come down considerably. The local formers are witnessing the declining quality of the soil for cultivation. We have failed to uphold the responsibility that God laid upon us towards the nature and the consequences faced by both the exploiter and the exploited. Let us look into the biblical text which describes a similar crisis and how we can be used by God for the restoration of the nature around us.

Prophecy and religion cannot be separated and it plays a vibrant role in everyone’s religious faith. Prophets are foretellers and through them divine revelations served as the conscience of their people. They receive the message of God through dreams, visions, ecstatic and mystical experiences and imparts it to the people. The prophecy of the Israelites originated from their forefathers and developed throughout history. The prophet Amos received a vision from God which directly deals with ecological concern (Amos 7: 4–6). There is a clear process that there is a Revelation from God which leads to the Realization of Humanity that eventually brings the Restoration of God.

Revelation from God

The prophetical message of the Old Testament always deals with the social crisis in connection with religious beliefs. Here God reveals the judgment through the vision of Fire. The judgment comes to the people because of the social crisis that land owners were oppressing the less fortunate and exploiting the land. From the prophetical stand the quality of one’s relationship with neighbors (It can be translated as co-creatures) determines the quality of one’s own relationship with God. God reveals this truth by the vision of Fire that devours the deep of the land. In verse 4, God himself calls for a shower of fire i.e. in other translation judgment of fire. From the prophetical language fire was used as a figurative term to denote the judgment of God though it was used in other texts in various meaning. Fire also used to mean the vengeance and punishment of God (Deut 4:24, Heb 12:29)
Robbin Kimchi interprets it “as the scorching heat of the sun like fire that restrained the rain dried up the plants and lessened the waters of the world.” When we look at the time of Elijah, fire came from above and licked up the water on the altar. The fire not only dries up the water but also eats up the land that includes plants and other creatures. Gill interprets it as eating up everything growing in the land. The text clearly explains that the Global warming today is a revelation of God to humanity of God’s judgment for our failures in caring for the co-creatures around us. God reveals to us by various issues that humanity had failed to recognize it and that the human sight had blurred towards the ecological crisis.

**Realization of Humanity**

The human eye is the main source of information about our external environment. It is the most amazing optical system with unsurpassed versatility. Our vision towards nature can be compared with what Ralph Waldo Emerson quotes on human eyes that ‘many eyes go through the meadow but few see the flowers in it’. It is the tendency of human sight that we always have a blurred vision towards the exploitation of nature. Though God reveals this through various signs that are seen by human eyes still we continue in oppressing the co-creatures. Our concern towards the earth is always anthropocentric though we are aware of the significance of nature. Our failure is not realizing that human beings are also one among the nature, and moreover we have inherited the divine image and called as a crown of creation but our concern towards nature doesn’t reflect this identity. But prophet Amos in verse 5 intercedes to God that, ‘O Lord God, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small’.

The human beings are a small community in comparison with the other creatures. And here Jacob is a figurative term for God’s covenant people and can be understood as a collective unit of all the people of the earth. The intercession of Prophet Amos can be read from an ecological perspective, O Lord God cease, we beg you how can humanity stand? We are so small. This attitude can lead us to realize the vision of God today. Targum gives a better understanding in relation with the reason behind God’s judgment are the sins of the people. In other version it says, ‘o lord God forgive I beseech thee’, which very clearly denotes our failure in fulfilling the greater responsibility to the earth. The intercession of Amos calls for realization of Gods revelation and leads us to repentance. As William Black quotes that ‘when the doors of perception are cleansed man will see things as they truly are infinite. The realization of humanity can lead us to perceive the vision of God with clarity.

**Restoration of God**

The prophetical messages are not only the condemnation of God but ends with a hope and restoration. In the passage God reveals the judgment of condemnation by the shower of fire but if we beseech and repent from what we commit God is ready to relent from that judgment. There is hope when God says, ‘this also shall not be’ and God renounced the judgment and rebuilds the sources of the earth. The ultimate purpose of the prophets message is to provide hope (Jeremiah 15:19, 18:8, Isaiah 30:15, Jonah 3:10, Hosea 7:15 etc). Amos clarifies that the restoration can be optimized by becoming Gods own covenant people.

Stephen Hukkings recently said that, humanity is in the process of suicide and he explains three important causes, nuclear war, Global warming and transplantation of viruses. The reason for humanitarian sufferings is humankind alone and our attitude towards the nature. God’s restoration will not happen as God uses the humanity in the work of restoration. When we realize the responsibility that God laid upon us in the beginning we will be used by God in protecting the earth. Until then our attitude to nature will be an exploitation without recognizing that we exploit ourselves. As the psalmist prays, restore to me the joy of your salvation (psalm 51:12) we are called to have hope in Godly restoration that brings the wholeness of joy both to humanity and also the rest of the creation.

The psalmist declares the wonder of creation from his personal experience as How Majestic is Your name in all the earth. The majesty of God cannot be compared to any power of the world and David experienced it by vision of nature, galaxy and its significance and finally he asks a question that, what is man you are mindful of him, mortals you care for?. The ecological issues we face today in the world are due to abuses of our responsibility towards nature.

The early church father Jerome in his writings of prophetic books states, “prophecy is not only but still is the word of God, and if all scripture is in its own measure the word of God, It is pre-eminently true of the prophecy in which God chose to speak directly with people. It is
furthermore not an archival record but the living word of the living God.” The prophetical message of Amos reveals the truth of God’s judgment to humanity in ecological terms. The ecological crisis in Kodaikanal need to be optimized from the prophetic truth of God’s vision. Eco-Tourism need to be compelled and consuming of fuels need to be limited. If we beautify our own place by the natural elements the tendency of tourism may diluted. After all, everyone needs to take the ecological crisis as their own and promote friendliness with the nature. Let us recognize the vision that God reveals and realize our relationship with the nature and seek for the restoration of God.

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Crisis Management-Jesus’s Approach

T. Johnson Jesudas

all ate and were filled, what was left over was gathered up

The Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) is a Government coal mining company jointly owned by both state and central governments. The Singareni coal reserves stretch across 350 Kms of the Pranahita – Godavari Valley of Telangana with a proven geological reserve aggregating to 8791 million tonnes. SCCL is currently operating 16 opencast and 31 underground mines in 4 districts of Telangana with a man power around 58,837. In India there has been a considerable increase in the demand for coal owing to the industrial development. High production cost and insufficient company production led to great deficit or loss during 1990-95.

To address this crisis the company has taken certain remedial measures. As part of this crisis management the company upgraded its mechanical power and relied more on Technology. More and more machines were introduced and manpower reduced year after year. Previously manpower in the company was 1, 20,000 but now there is only 60,000 manpower. The company moved from loss to profit, and it announced profit bonuses for its employees, it also received many awards nationally and internationally.
All these achievements are only one side of this crisis management. But on the other side:

i. Increased technology & machines, and reduced man power have become a threat for life. Many people lost their lives due to this upgrading.

ii. The ‘Over mining’ strategy of the company- severely damaging the environment. On the one side ‘Over mining’ causes rapid deforestation which results in to a great loss of fauna and flora and on the other side it causes climatic imbalance in the region.

As Crisis management of Singareni Collieries Company during Crisis, led to the threat of life, this sermon explores Jesus’ method of Crisis Management and attempts to present a better means to address the life situations of people.

Context
The life of the ‘common people’ was in threat during the first century in Palestine where Jesus lived and served on this earth. The gap between the rich and the poor, the have and have-nots has widened, while one section of people were enjoying their life by using/misusing all the resources, the other sections were struggling to lead their life with lack of resources. ‘The feeding of five thousand’ is recorded in all the four gospels, with slight variations but all the four evangelists effectively presented how Jesus handled the crisis situation where they fed more than 5000 people with the minimum resources that they had with them. Jesus through his life and teachings showed a way by which anyone can enjoy life to its fullness without affecting others. He tried to narrow/remove all the gaps between human beings as poor and rich. He encouraged his followers to create and be part in an egalitarian society by sharing and safe guarding the God given resources.

Resources –God’s Choicest Blessings
All the resources are God’s choicest gifts. The God of liberation as highlighted in the exodus event fed all the Israelites throughout their journey in the wilderness; he provided food from heaven, water from the rock and everything that they wanted. God preserved everything on the earth for the betterment of ‘life’, not only of human beings but all the living beings of the entire cosmos. God has concern for all creatures. In Gen. 6:18-19, God said to Noah, to take every living thing of all the flesh in to the ark, to keep them alive. God is the creator and provider of everything. In ‘Feeding the five thousand’ account recorded in John’s Gospel, Jesus asked Philip where he could get bread from (Jn. 6:7), Philip answered that, six months wages would not be enough to buy bread for all of them to eat. But in that episode, Jesus or his disciples did not buy anything from the market place but they searched and got a small loaf of bread and fish, with which the need was addressed and all the people were satisfied and were happy.

Whatever the life situation is, God encourages us to use the resources that we have in our midst. God has protected everything in the creation and preserved it for generations. Job 28:1-2 says “there is mine for silver, and place for gold to be refined.... Miners put an end to darkness.” This text says God has preserved resources even under the earth and affirms that the process of mining put an end to the darkness. This is true also of the Singareni Mines that have put an end to the darkness of life and all the lives are expected to be lightened with these mines.

I. Crisis Management- Jesus Approach

a. Analysis of the Crisis
When there is an emergency Jesus called the disciples and assigned the responsibility of addressing the issue. In fact disciples asked Jesus to send the people away, so that they could buy something for themselves. Jesus didn’t want to send them away, but asked his disciples to feed them (Luke 9:13) because he analysed the condition of the people that if they were sent away “they will faint on the way” (Mk. 8:3). Analysing the problem is an important aspect in crisis management for a perfect analysis can address the problem effectively.

b. Estimating the impact and the need
In the process of addressing the crisis, his disciples were aware, of the need and how much was required to address the crisis. Philip says in Jn. 6:7 that “six months wages are not enough to buy”. In Mk 6:37 the disciples said that 200 denari worth of bread is expected to address the need. Their anxiety helps us to understand that it was not an easy amount or thing to do. But they had an idea of how much was required.
Planning how to utilize the resources to address the crisis

They were aware that, they had very little bread and fish. Jesus said to his disciples, “make them sit down in groups of about fifty each (Luke 9:14). ‘Making groups and sitting down’ was the way used by Jesus to distribute bread easily so as to utilise the resources in the best way. Proper planning and Systematic utilization of resources are a must in Crisis management.

d. Addressing the issue for Maximum satisfaction

Jesus handed over the blessed fragments of loaves to His disciples to distribute. Pieces of bread and fish were distributed to the people who ate as much as they wanted (Jn. 6:11). Bread and fish were given to people till they were satisfied (Luke 9:17). Their need was fully addressed, they had plenty and no one went hungry.

c. Minimising the loss

Luke 9:17 says “what was left over was gathered”. In Jn. 6:12 Jesus said to his disciples “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost”. Jesus didn't want anything to be wasted. With Jesus’ instructions, his disciples gathered or saved 12 baskets of leftover fragments of bread. 12 baskets of bread fragments were preserved, in other words 12 baskets of bread and fish were distributed excessively to people. In fact, the disciples ought to have been more careful in distributing, because, they were well aware about the need and how much it would cost to address the need. Jesus here addresses the over distribution and bringing the condition to 0% loss. Proper utilisation of resources can preserve hope for the future.

II. Crisis Management - Singareni

Singareni Company also analysed the crisis, but in that process, the wellbeing of company became more vital for them, and they over looked the wellbeing of ‘life of the earth’ and ‘life on the earth’. The disciples also tried to look down at the people in that episode but Jesus did not allow them. Company relies on mechanism & Technology and neglected the element of the earth and human care. Ultimately in its plan of execution Singareni reduced 50% of the man power, while Jesus’ approach satisfied 100% of the people who were present.

In Jesus’ addressing of the crisis the loss is 0% where as Companies dealing with the crisis is immeasurable.

- Advanced technology and machinery threatened to human ‘life’ where 60,000 families were on the roads and increased unemployment.
- When the company depends on man power, ‘per shift of a man’ (8 Hours) they produced 1 tonne coal, whereas on machines ‘per shift of a man’ they are producing 8 tonnes of coal. For example, if the company used to produce 80 tonnes of coal in 8 days by using manpower, it is producing the same in one day by using machines. This is called ‘Over mining’. With this, 80 years production of coal, the Company is producing within 10 years. In other words if a mine has 240 years of life by using ‘man power’, it is cut down to 30 years with machines.
- God given resources vanish within a generation’s life span.
- Drastic deforestation threatened the flora and fauna of this region.
- It also resulted in increasing temperatures on the earth which cause eventually climate change.
- The very ‘life’ on and of the earth will be threatened.

The impact and loss of crisis in crisis management never end if we explore like this. Crisis in crisis management ultimately leads to another Crisis.

Conclusion

Crisis management should address the welfare of ‘life’ on the earth. It is high time to discuss these issues before earth loses its shape and life. If any organisation in the name of development misuses the resources and becomes a threat to the ‘life’ situations, we need to raise our voice against and show a better approval- Jesus approach to promote ‘life’. In Jesus’ approach no one or nothing will lose life, for it opposes overusing or misusing, and addresses the need for optimum satisfaction with minimum resources.

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**I shall not Want**

*B. Silpa Rani*

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**Text: Psalm 23:1-3**

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;*

3 *he restores my soul.*

*He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.*

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One of the most important reasons of the ecological crisis in the present era is consumerism and globalization. Human beings have become greedy and have a tendency to grab more than what is required which leads to consumerism and finally causes the destruction of the earth resources. Human beings prioritize their wants more than their basic needs. According to the standard of Economics, there is a remarkable difference between “wants” and “needs”. Needs are based on physiological, personal, or socio-economic requirements necessary for you to function and live. A need is a requirement or a necessity. On the other hand, wants are a means of fulfilling our needs. A want is a desire for or something to wish for. For example: you may be able to walk to your workplace or use public transportation and so on. While any of the choices will work, you still want a car to fulfil your need for transportation.
Surviving in such a context, as reader and interpreter and preacher of the Bible, how we interpret the Biblical passage from an ecological perspective is a real challenge. The Bible does have ecological issues but what is needed is a re-interpretation of the traditional biblical doctrines so as to make it relevant to our concerns. Like Sallie McFague advocates the use of models such as lover, friend, and mother as against the platonic concepts of Master, Lord and King so as to describe God and his relationship to the world as that of his “body”. Some of the others consider one of the major biblical themes like Creation, Covenant, Trinity or incarnation to develop a theology that addresses the ecological issues and considers the fall or redemption model as dualistic and inappropriate. Matthew fox says, “If it does not teach believers about the new creation or creativity, about justice making, social transformation…, it fails to teach love of earth or care for the cosmos, and it is so frightened of passion that it fails to listen to the impassioned pleas of the anawim, the little ones of the earth elements.”

The passage of Psalm 23:1-3 is a contextual passage to be interpreted from an ecological perspective. Traditionally this Psalm has been interpreted from theocentric and anthropocentric perspectives. This Psalm, written by king David is regarded as the “the pearl of psalms”. It seems to be based on the recollections of his early shepherd life, and perhaps on his gracious treatment by his friend Barzillai (2 Sam 17:27–29) late in his reign. Here, Yahweh is often presented as the shepherd of Israel and David says the Lord is his shepherd. As a former shepherd, David remembers how he cared for the sheep entrusted to him. David made sure that the sheep had sufficient food and water, and David risked his life to protect the sheep from enemies.

Verse 1 has the following two parts.

The Lord is my shepherd - The Hebrew says YHWH Ro’î literally “The Lord, my Shepherd.” This, then, is one of the revealed names of God. Here, God chooses to be called YHWH Ro’î and chooses to be identified as our Shepherd. The second part of that verse should be translated, “I shall not want.” The whole point is that taking care of our needs is God’s responsibility who is volunteering for it and who is good at it. The comparison of the care which God extends over people to that of a shepherd for the flock is one that would naturally occur to those who were accustomed to pastoral life. It would be natural that it should suggest itself to Jacob Genesis 49:24, and to David, for both of them had been shepherds. David, in advanced years, would naturally remember the occupations of his early life; and the remembrance of the care of God over him would naturally recall the care which he had, in earlier years, extended over his flocks. The idea which the language suggests is that of tender care; protection; particular attention to the young and the feeble; and providing for their wants, which are found eminently in God in reference to his people.

I shall not want - The words “I shall not want” reflect both past experience and future confidence. The shepherd makes his flock lie down in the noontime heat in pastures of tender grass. He gently leads the flock beside “waters of rest,” i.e., streams where they may find rest and refreshment. The eastern shepherd always leads and never drives his flock. Yahweh renews and sustains the life of the Psalmist. God guides God’s people individually and collectively “in the paths of righteousness,” i.e., in a way that is right with God and thus beneficial for human beings. This is the main idea in the psalm, and this idea is derived from the fact that God is a shepherd. The meaning is that, as a shepherd, He would make all necessary provision for his flock, and evince all proper care for it. The words shall not want, as applied to the psalmist, would embrace everything that could be a proper object of desire, whether temporal or spiritual; whether pertaining to the body or the soul; whether having reference to time or to eternity. There is no reason for supposing that David limited this to his temporal necessities, or to the present life, but the idea manifestly is that God would provide all that was needful for him always.

The traditional interpretation here has been mostly anthropocentric and theocentric, where God is portrayed as the provider and protector of human beings only. The following verse where the elements of the earth have been objectified for the comfort and pleasure of human beings only. The earth resources like the green pastures and the still waters are used to satisfy man’s greed and desire. The green pasture is one of the resources of the earth which has been destroyed by the multinational companies to establish factories and industries. The still water resources are contaminated by the pollutants because of the disposal of the waste materials into the waters.
In Odisha, especially in the Western part of Odisha, people experience heat waves, high temperature, and scarcity of water and so on. The reason being, the establishment of the industries by destroying the forest resources and contaminating the water resources. This passage is a reminder for our vocation as Christians to take care of the earth and the resources of the earth. Earth should not to be objectified as the creation is also a partner of God in the salvific acts of God, like the human beings. We need to follow the simple life without greed and we should understand the difference between greed and need as K.C. Abraham, “Greed is identified as the source of the problem of ecology, by adopting a simple life-style they showed a way to suppress greed. Living in harmony with nature and keeping the needs to a minimum as the monastic community which proclaims the message that the earth is the Lord's and that it should not be indiscriminately used to satisfy human avarice and greed. It is also a powerful protest against a consumerist lifestyle that is devoid of any responsibility to the world of nature.

Sallie McFague views that, a communitarian view of human beings is also an ecological and economic one. It is a view that sees our well-being as interdependent with all other life forms in a just sustainable way. Thus, its basic claims are ecological in that we exist only in and with other living components of our planet and economic, we must share the planet's resources well and sustainably if any of us is to flourish. Most of the churches today are not “ecological”. The Sunday sermon is not about flourishing of God’s whole creation rather it is aimed at the care and comfort of human individuals. The gospel and the good news is usually addressed to human needs and failings. The well-being of the whole of God’s creation is not seen as part and parcel of the gospel message. Christian theology has been anthropocentric concerned mainly with the well-being of human beings but can human beings thrive apart from nature? If salvation is understood as eternal life for some humans then perhaps the answer is yes. But if salvation means the flourishing of all God’s creatures here and now on this earth, then the answer is no. the world cannot be left out. The church must become ecological.

Today, evaluating our context, as a spokesperson of the church, it’s a challenge for us to implement the developmental programs and the action plans to step toward climate justice so to save this beautiful creation on this earth. Transformation begins from the individual and spreads globally. So let us take it as a challenge to be transformative to establish climate justice in this whole world.

Bibliography
Rise Up and Build

Raju Cheeran

Text: Haggai: - 1:10-11
Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors.

God's glory is clearly revealed through his marvellous creation of this universe. It's common understanding, that the temple is the place where God dwells. Then one should say that the whole world is God's temple that he created very beautifully. But this beautiful temple, the universe is being destroyed by the activities in the process of making it more beautiful. Kerala, located on the south western tip of India, enjoys unique geographical features that has made it one of the most sought-after tourist destinations of Asia. Fondly referred to as “God’s own country”, Kerala was selected by the National Geographical Travellers as one of the 50 destinations of the lifetime and one of the thirteen paradises in the world. Wayanad, the northern most part of Kerala attracts many by its natural beauty. But now a days it faces plenty of challenges in which the most important is the building of resorts, which will attract tourists to enjoy its charm. But the truth is they are exploiting nature for vested interest. We don’t need fields we need airports, we don’t need bushes on the sides we need only thick tar roads, we don’t need mud and greenery around the house we need tiles in front of the house, we don’t need ponds and rivers we need mall’s and flat’s, we don’t need cycle’s we need AC cars and low floor buses. We don’t need to plant trees we need high speed trains and express highways, but we are not aware of the heat of the sun, we don’t want the wells to dry up and we don’t want to lose electricity. This is the real predicament of modern life. Modern man seeks only his material welfare. His attitude is self centered with lack of moral values. The world should be the church of God, where all creation lives in harmony and peace. But the present scenario reflects only the weeping of nature. The Bible portion leads the readers mind to the people who wander for their wellbeing while the temple is destroyed.

God’s Concern
In ecology house means our surroundings. The Earth, sky, air, water, living and non-living creatures are included in our house. It is the duty of man to safeguard and protect nature. But human beings exploited the nature for their own benefits. The all-round development and growth of created things in the world, is the aim of our creator, who never wants to destroy any created things. We are all a part of the world. We should join hands with God in the rebuilding process. We should follow the path of the cross, a path of mourning and sorrow for others. We should hear and respond to the voice of the silenced people. It is our primary duty and set a back accumulation culture. In genesis 1:26-28 To Lynn white mis interpreted these words and made colonies by oppressing nature. They acted according to these words and an exploiting culture was developed. Radah, A Hebrew word, mentioned in the Genesis. God commanded to dominate all created things, and then onwards human beings started to exploit nature and the natural resources. The word “Radah” has been used 22 times in the Old Testament.

Rebuild the universe
It is essential to rebuild the nature (church). “lokametharavadu, thanikkkedikalumpul kalumpuzhukalum” is a Malayalam poem which depicts the importance of rebuilding. The plants and living creatures in this world become a family when they co-operate and join together. We should look at the world with a broad and open mind, to achieve or attain our aim.
It is very important to re build the temple (universe) which is the need of the hour. In the call for God centeredness God demands absolute authority on this people and forgetting God is a sin. Creation is the masterpiece of creator. God has invested all craftsmanship and creativity in the created order of things and we cannot separate the creator from creation and the creation from the creator. It is only through creation that one finds the creator.

Creation theology in the Bible is not a theoretical explanation on sustainable development. However, the main thrust behind the formation of creation theology is sustainability. The creation stories should not be understood primarily as an event of the past or a declaration about the origin of things. As Westermann has pointed out, the primary motif of creation is ‘not a question about the origin but about the world and humanity under threat in the present. The people of the past think about creation to seek answers to their present crisis. The Biblical declaration of creation was concerned with the present world and the natural environment for his/her sustainable development. Creation as order for sustainability it has long been suggested that the goal we encounter in the first chapter of the Bible is not just a God who creates but also one who is deeply concerned in bringing order to his creation. The frequent occurrence of the word “Separate” (Bâdal) in the first chapter is significant. God separated light from darkness (1-4). The firmament of the heaven separated the water above from the water below (1:6). Ordering the material world from disorder is intrinsic to the creative motif of God. Today, human beings are exploiting and disrupting the nature and its equilibrium or balance. When we exploit nature, we are attacking the creator too.

Build together
This universe holds the image of God and so the universe can be viewed as a temple. Temple is not just a building of four walls, but the residing place of God. Unfortunately this temple has been destroyed by the selfish acts of man and consequently the balance of nature has been disrupted. Human race should avoid exploiting the nature for selfish motives and consider the whole world and nature as a family. That should be our mission and vision. We need a Green Development “Green Development” does not denote just the color green; rather it represents the whole life-sustaining system. Saying ‘Green’ in this sense is like saying ‘amen’ to all that is.

Green development is a way of life, a philosophy and praxis of life which recognizes, respects and responds to life in its varied forms. Let’s rise up and build together.

Conclusion
God created us in the image of God and gave us the authority to “dominate” or “look after” it, in other words, to be stewards. Protection of nature is a part of our spirituality, therefore we should develop a responsible attitude towards nature and build up a sacred bond between nature and human beings.

Bibliography
Introduction

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has announced that the new capital of Andhra Pradesh will be set up in the region of Guntur district. It announced that along with Thullur another 14 villages from Thullur Mandal would be included in the new capital. It is located 4 km from the Krishna River. Vijayawada and Guntur are the nearest cities to Thullur. Due to the proposed activity there will be significant impact on land use pattern. In addition to the land areas rendered derelict due to the project activities it may have visual impact. Immediate destruction of trees and massive disfiguration of land will affect human habitation and cause ecological imbalance i.e. agricultural lands will be lost, the infiltration of soil will be reduced. Residents and inhabitants of the capital area will be in trouble with loss of employment especially those who are dependent up on the Agricultural lands.

Context of the crisis

The areas earmarked for the capital area in Krishna and Guntur districts largely consist of very fertile paddy fields. The Sivaramakrishnan Committee Report clearly states that, “the districts of Krishna, Guntur and West Godavari comprise some of the best agricultural lands in the country, contributing more than one percent to the country’s rice production and is often referred to as the rice bowl of the country” and “any attempt to convert agricultural land, much of which is located along the proposed ring road, into non-agricultural use will seriously displace this work force rendering them unemployed. Loss of valuable agricultural land, disappearance of small holdings and farmers will benefit only land speculation and surge profit for the real estate operators”. The Capital Region Plan and Report - March 2015 prepared by Surbana Consultants also mentions that 81 percent of the capital area is agricultural land.

The Draft Capital City Master Plan Report Part 2 - July 2015 prepared by the consultant also states that the current economic activity within the identified 391 sq km of Amaravati Capital city area is “primarily agricultural (viz. production and harvesting of crops including rice, sugar-cane, pulses, spices, etc.) with negligible activity observed in the industrial and services sectors”. Major crops grown in this region include Tobacco, Chilli, Cotton, Lemon, Guava, Coconut, Sugar Cane, Jasminum sambac, Saputo and Banana. Irrigation water is provided through the Rayapudi Lift Irrigation and Thullur Lift Irrigation Project.

Traditional reading of Psalm 127:3-5

In the ancient Israelite community, it is believed that a man who trusts in YHWH to found his family will be blessed with nahala which also carries the connotation of Earth/land. Even the reasons for viewing the children as blessings serve the interests of the father: such a man would not be ashamed when confronting his enemies ‘at the gate’. These sons particularly the sons of his youth will fight for him at the gate when he is old. The gate of the city was a public sphere of men. This is the place where the Israelite elders gathered to settle the disputes and other matters pertaining
to the welfare of the city dwellers. Unfortunately, the influence of the women in the private spheres of the home for their husbands to be praised at the city gates is left unnoticed. The sons who were born and nurtured by the mother in the home are the ones who will support their father at the gates of the city. Women’s role in running the household of her husband is ultimately felt in the gates of the city where her husband, not she is praised.

Re-Reading Psalm 127:3-5 from an Ecological Perspective

In these verses, we can see the selfish motives of an Ancient Israelite patriarchal family. Motivated by the self-centred desire to be remembered by their offspring, many have chosen to have as many children as possible irrespective of the negative effects which would damage the whole ecological system and the non-human members of the Earth Community. There has been a mis-understanding in the concept of ‘fill-ing the Earth as in (Genesis 1:26-28). The so called ‘development’ at the cost of many lives has been misunderstood as a blessing for God. The Social scenario of the Andhra Pradesh state projects various aspects that withhold our responsibility in protecting the fertile Agricultural lands. In the name of development, cities expand to a great extent and all the natural resources are getting damaged. We are witnessing huge area of Agricultural lands being transformed into cities and plots. Though at the outset the developments may look grand, it is at the cost of many poor farmers.

Call for Kinship

Through the ages, we have seen that all the natural resources and especially Land belongs to all and therefore no body owns the land. In some of the famous sayings in telugu dune vadide bhumi which can be translated as land belongs to the farmer is completely neglected in the present scenario. In order to satisfy their own egos and their selfish desires of some of the powerful leaders, most of the fertile cultivable land form the farmers have been grabbed and has been turned into places for industrialisation. The whole concept of mutual Kinship and mutual inter-dependence of the nature and humans have been negotiated. Re-reading the texts which had been misunderstood as the safe zones for exploitation and to satisfy ones’ own desires are to be done in order that we may escape from the bonds of consumerism which may provide a short term comfort and ease. We need to encourage and promote the concept of mutual Kinship and help in sustaining the environment and also maintaining the Ecological balance.

Conclusion

We are well aware of the famous quote by our father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi who said, ‘The Mother Earth has more than enough to satisfy everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed’. Though there is a thin line to differentiate the need and the greed of an individual, in this time of crisis, it a high time for us to maintain a balance in the order of the eco-sphere of our mother-earth. By evacuating all the fertile land and disturbing the eco- balance in the name of ‘development’, we are going against the will of God thinking that development is a blessing from God. We should learn from the mistakes of the past need to re-build our future. The recent Chennai floods stands as a living example as how we are turning the blessing of God into a curse with our own hands and with our selfish motives. Most of the water absorbing lands in Chennai have been occupied due to the consumerist motive of mankind and has learnt a great lesson. As responsible citizens of the nation, let us build an environment which can be a place of a peaceful and happy dwelling.

May the triune God who enriches us enable us in making this endeavour. Amen.

References


The Custodian of the Sand

G. Asirvatham Rajkumar

Text: Genesis-3:19
“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Tirunelveli is one of the beautiful districts in Tamil Nadu in South India. Its beauty is manifested by beautiful rivers, mountains, beaches, endless paddy fields and other vegetable cultivations. The changing of the season brought the feeling of refreshment on the earth that resulted in a good harvest. But the last few years the population explosion of this district demanded Sand Mining for building purposes. The increasing demand brought the sand price very high. So the lobbies attracted most of the unemployed youngsters to join with the Sand Mining groups and started the exploitation of the natural wealth without any consciousness of future existence of the earth and its surroundings.

Sand mining in the river basins, coastal areas and hilly regions of Southern India particularly in the State of Tamil Nadu has posed serious threats to ecology and social life. Here I would like to throw some light on how nature is destroyed by human greed, particularly from my place the problem of Sand Mining is an important issue these days, because it not only destroys the river banks but also it affects people’s life very badly. It is a humble attempt to specify the environmental and ecological crisis of ‘sand mining’ which is now seriously affecting my place and I shall explain the responsibility of the church.

Ill effects of sand mining
a. Excessive sand mining stopped the natural flow of the river and consequently this stagnant water got polluted and the water became useless for human needs and also for agriculture.

b. More and more sand mining from the river makes the river much deeper than the natural depth; this may cause people to drown in the river.

c. Due to sand mining and the increase of the depth in the river, it soon dries up.

d. The increase of the depth of the river made the water level lower than the sea level, so that the salt water enters the river which makes cultivation impossible.

e. The cultivation without good harvest resulted in unpaid loans in the banks and big amount of debts ultimately resulted in farmers suicides.

f. This problem not only affects some particular areas but it reduces the water wealth in the hilly places. Sand Mining decreases the ground water from normal level which results in water crisis to the people living in hilly areas.

g. The stagnant water became the breeding ground for mosquitoes and all other bacteria and the use of that water made people sick with all kinds of health problems.

eg: Chikungunia, Malaria, skin decease etc...

In our present modern world today, everyone is aware of this responsibility, but many a time we ignore it. When something goes wrong in our life, we are not ready to take the responsibility rather we blame others for not being responsible. Everyone is responsible to oneself and to the rest of the creation to maintain a harmonious life in this world.

1. Human beings belong to the Sand (Earth)
The creation materials make it quite clear that human beings arise from Earth and are embedded in this world.

“There the lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 4:7)

We are rooted in the earth like trees. And we are dependent on earth like the flora and fauna. We can say that life begins with sand / soil / earth and it ends with it. Adam was made from the dust of the earth. The name Adam (adam) is the masculine form of the Hebrew word adamah, which
literally means “soil” or “arable [farmable] earth or red earth”. So Adam is an “earth man” who belongs to the land and who is responsible to the land. Dust we are and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19). From sand/dust human being is taken and then God breathed His breath so that man became alive. However, sand does not require God’s breath to produce lives, vegetation etc. Therefore sand has ‘life’ in it that generates life too. If we think sand has life, we should consider the value of life that is contained in the sand. However, we treat sand as material without life and as a commodity.

Out of our greed, we accumulate it either by money/building/huge houses/sand storages to create artificial deficits/demands of sand. We commercialize it because we don’t think we are sand, if we sell we sell our selves and we sell our future generations. It may be called as self slavery system, (or) a slavery to death.

We can translate the name of the first man literally as “Earthman” or “Soilman” or even “Tiller,” but, our common understanding of human beings and their relationship to Earth might be quite different. In the biblical understanding, there is a common source of life—the good earth and God’s breathe.

2. Human beings are Stewards or custodians

God created human beings in His image. The image of God in human being consists precisely of their being put in charge of creation. Thus as human’s being, our task is, to take care of nature in a responsible way, because we were created last, in the creation order. In the creation narrative our responsibility is indicated, that we are placed by God to be in charge or be care-takers of the earth. Human beings should relate to the non-human as God relates to them. I would say as God’s representative we are custodian of the nature just as God is for the whole creation. In our daily lives, we are separated from the rest of the creation because of our way of life, our attitudes, our preferences, and our selfish actions. In addition to that we need to understand that as human beings have been responsible in bringing the curse upon the ground, in the same fashion, we are also responsible in bringing the blessing to the land. So we have a responsibility to keep the process of restoration of the distorted relationships in the creation and bring blessings to the land.

Industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, indiscriminate mining and other human activities have been degrading the land. Desertification in the sense of diminishing vegetative cover and plant diversity continues. More serious than desertification may be the gradual deterioration of agricultural land through erosion and salinization. A money-minded mentality leads people to destroy nature. As Christians our responsibility is to acknowledge, preserve and promote the value of nature. We are the stewards of nature so we must care for and protect our nature for future generations, and not exploit our environment. Instead of using river sand for construction and plastering work, we can go for alternative methods and we can use M sand. Nature is our home given by God so we should be the protector of our nature.

“We need to be a voice for the most vulnerable and those who will be most affected by environmental degradation, and we need to depoliticize environmental issues and give a moral imperative to earth care.” Inherent in that moral call is the desire to address current lifestyle trends. “As people of faith we can help Christian communities further understand the ties between environment and justice and personal lifestyles.” As Christians, we need to practice, model, and embody a way of life more fulfilling, whole, and joyful than that which is sold to us by our culture. We should preach a life that is instead based on healthy relationships, community, and love.

Conclusion

When we see the full thrust of the biblical mandate to care for the Earth, we can see even more clearly that care for creation is not just one contemporary issue among others. Rather, it is part of our fundamental purpose as human beings and it should affect the way we do everything. As the Bible shows, creation-care is an integral dimension of our calling as humans. We are to love God, love our earth, and care for creation. Let us hear the biblical call from God and make a profound commitment to fulfill our human vocation to be Earth-keepers who serve and preserve the Earth. Let us be motivated by grace in all things to change our spirit as well as our actions. Let us be different so that we can make a difference, for God’s sake.
“So be Wise as Serpents”

D. Jeyasingh

Text: Matt. 10:16
See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Introduction

In June 2011 I was appointed by my diocese in a rural pastorate called Nangur Pastorate, which has four villages and a farm of about 5 acres with more than 100 coconut trees and 3 acres of chowuku plantation. As a newly married couple we stepped into the house in the farm where our frequent visitors were 'snakes'. We used to kill them when it was about to harm us. One fine evening my church secretary came to meet me and we were discussing about the pastorate matters and that time the usual uninvited visitor (snake) made its appearance. Then our whole discussion was about snakes and at the end I came to the conclusion that not only my secretary but also many christians including my own family members were caught up with the idea that snakes are the substitute of satan or evil and hence we need to kill them.

No doubt that snakes receive a lot of attention in the Bible, starting from Gen.3:1 (In the garden of Eden) till Rev. 20:2 (The Ancient Snake). They are almost always symbolised as loathsome creatures, associated with the deadly poison and craftiness. And that has made us think whenever we see a snake slithering, limbless on the ground, about the 'Fall of Human' and the 'Effects of Sin'. This sermon is an attempt to find out the facts and the importance of snakes historically, biblically and scientifically and understand to that as creatures snakes are not evil in themselves but they are an easily handled metaphor for evil in most of the passages.

Word Study

In the Hebrew Bible, nachash (נחש) occurs in Torah to identify the serpent in Eden. Tanniym a form of dragon monster also occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible. Hebrew saraph means fiery, fiery serpent, 'seraph', 'seraphim' occurs in Torah to describe a species of vicious snakes whose poison burns upon contact. According to Wilhelm Gesenius, saraph corresponds to the Indian language, sanskrit as ‘sarpa’ (serpent).

Snakes: Sin? / Satan?

In the whole OT only two creatures have spoken the human language i) the Snake in the garden of Eden, ii) the Balam's Donkey. In Gen. 3:1 we read “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God has made”. The importance of the serpent in the OT lies primarily in its symbolism in certain narratives. The most conspicuous use is in the story of the Garden of Eden. The usual story is how this snake was used by satan and because of that, it occurred God's curse. Then the later tradition would identify the serpent as satan or the devil, but no such supernatural figure was envisaged by the author of Genesis. The story is a fable that uses the technique of a talking animal. Hence, the serpent symbolizes temptation, whether it comes from within the human person or from another source. Here we can see clearly that human beings are responsible for the “Fall” but the curse of God on man, woman and the snake is essentially descriptions of life as the author understood it. Debate about the serpent in Eden is whether it should be viewed figuratively or as a literal animal. According to Rabbinical tradition, the serpent represents sexual desire. Voltaire, drawing on Scocinian influences, wrote: “it was so decidedly a real serpent, that all its species, which had before walked on their feet, were condemned to crawl on their bellies. No serpent, no animal of any kind, is called satan or devil in the Pentateuch. The identification of the snake with satan is more than a tale in Judaism and Christianity, when it is viewed through the conceptual and moral framework of Genesis.
Snakes: Signs? / Statues?
In Ex. 4: 1-5 we come across Moses asking for a sign from God. Then God provided him with a sign which is his rod which turns into a snake. In order to believe that Lord the God of their ancestors (v.5), sent the snake to the Pharaohs palace as God’s representative/sign (v.8). Later in Numbers 21: 4-9 when the Israelites were journeying towards Canaan in the wilderness, bitten by the “seraphim” the burning ones, again this “serpent” (nahash) was served as a “sign of curing agent” ordered by God. The phrase serpent (nahash) and bronze (nehoshet) are closely related. We read this bronze serpent alleged to be the one Moses made was kept in Jerusalem’s temple sanctuary (2 Kings 18: 4) until the time of King Hezekiah's. Olivier Artus said in his commentary that the bronze serpent made by Moses to save the people is reminiscent of rites known in the ancient religions of the Near-East. Also images / signs of snakes were placed at the door of the temples. John J. Collins adds to this by saying the Jewish attitude to snake worship in the late OT period is vividly portrayed in the story of Bel and the Dragon which appears as chapter 14 of the Book of Daniel in the Greek and Latin Bible and in the Catholic Cannan, but it is not included in the Hebrew Bible and is regarded as apocryphal by protestants. Also serpent figuratively describes Biblical places such as Egypt (Jer.46:22), and the city of Dan (Gen.49:17). The prophet Jeremiah also compares the King of Babylon to a serpent (Jer.51:34).

Snakes: Symbolism of Mythology? / Scientific Medicine?
In some reference of OT serpents also appear as mythological beings, opposed to the creator God ex. Job 26 : 13. The symbol of snake played a major role in the religious and cultural realms of ancient Near East like Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia, Greece and Babylon. The serpent was a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld as well as a symbol of fertility, life and healing. Wilhelm Gensenius notes that even amongst the ancient Hebrews the serpent was a symbol of wisdom. But when it comes to the scientific study about the healing power of snakes, it is found that their venom it can cure several human disorders and diseases. Of the venom of 3000 species of snakes just over 600 are venomous and it was made of different types of peptides, enzymes and toxins. Also these venom compositions can vary within a single species and may also vary between life stages. For, e.g. the venom produce by a juvenile snake may be much different than the venom it makes as an adult. Broadly there are two types of venom: Hemotoxins & Neurotoxins. Hemotoxins target the circulatory systems and the medicine derived from this is used to treat heart attacks and blood disorders. Neurotoxins are particularly deadly and targets the central nervous system. The medicines derived from this are used to treat brain injuries, strokes and diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s. Hence the doctor’s symbol has a snake in its emblem.

What Would Jesus Do?
As a person, Jesus Christ grew up in the same Judaisitic, middle Eastern world, but his view about snakes is not made of the Genesis framework but of the Kingdom values & life oriented framework. i.e. God’s framework, God created everything and found it was good. Hence here Jesus Christ looks only at the goodness of snakes, “Be Wise as Snakes”. Jesus our role model always values the least, the lost & the last hence tearing the veil of stigma attached to this creature. He brings in a new image to it as it is recorded in Isaiah 11: 1-8, God’s vision/wish as “The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covers the sea” envisaging peace and not enmity. Hence, Jesus will not kill this creature which is God’s own creation which has a certain purpose to fulfill on this beautiful Earth, as it was not killed in the times of Noah’s 40 days rain. God always renew & restore the creation for a greater purpose (maintain the eco-balance of nature).

Conclusion
In order to live the snake eats harmful bugs & insects, mice, rats and other mammals that can destroy crops. Also these snakes can be served as a food source for predators like hawks, owls, herons and carnivorous mammals such as bobcats. As we all know the life cycle is inter-dependent on every creature & species on the Earth. We should realize that the above mentioned creatures however small it may be, can live without humans and the humans can never think about a world for survival without these creatures / species of animals. Hence, snakes play a key role in maintaining an eco-balance of nature on this planet, Earth. Their presence or removal will directly impact the health of an eco-system. Among 3000, some snake species have become endangered not only in the name of development
or due to land clearing but also in several places due to the religious beliefs it has been killed/eradicated (as my church secretary said). We should not worship snakes, but we must at least show minimal respect to all God’s creatures. Yes, there is no doubt in the Bible that the snake has been used both by God & Satan. But Satan did not use only the snake as an instrument but also used many including Judas Iscariot and may be at times, you and me too. If so why this enmity towards snakes. Likewise Lion as a metaphor is also used for God (Hosea 13:7, Rev.5:5) and for Satan (I Peter 5:8). But we do not demonize/satanize “Lion” then why do we do so for snakes?

Let us hear the voice of the voiceless not the issh, issh sounds of snake but here I mean that the whole creation including snakes asking for freedom from bondage to bring salvation (Romans 8:18-22). As co-creatures if we learn more about snakes, snakes will become worthy of our respect and protection and animals that we can learn to live with (peace & harmony). Amen.

Bibliography

Earth is Good and let it be Good

Jawahar Paul

Texts: Gen. 1:28-31, Mt. 13:3-8, 18-23 & Mal. 3:11

God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth … … …” Gen. 1:28

Mr. Elaiah (pseudonym), a farmer, in my Pastorate committed suicide a fortnight ago. On further investigation, the reason became clear. Mr. Elaiah cultivated Cotton in 5 acres of his agricultural land for the last 15 years. Somebody advised him to use pesticides of different brands for a better yield. Mr. Elaiah tried these methods by investing a huge amount, which he had borrowed from a few people. Every year the production of the cotton crop decreased in spite of using new branded pesticides. This frustrated Mr. Elaiah and he concluded that he could not repay the debt which eventually culminated in his suicide.

On closer examination, there are several factors for his suicide like 1. His expectations were not fulfilled. 2. He was over loaded by the credit amounts. 3. He had no way to clear his debts. 4. He was pestered by the moneylenders. 5. He did not get the expected profit. This issue may also be looked at from an ecological perspective.
Modern agriculture and its impact on the Earth

The impact of modern methods of farming resulted in diverse results. Especially in agriculture, the advent of technological advancements such as better irrigation systems, use of high yielding seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, multi-cropping systems, etc., the farmer aims to get the best production from the soil. However, as we look at the cited issue, the use of these methods can also have an adverse effect on the quality and fertility of the earth. The unlimited use of pesticides and the use of hybrid seeds have an adverse impact on the environment. Increasing demand for food due to increasing population has pressurized the earth for more production, the cultivable land is decreasing day by day but the nutritious food demand is increasing. Therefore, the farmer is adapting to so many alternative cultivation methods, experimenting with new technologies and using heavy chemicals even though his/her finances are weak so as to increase production but unfortunately it shatters the expectations of the farmer.

1. Degradation of Mother Earth (Gen. 1:28-31)

In God’s creation, God created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1) and in Gen. 1: 11-12 says let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind that bear fruit with the seed in it and also in Gen. 1: 28-31 says about the earth, God blessed them to fill the earth and subdue it. According to the key verse, earth naturally has the capacity to yield its maximum and that is how God blessed mother earth. In India, earth is worshipped as one of the goddesses and is called “bhu-mata.” God already instructed and blessed mother earth to yield its maximum and the mother earth naturally has the capacity to yield its maximum.

Out of greed and without realizing that mother earth has the capacity to yield its maximum, Mr. Eliah started investing more money on pesticides for a better yield. By using heavy chemicals, mother earth’s natural/original capacity of production was destroyed and that is how, mother earth, instead of giving more production, started to give lesser production. The natural production of the earth decreased year after year and this made Mr. Eliah disappointed and disgusted. Mr. Eliah believed in the pesticides and chemicals than believing in the capacity of the earth given by our almighty God, which resulted in his suicide. Therefore, let us start safeguarding our mother earth from such external chemicals, minerals, metals, or elements and non-elements, which are destroying the natural capacity of the earth, given by the God.

2. Depletion of the Earth (Mt. 13:3-8 & 18-23)

In the New Testament, the parable of the sower (farmer) and soil, is recorded in the three Gospels (Mt. 13: 3-8, 18-23; Mk. 4: 3-8, 14-20; Lk. 8: 5-8, 11-15). In God’s creation, God created earth and he saw that it was good and instructed the earth to yield and multiply. (Gen. 1: 11). On a closer look at the parable of the sower, we can notice that the earth is good and that is how it could give birth to the seed when sowed in four different locations of the earth. However, it was bird, rock and thorns, which became obstacles for the continuity of growth and yielding fruit, except the seed, which grew, in the good land for the cultivation and we can notice that the sower did not use any other fertilizers for the production.

In the above parable, one can notice that only external things (bird, rock and thorns) damaged the growth of the plant but the earth is good and that is how it gave birth to all the four seeds and the fourth one, which was sowed in the good land started yielding even without using anything extra. The sower, sowed and forgot and in its own time, in God’s time, the plant started yielding fruits. In this parable, we notice that the earth is good and only external things damaged the growth of the plant. Therefore, dear friends, the earth is good and the seed is good and ultimately the fruit is good which means it can yield to sufficiently. Mother earth does not need external minerals, metals, or elements and non-elements, which are used in the pesticides for getting greater production according to the human greed. We should learn to sow and forget because God has already instructed and blessed mother earth to yield its maximum potential and it will yield if we obey God’s word as mother earth is listening to the word of God since its birth.

3. God rebukes the Locust (Mal. 3:11)

Malachi is the postexilic prophet and prophesying to the Israelite community to listen to the God’s commandment and obey God’s word and thereby says “I will rebuke the locust for you so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil … . . . .” Mal. 3:11. Eliah, who knows the word of God and worship the living God, could have realized the importance of this verse and listened to the word of God as mother earth and the
locusts are listening to God. His greed made him forget the word of God and he started depending on the externals elements like pesticides and borrowed huge amounts for buying those pesticides.

The word of God clearly states that it is God who will rebuke the locusts but not the pests and that is how today pests are unable to kill locusts. By using the pests, we want to kill locusts but by God's grace locusts are developing resistance towards those pests and that is how year after year powerful chemicals are discovered to kill these locusts. The word of God never says that God would kill the locusts or asking us to kill and destroy his creation but God says that he would rebuke it to go away from our fields in order not to damage the production.” God's intention is not to kill but it is the greediness of humanity that is killing the creation by using several external methods rather than depending on the word of God and looking at the goodness of the creation.

Dear friends, Mr. Eliah might have depended on the word of God, its importance and on the goodness of earth and stopped using the pests to kill the locusts. Let us start becoming good-hearted human beings so that the creation would become good to us. Let us stop damaging mother earth and killing the creatures by using the powerful pests.

Conclusion
We the human beings are to affirm the goodness of earth and all that is in it. If we continue to relate to earth in a destructive manner, the yield also will destroy the life on the earth in turn. It is we the human beings, who are to mend our ways by establishing the right relationship with the earth and treating the earth, as our neighbors. We are called to safeguard and replenish its goodness then God will establish his peace on the earth to produce, allow the sky to bring dew so that whole creation will enjoy the peace that has been promised by God in Zech. 8:12. The Earth is our neighbor and the human beings are earth's neighbors and we need to build and safeguard this relationship so that the goodness of the earth is to continue and our life on the earth be blessed for generations and generations. As we learnt and saw that the earth is good by nature and that is how God blessed the earth to be good, let us stop using powerful chemicals, which are killing, destroying and degrading the earth is natural capacity of yielding and fertility.

May God Almighty Grant us wisdom to discern the use of the mother earth in a right manner by respecting its dignity. Let mother earth enjoy its dignity. Amen.

Bibliography
Spiritual Insights on Creation

Asok Kumar

Text: Job 12:7-10

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

With the coming of Christianity and modern development, the belief in the presence of spirits in the trees, jungle, rocks, and rivers disappeared. The traditional beliefs were considered as superstitious. Consequently, the tribals changed their attitude and looked at nature as mere sources to be exploited. Today, the tribals have freedom to cut forests, to sell land, to burn jungles, to hunt animals, birds, fish with lime and bleaching powder. These practices destroy almost every creature in the rivers. Neglect, exploitation, and the degradation of nature remain one of the greatest problems in the history of world civilizations. While concern for environmental care and ecological protection is universal, local communities take varied contextual approaches in dealing with the environment. Tribals believe in the relationships among the Supreme Being, humans and nature. The human race and nature are interdependent. They maintain a close relationship with love intrigues. However, this concept greatly changed with the coming of Christianity and modern development. Early Christian missionaries condemned the beliefs and practices of people as superstitious and satanic. Thus, the people gave up their belief in the association among the spirit with forests, trees, rocks, rivers, etc. They surrendered their close attachment to nature. They now look at nature as mere resources for manipulation and exploitation as they cultivate new land, cut big trees, and clear jungles. The industrial and technological revolution brought a new way of thinking and life; in addition, they brought changes in the relationship between nature and humanity. Massive industrialization brought ruthless exploitation of natural resources. The consumerist worldview and growth-oriented economic paradigm helped people to view nature as resources for exploitation.

Tribal Concept of Nature

Tribal people have an intimate relationship with nature. Wati Longchar writes, “The tribal world of culture can be explained only in terms of the world of nature; we cannot understand tribal culture adequately without understanding the world of nature, they are inseparably related. Once we divorce, we lose the meaning of life. For tribals, nature is not only a mechanical system, but it includes everything that is qualitative and spiritual.” The tribals counted the seasons of the year and sowed seeds according to the revelation of nature. Nature spoke to them about good weather, drought, famine, and prosperity. They believed the revelation of the Supreme Being was in nature.

The Concept of Land

Land is the foundation of human life. Human survival depends on land and its resources. The tribals have a great reverence for the land and its resources. One of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh believed that they came out of the rock. Even today, some of them still worship the rock, and they consider the land as extremely sacred. It is taboo for them to remove the boundary stone. If anyone intentionally removes the boundary stones, the spirit of the land will cause sickness and even death. Whenever there is a land dispute or a false claim, nature would determine the outcome.
Festivals were celebrated in honour of the land. Prayers were once addressed to the Supreme Being, the spirits, and the land to be kind to the crops before cultivation.

**Relationship between Human Beings, Trees, Flowers and Animals**

Traditionally, Nagas believed that before the separation of day and night, human beings, nature, and animals lived together as a big family. They lived in harmony with one another, understood one another, helped one another in times of need, spoke the same language and tried their best not to hurt one another. People lived in an intimate relationship with nature. Many herbal medicines were used by the tribal members without side effects. There is a mystical sharing of life between human beings and plants. Trees, bamboos, rocks, and rivers were believed to be the abode of spirits. Hence, they do not destroy or kill intentionally, birds and animals were hunted according to each season and people did not hunt during mating seasons and when the young ones were small.

It is important to rediscover the relationship among the Creator, nature, and human beings and their interdependence. Creatures and people have a close attachment to the land. It feeds and nurtures all living beings and things. People are placed upon the earth to be stewards of the land and its inhabitants. We all are aware that people have to care and judiciously use it for our survival. Yet crucial questions remain. How do we educate people to treat the land and its resources with reverence and conserve it? How far can we do justice to God's creation? Can people develop affectionate love for nature? Forest is the backbone of the ecology of the tribal's. The people should be educated and encouraged to plant trees in the deforested areas. This will help to restore ecological balance. Environmental wisdom still exists in the mind of the villagers, who still love the nature. People love natural beauties, and the elders of the villages try their best to control the exploitation of forests, animals, birds, herbs, orchids, and other wild flowers. This goes against the consumerist culture which has compelled young people to abuse natural resources to maximize their profits.

Today, eco-theology has been introduced in theological education. Yet, most of the Christian ministers, who have been given eco-theological education, have reservations to preach on the importance of conserving nature. It is unclear as to why, after all, is it possible that we can rediscover liberating resources from traditional myths, beliefs and practices and incorporate it in our theological education? It is important to promote human responsibility to preserve and care for God's creation.” In the biblical theology of creation, human beings are created in “the image of God,” and, as the story of creation declares, nature was created “out of nothing” \( \text{ex nihilo} \). The first man, Adam, was created from the dust of the earth. This statement established his organic connection to nature. Theologically speaking, people are related to and at the same time very distinct from the earth. The imago Dei makes this clear-cut distinction between humanity and nature. However, the biblical notion of the “image of God” in humanity ensures that Adam and his offspring would become responsible citizens of the earth.

God is the creator of the universe, of earth and all its creatures (Gen 1:1) and while this is amply taught by the Bible, it is also taught by the creation itself “for since the creation of the world Gods invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen and understood. The scripture teaches that if you come across a birds nest beside the road, either on a tree or on the ground and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young (Deu 22:6). Similarly (2-kings 17:4) I have ordered the ravens to feed you there. So you can see, God’s Creation conveying the message about creation num 22:21-41 .

The voice of the non-human world opens our eyes to see the beauty of creation. Beasts, birds, and sea life, the non-human inhabitants of the earth declare God’s glory. When human knowledge fails to understand the intrinsic value of the earth, the non-human life - the bio-diversity affirms its life as God’s gift.

Perhaps this appeal to the earth may mean that the equality is shown in the productions of the earth, as in the case of fierce animals. Noxious weeds and useless plants are thriftier than the plants which are useful and the growth of poisonous or annoying things on the earth illustrates the same thing as the dealings of God with people - that his dealings are not in accordance with the real nature of objects. The same thing is manifested in the sea, where the mighty prey upon the feeble, and the fierce and the ferocious overcome the defenseless. The sentiment is that it is a great principle which pervades all things that the ferocious, the strong, the wicked,
often prospered, while the weak, the defenseless, the innocent, the pious, are subject to calamities, and that God does not apportion his dealings to the exact character of his creatures. Undoubtedly Job was right in this, and this general principle might be seen then as now, to pervade the world.

The Hand of the Lord in the Creation
The whole creation speaks eloquently of the creator “the heavens declare the glory of God; The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge (psalm 19:1-2). As the creator of all, God also is owner of all the earth is the lords and everything in it the world and all belong the heavens, even highest heavens the earth or the lords upon them he has set the world (1 Sam 2:8). God is the land lord and we are God’s tenants (lev 25:230 our response to this joy “ for God is the king of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise (psal47:7). God’s ownership precedes us and it follows us we can say” before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (psalm 90:2). God can construct the creation and destroy as well. Gen 6:6-9:16. Noah and the flood during the time of Noah, God destroyed the creation and created a new creation.

Job appeals to the orderly course of the earth, its summers and winters, its seedtime and harvest, its former and latter rains, its constant productivity, which, no less than animal instincts, speak of a single power directing and ordering all things. If the creeping things of the earth, the reptile creation, be meant, then the argument is merely an expansion of that in the preceding verse. And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. The testimony will be unanimous - beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes will unite in it. (Pulpit Commentary). The discourse we hear for the earth. We are in a time of compassionless life. All Kerith’s of the earth are drying. It was a river that helped Elijah sustains his life.

Conclusion
A theology of creation assures the communities of the tribal in India of their God-given identity and future. The people’s claim to the land is theologically legitimate. Their present identity and determination to live as a people finds historical connection, not simply because of their mythical stories, but because of the historical reality of existence from the time their forefathers who lived in the land. The use of indigenous myths to construct a theology of nature for the tribals could pave the way for a contextualized, relevant, and innovative preservation and protection of the environment and ecology. However, uncritical employment of indigenous mythologies can dilute the biblical theology of creation or nature. In a word, a theology of nature articulates the power of a nature-caring community composed of responsible individuals.

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A Vision for the New World Order

V. Paul Robert Kennedy

Text: Isaiah 11:6-9
The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

1. Introduction
The contemporary situation demands us to engage with the salvific act of God to be extended to every creature on the earth, which is considered to be the holistic ministry. God created us with a special responsibility— to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28). This does not mean that we are to exercise domination over other creatures or to exploit them for human misuse. Rather, we are to delight in other creatures, as God does. We are to present to creation as Christ is present to us,” just as He used the servant hood model in His ministry. Our love for creation is the only basis for our right use of creation. We are to exercise our stewardship as servants of creation. We are to take responsibility for all creatures, to serve their needs, and to work to preserve them (Gen. 2:15). And we are to do this not with a sense of superiority but in solidarity with all other creatures. We were created to be together, to be companions to one another, to thrive all together. And God made a covenant with us and with all other creatures together.

2. Paradigm Shift to Ensure a New World Order: an Ecocentric Approach
“The Christian tradition has understood the value of creation primarily in terms of its utility to us. Even now, the notion that animals ‘exist for our sake’ has strong resonances throughout popular Christianity. In the theo-centric, the whole creation is included in the salvific act of God. It is clearly articulated in Col: 1:19-20. “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his bloodshed on the Cross” God demands us to be committed towards this goal. We are also called to make a paradigm shift from Anthropocentric to Eco Centric pattern of life in an effort of bringing together the human and other creatures.

3. Vision for New World Order
The possibility of bringing together human beings and all other creature is fully guaranteed by the remarkable words by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11:6-9). While explaining how human being and other creature can be brought under one domain, the vision of the prophet Isaiah goes even to the extent of remarkable saying ‘The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea’. The enmity between human beings and other creature would be completely removed. So the challenge is placed before us to have a vision for a new world order, and to initiate a new journey towards this end. To realise this vision, human beings should mend their ways so that there may emerge a new world order, where
interconnectedness, mutual help, intrinsic value of each created being and kinship relationship can be realised.

4. **Present Condition challenges us for the realisation of NewWorldOrder**

Environmental ethicists argue that there is no inherent injustice or immorality in animals preying on animals, or in humans hunting and killing animals for food. The moral problem is not in the eating of animals but in the avoidance of unnecessary cruelty, indignity and pain. The harm done to animals and birds in modern methods of factory farming and intensive rearing is undoubtedly great and of moral significance, even if we do not adopt a rights approach to the moral status of non-human life. Then raising of chickens, pigs or veal calves in spaces which allow no room for movement, and the chemically and genetically altered environment which farm animals increasingly inhabit, all are indicators of unnecessary suffering and of the denial of any possibility of life quality for most intensively reared farm animals. Similarly the trade in the abuse of millions of animals in laboratory experiments, for human entertainment and in circuses or zoos, is undoubtedly a moral evil which is clearly contrary to injunctions against a cruelty to animals and also it is a further symptom of the modern commodification and reduction of nature to the status of materials bank or 'cash cow'.

We must be able to realise the fact that how the intrinsic value was restored in the prophetical words of Zechariah, (Zech: 9:9,10), where the reign of God starts through God's anointed, the weapons of war, were to be put away, and God's ruler was to enter on the harmless donkey a sign of peace and gentleness.

5. **Challenges and Alternatives for the New World Order**

a. **Pet Animals/Birds**: The Culture of Pet animals/birds should be eradicated. *E.g.* The greatest thing about being a bird is the ability to fly – to soar above the skies, a freedom that other creatures can only envy. So to confine a bird to a cage where it can barely fly at all is a kind of cruelty. Birds hardly get to even fly at all in cages, unless there is a very large aviary. Although bird-keeping is a hobby for many of us, keeping birds in cages is denying them an inborn right. Even in the case of pet animals, it is cruel to keep them in a cage. It is also a kind of curbing the inborn right of the animals.

b. **Zoo**: Zoo culture is also a debatable one. Zoos claim to want to protect species from extinction, which sounds like a noble goal, but zoo officials usually favour exotic or popular animals rather than endangered native species. It is mostly maintained for the entertainment and commercial purposes. Animals should be left in the forest area for its survival with its own freedom. If it is kept for our entertainment, it expresses our subdued nature against animals. For entertainment purposes, places like Thekkadi (situated in between the borders of Tamil Nadu and Kerala) can be created. There, by taking boat cruise people enjoy seeing animals in the forest area.

The recent happenings of wild animals infiltrating the resident areas of the village gives us a kind of warning not to exploit the forest areas which are destined for animal/birds. The new world order is sure to come if human kind is ready to change its perspective towards non-human animal world.

c. **Jallikattu**: Jallikattu game in Tamil Nadu has now become a national debate. As ecologists, we should be very clear about this issue. There should not be any compromise with regard to the cruelty meted out towards animal and also human sufferings during this game. Though it may be considered to be an age-old tradition, it is a kind of cruelty for the animal and sufferings for spectators and players. Other alternative plays can be identified creatively for the entertainment during festive seasons.

6. **A Call for Our Commitment for a New World Order**

This text taken for our meditation gives us a vision for a new world order where both human beings and other creature are brought together for coexistent living. It is wrong to consider that only mankind was given the task (and blessing) of representing God in this world, for that matter, whole creation is also given the task (and Blessing) of representing God. Psalm 19 is a good example. We as the stewards of God, must learn to relate to the world wisely until that time when the wolf shall live with the lamb in the presence of God.
7. Conclusion
So it is important to understand that human beings and all other creatures enjoy equal status. They are inseparable to each other. In all our discourse, we tried to deconstruct the old concept of kingship system of the world instead we tried our level best to construct the new concept of kinship system in the world. The covenant of god is not only established with human beings alone but also with the whole creation. So a new world order which is found in the book of Isaiah 11:6-9, should be taken seriously. The cultures of pet animals/birds are to be eradicated and the cruelties towards animals are to be considered to be sin. We are called to repent from wrong attitude and behaviour towards other creatures and also we come to understand that not only human being represent God’s nature but also the whole creation. The nature of God is not the physical nature but it is a sacrificial love, which can also be seen in all creatures. May our gracious God help us to realise a new world order for the glory of God. So if there is repentance on the part of human beings, it is sure that there will emerge a new world – the reign of Christ. This discourse is concluded with the famous saying, ‘where there is will, there is a way’. May God bless us all to visualise and realise a new world order in the days to come. Amen.

Bibliography

A Cry for Action

D. Paul Yesudasan

Text: Psalm 102
like smoke my days (life) disappears.
Like glowing embers my bones burn
his heart is blighted like whitened grass.
No normal breath, but loud groaning
serious weight loss reduced to skin and bones
Isolated living like desert owl living in ruined houses.
He forgets his food, even if he eats; he eats his food as ashes and drink water with tears.

Introduction
The Psalm is a prayer song of an afflicted person, who is faint and pours out his lament before the Lord. The major theme of this song is God’s care for the distressed. God is living, eternal and unchanging and we can trust him to help his people in this generation just as God helped his people in the past generation. At the centre of the Bible is the book of Psalms. This great collection of songs and prayers express the heart and soul of humanity, the whole range of human experiences. There are no clichés in this book. Instead, David and the other writers honestly pour out their true feelings, reflecting a dynamic,
powerful and life-changing friendship with God. The psalmists confess
their sins, express their doubts and fears, ask God for help in times of
trouble, and praise and worship him. As we read the book of psalms, we
will hear believers crying out to God from the depths of despair, and we
will hear them singing to God in the heights of celebration. But whether
despairing or rejoicing, we will always hear those sharing honest feelings
with God. Because of the honesty expressed by the psalmist, men and
women throughout history have come, again and again, to the book of
Psalms for comfort during times of struggle and distress. And with the
psalmists, they have risen from the depths of despair to new heights of
joy and praise as they also discovered the power of God’s everlasting love
and forgiveness.

Psalm is poetry, the spontaneous overflow of the powerful feelings
of the poet who brings out the desire of his/her heart with a lot of
emotions. These feelings and emotions expressed in words are in the form
of prayers, praise and petitions. The content of the songs differ reflecting
the situations which the poets live and sometimes these songs reflect the
aspirations of the poet; One such song is psalm 102.

Case
Solid Rocks Mountains are broken into huge granites and then made into
different sizes according to the need of people. However, white solid
rock (Calcium Content) which are found above the ground/earth or below
the earth are taken by the people for making white powder that is used
for house terraces. (This powder is mixed with broken mud bricks and
applied over the concrete roof tops in order to stop leakage) The poor
labourers break the earth with crowbars and ploughshares to collect these
semi solid white rocks. These broken rocks are taken by bullock cart to
the furnace and put in the furnace in layers in between the layers of these
broken rocks fire wood is spread to powder the rock. The fire is lit, about
24 hours the broken rocks are in the furnace till they became powders.
In this process, a billow of smoke that contains toxic gases like carbon-
di-oxide and silicon-di-oxide are emitted which create a lot of health hazards
for the people around the furnace.

Case Analysis
The white stones are taken from the village pond/pool without permission.
Some poor labourers earn their livelihood by digging the ground in the
pool to collect these white stones. They spend more energy to get little. If
they break the measure of one full bullock cart they are paid Rs.350/-. This is how they are exploited by low wages. The water storage of the
pond is increased by deepening the pond but the shutter level of the pond
level is high therefore the water in the pond cannot be irrigated for
agricultural purpose. Moreover, the villagers say that because of this digging
of white rocks the stored water in the pool leaks heavily and soon the
pool dries up. Therefore agricultural work is abandoned. Trees are being
cut and used for fire wood, especially Palmyra and the thorny bush as the
fire has to be kept going for 24 hours. By the time the white rocks boil
and become powder, then the powder is separated by the filter, the solid
remains stored and water is poured on the storage therefore it also become
powder. However it is dangerous and many people were affected by the
boiling stones.

The smoke commissioned from the furnace is the combination of
carbon and silicon, they mix with oxygen which creates respiratory problems
such as breathing trouble, wheezing, asthma, allergy, skin problems, eye
sight problem, migraine, headache, hair fall and in some cases impotency.
The ground water level is decreasing and the calcium content of this ground
water level is too high to drink. Therefore many people suffer from kidney
stone. The treatment for this leads people to heart and bone ailments.
People buy water in bottles and drink. The nearby houses and vegetations
are filled with a layer of white powder and black smoke. They settle in
every home through doors, windows and ventilators. To avoid these smoke,
some houses have one air-conditioned room which again gets struck often
and that increases the heat of the environment along with the furnace
heat. Since we have 20 furnaces around this village within two kilometre
radius, nearby villagers are also affected. People slowly leave these villages
and settle down in towns, therefore some houses are dilapidated. The
 greed for money, looting of natural resources, creates a lot of serious
health problems which goes unnoticed. Recently the furnace owners mix
fly ash to enhance the weight of white powder to earn more money.
Psalm 102 and the local Context
The poet is in distress and also in danger (Vs.2) therefore he calls to the Lord to intervene and answer him quickly. The painful experiences are narrated in verses from 3 to 9. The result of all these is (Vs. 23, 24) the strength is broken; life span is cut short and also premature death. The experiences of the poet as well as the villagers are the same. In such a situation God intervenes for his creation, not only for the humans but also for all his creations.

I. Compassionate God loves and protects
Vs. 13: God will arise and have compassion in Zion for it is time to show her favour. It is God who intervenes; God arises and reveals compassion towards the earth and all that is in it. God's compassion makes God in action as “to hear the groans of the prisoners (human and nature) and release those condemned to death” (Vs. 20) God viewed the earth from heaven (Vs. 19) with compassion in action. We need to treat the earth with dignity because the stones have the value, the woods have the value and they are connected to us. They make our life worth living.

II. God's servants -move with pity and wisdom
For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity (Vs. 14). We the children of God expected to be compassionate towards the dust and stones of Zion where we and God live together, i.e. this earth. It happens now in the reign of God, when we love nature and live in nature as the word of God directs us Vs. 15, 16 fear of the Lord brings us wisdom which leads us with pity. In wisdom literature nature teaches wisdom, if we live with nature we deal with things mercifully. The very purpose of nature is helping us to have a life in abundance.

III. Nature will be renewed
Vs. 25-28 God who created everything will never change, however the creation changes into new creation. The old one perishes and the new one comes. The process of renewal is not removing something old and replacing it with something new, rather it is growth towards maturity in mutual custodianship. It happens only when we take the responsibility of nature, the earth and all that is in it. As co-creators in God’s creation, compassionate in all our dealings with nature we can partake in the process of the renewal of nature. If so the Children of your servants live, and their descendents will be established for ever.

Conclusion
We have clinics and hospitals for therapeutic purpose if we feel sick we consult physicians. If nature gets sick and cries for help how do we heal the nature? If we are compassionate enough with our environment and maintaining a healing relationship there is the possibility of survival of all creations.
Earth Centered Vision

Ratheesh N.

Text: Is.65:25

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent-its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the lord.”

Some study reveals the real shocking news, per day in the world 40,000 people dying due to the starving. In India 3000 children dies because of starvation. This situation may lead as to think to produce more food. But we will be failed because, 1/3 of total production of food is being spoiled every day. In India a large some of food, which may cost up to Rs.58,000 core is being wasted every year. This worst culture causes to increase the death rate.

Food is fundamental need of human being, but when the food becomes the part of luxurious culture it may leads to the dangerous situation. In luxurious culture we consume food not in need but in greed. Now-a-days for promoting this culture we try to increase our food production. For which we use chemical manure and pesticides. But food produce through this greedy technology is not a survival food but a ‘slow poison’.

In Kasaragod may lives are being perished due to the use of Endosulfan. Use of chemical manure and pesticides are main causes of the cancer. According to WHO (World Health Organization) within 2030 13.1 millions of people will be died of cancer, 20 times greater than today’s death rate. Actually use of fertilizers and pesticides not only affecting the human being but also soil quality will be evaporate, lot of micro organism and different kind of living thing will become extinct, then finally earth may become the planet which unsporting life.

This way our beautiful nature is being collapsed by the hand work of human being. Why human does like this? Primarily this is because of wrong interpretation about creation especially mentioned in Genesis first chapter. In these chapter verses 26 and 28 we can find the word ‘domain over’ but human think domain over mean authority is exploitation the nature. Hebrew word ‘radah’ is used to mention ‘domain over’, this word can be seen again in Ps.110:2, there this word is used to denote the reign of ‘messiah’. Was messiah (Lord Jesus Christ) reign exploiting the nature? Never, he comes here to proclaim the good news of ‘Kingdom of God’ and all his messages here related with the earth centered vision.

The meaning of ‘oikos’ includes everything in the family, that is living and non-living things, lives together or co-exist without harm each other. In the same way, earth is also a family in which living and non living things need to co-exist without exploitation. Then only harmony of life will be created.

Our anthropocentric interpretation, reading study and preaching will not support this vision. Because anthropocentric ideas provide the provision to hear the voice of human being only, but earth centric ideas can provide the voice of earth/pathos of earth /warning of earth.

The prophet Isaiah in his prophecy gives more importance to hear the voice of the earth. In this sermon I would like to share the earth voice on the basis of Is.65:25.

New diet and Justice in earth centered vision

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent-its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the lord.” Is.65:25

The words point to what have been called the discords in the harmony of Nature, the pain and death involved, of necessity, in the relation of one whole class of animals to another. In St. Paul’s language, the “whole creation groaneth and travaileth together” (Romans 8:22). In the new
heaven and the new earth of the prophet’s vision there would be no such discords. The flesh-eating beasts should change their nature; even the serpent, named, probably, with special reference to Genesis 3, as the starting-point of the discords, shall find food in the dust in which he crawls, and shall be no longer a destroyer. The condition of the ideal Paradise should be restored. The renovation here spoken of extends to the whole creation, the words may imply the correcting the noxious qualities of fierce or venomous creatures.

And the lion shall eat straw - Shall eat hay or provender like the ox. The food of the lion now is flesh. Changes shall take place as great as if his nature were changed, and he should graze with the herds of the field. Like the bullock - Or the ox - the cattle that herd together - for so the Hebrew word (á÷ø baqar) means. The word may be applied to a bullock, an ox, or a cow. Dust shall be the serpent’s meat. Here we have a new feature, not contained in the earlier description. Serpents shall become harmless, anal instead of preying upon beasts, or birds, or reptiles, shall be content with the food assigned them in the primeval decree (Genesis 3:14). Mr. Cheyne appositely notes that “much dust is the food of the shades in the Assyrio-Babylonian Hades”. They shall not hurt nor destroy. Repeated from Isaiah 11:9, word for word. The sentence on him should be perpetual. He should not be injurious to man - either by the venom of his fangs. The state of security would be as great under the Messiah as if the most deadly and poisonous kinds of reptiles should be wholly in noxious, and should not attempt to prey upon people. They shall not hurt nor destroy.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,... Or, “as one” : as if they were one, of the same kind and nature, and lived upon the same food.

The people of God are comparable to lambs, for their harmlessness and innocence; and wicked men to wolves, for their fierceness and cruelty; but, by the grace of God, the latter become as mild and as gentle as the former, and live upon the same spiritual food, and join with them in attendance on the word and ordinances, where they find spiritual refreshment and comfort together. The meaning is that there shall be no violence of any kind, done either by man or beast, in the happy period described.

Here we can see harmony of life in the earth; everyone gets equal justice, so injustice is disappearing from this context. What is justice? We can define the word justice with the help of three theories.

I) Positive law theory: According to this theory justice is accepted on the basis of the law and all kind of law controlled by the laws.

II) Social good theory: According to this theory justice carried out welfare of the society. Here justice has wider meaning than laws.

III) Natural theory: according to this theory justice based on the right, everything in nature all living and non living things has right to have justice.

In this theories only the natural theory can hear the voice of the earth (All living thing and non living thing voices), remaining two are anthropocentric theories. But we prefer to adopt only positive and social theories and neglect the natural theory. Thus the earth becomes peace less. Actually ‘peace is nothing just does justice’

Now a days the ‘development will be beneficial for a only few people, but others including whole being will be suffered. If the majority people have no space means that injustice and peace less exist in the society. And this kind of development which is wounding earth is not for our good, but for our curse. More over it is just opposite of the ‘Kingdom of God’, ‘Kingdom of God’ gives at equal justice to all.

This prophecy assures the servants of Christ that the time approaches, wherein they shall be blessed with the undisturbed enjoyment of all that is needful for their happiness. As workers together with God, let us attend his ordinances, and obey his commands. Beloved in Christ, we should know that our culture causes dangerous to nature. So through Isaiah God propose new system, a co-existing system. So we must adopt this new earth centered vision to protect our earth. In Isaiah 65:17 we can see a promise of God ‘New Heaven and New Earth’ if we want to attain this dream we should avoid human centered activity and preference to the earth centered activity and vision.

“Just as we are all part of the problems, so we are all the part of solution”
The Mother Earth Mourns

B.E. Wilson

Text: Hosea 4:1, 2.  
Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel;  
for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.  
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,  
and no knowledge of God in the land.  
Swearing, lying, and murder,  
and stealing and adultery break out;  
bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Introduction

Earth is the creation of God and all living and non living creatures are also the creation of God. All creatures are interrelated and mutually dependent. God created all creatures with dignity and God’s divinity is present in all creatures. All creatures are mutually dependent. One creation cannot live at the expense of the other. Normally human beings have the tendency to think that they are the crown of all creations. But the fact is that we cannot live alone. Recently we heard about the Chennai flood. All the rich and poor men were washed out. Nearly 100 people died. Their houses also washed out. Even their cars and money could not save them.

Hosea 4:1, 2 says  
By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

Hosea was an eighth century prophet. When people were in exile to Babylon The leaders who were in Jerusalem did very evils things to their brothers.

Hosea tries to explain the sinful act of the humanity. When human beings try to oppress other human beings by lying, killing, and stealing, committing adultery and when the human society sheds blood on the face of the earth, the earth mourns. The mother earth will raise her voice through inhuman ways. When we destroy rivers, the ways of the river are blocked. More over, if you are not living righteous Because of human sinful nature all creation will suffer.

God’s presence is on the earth (Earth is filled with divine nature)
In the Indian context Earth “Bhoomi” is called as mother God (in Hinduisam). She is the sustainer of all creation. Earth God is called as Bhoomi devi she has four arms. Bhoomi devi is represented with four arms. One arm is holding pomegranate another arm is holding water vessel another arm is holding healing herbs (medicinal plants) and the fourth arm is holding vegetables. So Bhoomi devi is venerated as a life giver and life sustainer of all creations. On the one hand Indians are worshiping Bhoomi devi and on the other hand they are selling the Bhoomi devi through real estate business.

In the Tamilnadu context, The famers go to their field every day and worship the land whether it is fertile or barren. They walk gently on the ground. They feel walking on the bosom of the mother earth. They never unnecessarily dig the ground. When they dig the ground they pour milk in the pit. Bhoomi puja is very important for the new construction. Whenever the Tamil people drink the water they pour few drops of water on the ground and then they drink. There is an intimate relationship with the farmer and the earth.
The Australian Aborigines have a cultural history of 50,000 years. Their ancestors say that they were created during the dream time. God walked on the earth and created them. All other people were created out of them. They believe the jiva or guruwari “The seed power” is deposited in the earth which a creative power to create all creatures.

1. All creatures are interrelated
All life supporting systems land, sea, ocean, ponds, rivers, forests, mountains etc are only on the earth. All life supporting system are interlinked. The rain water flows on the mountain and flows through the streams and waterfalls then rolls through the river and feeds the land. Finally it drowns into the sea. The rain water is feeding all lakes, ponds canals waste lands forests etc. The rain water has her own way to go around. Bhoomi devi could bear with any amount of water.

2. All creatures are interdependent
All living and non living creatures are interdependent and depend on the earth for their sustenance. The Earth looks at all creatures mercifully, a motherly look. She feeds all and brings forth all creatures. The face of the earth is so beautiful that it is more generous. Earth is not selfish. She shares all of her richness to all creatures. She upholds life and harmony.

3. Humanity views earth as a commodity
When a man sees a vacant piece of land he calculates it monetary value. Human beings look earth as a commodity. He tries to make use of the land to become rich. In the Tamilnadu context, all the politicians irrespective of parties undermines the nature of the earth. They made use of the land and the earth to build factories. They block the ways of the river. In Chennai CMAD Says there are 1.5 illegal constructions on the water catching points. The Chennai city has grown without any planning, as the corrupted politicians and the officers had closed their eyes for more than 10 years. Where to go ? Water water every where but there is no drinking water. The mother earth raised her voice to wash out houses, boats, vehicles ex. Cars, taxis, and auto rickshas in Chennai and nearly 100 people died. The unplanned city development, Encroachment on the ways of the river. When one creature suffers all will suffer. When the human beings for their selfish nature swallow all natural resources God will punish them. They even don’t know about the value of river, lake, and ponds. When human selfishness oppress the earth, naturally Earth raises her voice in the form natural calamities. To teach a lesson. “DON’T destroy the face of the earth.

4. Earth raises her own voice
We consider earth as a non living creature. We misunderstood that the earth is calm and quiet. When heavy rains fall on the mother earth she warns her children to escape. But all her ways are blocked. Moreover the human build the buildings on the route of the river. In Chennai CMAD Says there are 1.5 illegal constructions on the water catching points. The unplanned city development, Encroachment on the ways of the river.

Listen to the voice of the earth
The mother earth is very deeply united with all creatures, as she gave birth all living and non living beings. She could hear the voice of the oppressed. When she hears the cry of any creature she will respond aggressively like tsunami, flood and earth quake.

5. Application and Practical suggestions
   a) Be an Eco activist
   b) When lakes ponds or rivers are encroached please raise your voice against it.
   c) Respect fellow human and non living creatures
   d) Uphold the harmony among all creatures
   e) Start eco- clubs in school and college level to teach eco sensitivity
   f) Don’t construct building on the pathways of streams, lakes, and ponds
g) Give Green awards yearly once to encourage the people who are environmentalists.

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Appendix - 1

Sacramental Model of Life

Prakash K. George

Let me begin this short meditation by reflecting on some of the basic affirmations of the Bible. The book of Genesis begins with a Geophany in which, God reveals the whole earth before us. On the seventh day the earth appears in its fullness. In the first chapter there is a repeated refrain occurring seven times corresponding to the seven days of creation. “God saw what he has made and it was good” (vv 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). In the last refrain the writer sums up “God saw everything he has made and behold it was very good” (v. 31). It means that everything in this world has a mark of goodness. It further affirms that everything in this world has intrinsic value. Each creation possesses qualitative goodness and everything has its space, place and role. God is proud of all his creation.

It is also significant to note that the first creation story ends with the making of Sabbath and not with the creation of human beings. There is no English word corresponding to the Hebrew Sabbath, which we translate as ‘Sabbath’. Many of us think that it is abstaining from work. But it has a much deeper meaning. Gen 2:1-3 can be translated as “The heavens and earth were completed and all their host. And God completed on the seventh day the work which he did, and he made Sabbath on the seventh day from all the work which he did.” Sabbath here is translated as a verb. Rest is a necessary feature of Sabbath but it does not define it. It is a
celebration of creation. So on Sabbath all creation feels good; all enjoy a harmonious relationship with the creator God and between themselves. Sabbath is God’s vision of the earth.

In the second creation narrative, the Garden of Eden is an oikos – a house, in which different organisms coexist in a state of harmony, fulfilling God’s purpose. God is present with his creation in an anthropomorphic way. He has given human beings the task of tilling and tending the garden which means to serve and to guard the garden as God’s garden. Human beings are given the responsibility to serve and keep the garden so that the whole creation grows to its fullness.

In the wisdom books of the Bible - Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes - there is the recurring invitation to learn from nature. It is a call to discern God’s order in this world and to live in harmony with that order. Nature in many wisdom passages appears as a teacher. Jesus too invites his listeners to learn from nature. In the book of Job, Job is puzzled with the question of suffering and wickedness on this earth. At the end of this book, God speaks to Job through the whirlwind. The divine speeches invite Job to see the wild world with Him. In this worldview, the sea, the five pairs of wild animals and even the so-called chaotic creatures Behemoth and Leviathan have their respective space and place. All of them have their space and place, and God enjoys their existence. It is an invitation to widen his vision. The speeches broaden Job’s vision of the world from a worm’s eye view to a bird’s eye view.

In the book of Psalms the whole earth incessantly communicates God’s glory (Ps. 19:1-2). It is a silent non-verbal communication. In many Psalms the whole creation praises God (Ps. 148). In the original Jerusalem temple, the images of animals, plants and many other objects are a conscious effort to depict a microcosm. Thus it shows that the whole earth is worshipping God along with those who worship him in the temple.

The Bible also affirms that the world that God found good has also the possibility to turn to chaos by the sinful acts of mankind. As we celebrate Earth day today, the reality of the world is so alarming that we can listen to the groaning of the death of many species on this earth. All over the world we can hear the cry for clean water, air and soil. We cannot go on exploiting the deep water level without disturbing the ecological balance. What is happening these days is that we have turned this beautiful world into a wasteland. If environmental degradation continues at this rate, we would be destroying not only ourselves but also the entire cosmos and all its inhabitants.

In this context we need to have a new perception of the world. A shift from utilitarian assessment of creation to a new value system that respects and cares for the intrinsic worth of each creation. It is a call to have a new world view that values and honours the place, space and role of the rest of the creation. This new worldview must create an awareness of our dependence on this earth, for we are greatly dependent on other creatures for our very existence. We belong to this earth and we are part of it, but not at its centre. This vision of the world is not anthropocentric but creation-centric.

We need to uphold a new value system that sustains interrelatedness and interdependence of every being on this earth; new understanding of power and responsibility that will equip us to nurture and care for all creatures. There is also the need to have programmes and planning at the local and national level that enables the whole creation to flourish as God’s creation.

To achieve this we need to have a new lifestyle that is very different from the North American one. If the whole world adopts the North American lifestyle, which we often try to do, the whole planet will soon die. The only alternative to save the world from peril is to change our lifestyle. It sounds simple but it is very difficult to practice. A lifestyle of simplicity that is in tune with nature. It is an invitation to reduce our needs to a minimum. Gandhiji has expounded this truth “The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.” We are living in a world that tempts us to practice materialistic values and lifestyles. The market and media persuade people to evaluate others not by who they are but by what they possess.

How to counter this is a challenge before us. When we study the Bible, God calls individuals and communities for an alternative mission and lifestyle. The people of Israel were liberated from the bondage of Egypt to demonstrate God’s character in their lives. They were called out to be holy and merciful as God. The Church is also called out to respond
to the dominant materialistic worldview by alternative kingdom models. The ascetic model and the ashram movements started as a response to this. They advocated a lifestyle that was in harmony with nature.

The church as the people of God is reminded continuously through the Eucharist to practice this sacramental model of life. It is a model of life that is “taken” “broken” “shed” and “given” for the life of many. The Eucharist calls us to have an active involvement in this world. The body broken is an imperative to share. Christian disciples are called to follow this life style of their Master who offered his very life as a sacrament. In the sacramental model, life and all its relationships are brought together in the worshipful presence of God. It is a life in harmony with nature.

Once a foreigner went to meet a famous Indian Guru. The Guru asked what she wanted? She said, “I want peace.” The Guru said, “Drop the first two words then you will automatically get peace.” Every Eucharist is an invitation to drop these words, ‘I’ and ‘want’. If we want to make this world more beautiful and habitable, all we need is to drop these words. It is the way of the cross, the path of self denial for the life of the whole world. Earth day bids us to take up this challenge.

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Biblical Reflections on Illegal Trade in Wildlife

John Samuel Ponnusamy

Introduction

The world is filled with God’s creatures. The psalmist describes the beauty and harmony of the animals, birds and fishes found all over (Psalm 104:24). These creatures reveal God’s wisdom. This wonder is not merely due to the great characteristics found in each of the creatures, but also due to the rich diversity and great numbers of the animals and birds. It is reflected in one of the commentaries of the above psalm, “Come and see how many types of domestic and wild animals and birds are there in our world? Is the voice of one like that of the other? Is the appearance of one like the other? Is the character of one like the other? Is the taste of one like the other? Life in nature is adorable.

The most elaborate accounts of the animal kingdom appear in Job. God comes to respond to the terrible sufferings that happened in the life of the righteous man Job. God gives a detailed description of a number of animals. God thus shows how the animal and the birds live in His kingdom. God even want to say that there is a plan and purpose behind every creature in this world. They all praise and glorify God. The beasts and every animal, insects, birds, through the wonder of their existence, all witness to the glory of God. Hence it is said,” and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever “(Psalm 145:21).
‘Animals’ in the life of our Fathers

When Jacob blessed his twelve sons (tribes), he blessed each son comparing him to an animal. Yehudah is a young lion. Dan shall be a serpent. Isacchar is a strong ass. Joseph is the firstling of an ox. Benjamin is a wolf. Collectively Israel will look like a beautiful harmonious paradise of the animal kingdom. Ezekiel once remarked about Israel collectively, “What a lioness was your mother among lions! She lay down among young lions, rearing her cubs” (Ezekiel 19:2).

Leave alone that, in appreciation of the animals and birds, many important people were named after the animals and birds. Rachel means ‘ewe’. Deborah means “bee”. Jonah means ‘dove’. Bible is perhaps teaching us through the animals and birds. Job says, who teaches us more than the animals of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?” (Job 35:11).

One sage wondered, “Had not the Bible not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, prohibition of theft from the ant and so on. In another place, it is said, “Be as brazen as a leopard, as light as a vulture, as swift as a gazelle, as mighty as a lion to fulfil the will of God”.

When David lamented for the mighty Saul and Jonathan, he sang, “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. (2 Samuel 1:23b).

Bible describes the land of Israel as “A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey (Deuteronomy 8:8). Probably the Israelite’s main food consisted of these elements. Every time after eating the meal, they said a special prayer, thanking God for the goodness of the land. The praise of the land of Israel and for its fruit trees helped them to become aware of the importance of the environment, particularly, of nature and trees in Israel. The prophet Micah picturizes the shade of the grape vine and fig tree as a metaphor for the ideal community filled with peace. Thus their ultimate trust in God is expressed through the peaceful environment, “but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. Judah and Israel will sit securely, each person under his vine and fig tree. (Micah 4:4).

The Israelites after their harvest, brought their first fruits to the temple, usually from one of the seven kinds of products mentioned above. They will offer it in the Shavout festival. The flowering and fruiting of these plants usually occur between Passover and shavout. It is time characterised by the delicate balance of contradictory phenomenon of nature. There will be extreme heat on the one hand and cool climate on the other. It was often construed as conflicts between deities in the pagan religions. However, Israelites brought these seven fruits into the temple and offered to God to express their thanks for the goodness of the land.

The flowering and fruiting of the seven species paralleled their spiritual development during the season between Passover and Shavuot. It also signified the preparation for receiving the Torah on Shavuot day. They counted omer during the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot, and thus turned to God in repentance and prayer. Thus the fruiting of the seven fruits were linked to their spiritual lives. Thus these seven kinds comprised a wealth of spiritual attributes, nutrients, and medicinal properties. The animal world and the plant kingdom can never be separated.

Hunting versus shepherding

The Bible teaches us to value the life of the animals and birds very highly. The community has an obligation to protect them. Hunting was not generally forbidden. In Leviticus 17:13, it is written: And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. But note that the verse is careful to specify that the prey is an animal that may be eaten (only). Even in this case, the animal must not be killed by the hunt but rather be ritually slaughtered like a domesticated animal.

Furthermore, in this case the Bible imposes the special commandment of covering the blood. This is over and above the general prohibition on eating the blood described at length in the same passage; both have the object of ensuring that eating meat does not become a “blood-thirsty” pursuit, a danger which is greater in the case of hunting, even if it is the permissible variety.

Hunting has been a popular pastime since ancient times, and continues to be a popular sport today. World wide, hunting is considered as a harmless
sport practiced by a large number of individuals. However, be it in the Bible or in the Jewish tradition, it has a very poor regard for hunting.

The Bible recalls for the first time, that Nimrod was a hunter. It is said: Cush was the father of Nimrod, who was the first to amass power in the world. He was a mighty hunter before God. There is thus a saying, ‘Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before God!’ The beginning of his kingdom was Babylon, along with Erekh, Akkad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. (Genesis 10:8-10). While the Bible merely says that he “amassed power,” it is explained by the wise, who claim Nimrod as a wicked tyrant and as the one who sought to contend with God.

The second person who is related to hunting in the Bible is Esau, who is unfavorably compared with his brother Jacob in the following verse, “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents.” (Genesis 25:27). As we know, Jacob became the patriarch of the Jewish people, while the progeny of Esau are often identified in the prophets with Israel’s enemies. The favourites of the Bible are generally shepherds, people who cultivate and nurture animals rather than who are hunters of animals. Abel found favour with God because of this pursuit; subsequently, all the three of the patriarchs as well as King David were shepherds.

One of the great Rabbi Landau was once asked by a congregation if it was permissible to hunt for sport. Rabbi Landau taught that, the hunting would not be considered cruelty to animals insofar as the animal is generally killed quickly and not tortured. But he concludes: I am very surprised at the whole subject; we don't find any hunters [in our tradition] besides Nimrod and Esau, and this is not the way of the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is an unseemly element in it, namely cruelty, and also a measure of danger. Therefore, one who listens to me will dwell securely and placidly in his house and not waste his time with such things”.

**Limiting to the Wild animals**

God formed every beast of the field and birds of the air out of the earth and brought them to man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name (Genesis 2:19). And in the next verse, the terms, ‘behema’ and ‘chayya’ are used precisely to differentiate two groups of animals. “The man gave names to all cattle (behema), and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field (chayya) “. Behema signifies domestic animals and chayya signifies wild animals. Similar distinction between domestic and wild animals are made in the Noah’s account, “But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark “ (Genesis 8:1).

There is a beautiful expression,”beast of the forest” apart from the “beast of the field” in the Bible. Once it occurs that God allows all the animals of the field to roam and seek their food. “You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. (Psalm 104:20-21) God sustains the animals of the forest. The other recurrence is the declaration of God’s ownership over the entire animal kingdom where it is used to contrast with the domestic animals. “For every wild animal of the forest is mine, “the cattle on a thousand hills.”’ (Psalm 50:10).

This term, ‘beast of the field” also occurs in the context of the Sabbath.” But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard”. (Exodus 23:11)Whatever grows in the Sabbath year, the holy year to the Lord, belongs to the poor and the animals of the forests. To conclude, God makes night for the provision for animals of the field. God makes Sabbath for providing for the animals of the forest.

Noah became the greatest expression of how God feeds the wild animals. A clear distinction of domestic animals and wild animals are drawn in the Noah’s story (8:1). Noah, his family and all the living things which were with him went into the ark. Noah spent twelve months in the ark. Noah had to attend to all the living creatures which took food at different times. He could not sleep even for a moment for the whole period in the arc. He was full of compassion. Even while one of the lions became enraged, attacked and injured him, having become lame for the rest of his life, Noah took care of the animals. Thus Noah followed God’s example in caring for the animals of the forest. Interestingly, Jesus relived the life of Noah, in the temptation story. He lived with the wild animals. Luke's gospel recalls, “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 1:13).

**How did we become traders of animals?**

Adam knew about all the animals, birds and plants. He even knew their characters and named them accordingly. Whenever Adam called them by their names, they came to him, because they also knew their names given to them by Adam. Naming suggest relationship between both the parties. Later, he became the enemy of the snake. Either he will kill the snake or the snake will kill him. It became an animal, leaving the forest and lurking in his door steps. Noah was a great lover of animals. He served God by serving the animals with him. Whatever he did for the sake of animals, God saw that it was done for God himself. However, later, he became a killer of animals for the sake of wine plant. The famous legend says: Noah took the wine stem thrown away with Adam out of the paradise. Immediately after the flood, Noah planted the wine stem. While he planted, he killed a sheep, lion, monkey, and a hog. Then he washed the roots of the plant successively with the blood of sheep, lion, monkey and the hog. Given the spiritual nature of the time, the wine plant came up in the same day. Grape fruits blossomed in the plant the very next day. The following day, Noah even made wine and drank. When he took the first cup of wine, his mind was calm like a sheep. When he took the second cup, he behaved like a lion, very brave. When he took the third cup, he behaved like a monkey. When he took the fourth cup, he rolled on the sand like the hog. Soon after, he lay naked and was humiliated by Ham. Thus the honourable Noah became a debased man when he became an animal killer.

Solomon knew so much about wild animals and the natural world. Bible mentions that, “He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom (I Kings 4:33-34). Later when he lost his great appreciation for animals, he became of the trader of the animals (horses) and thus lost his respect for his wisdom. Solomon’s import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king’s traders received them from Kue at a price. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; so through the king’s traders they were exported. The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which came from the traders and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land. King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each large shield. He made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three minas of gold went into each shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. The king also made a great ivory throne, and overlaid it with the finest gold to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram. (I Kings 10:28-29). All this wealth as a consequence of animal trade “

When all others killed the animals, why Solomon did not kill the animals, but sold the animals? When Joseph came to his brothers, they spoke to each other that they would kill their brother Joseph. Interestingly, they say that they will kill Joseph like killing a wild animal. “Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him “ (Genesis 37: 20,26) Thus selling is more treacherous than killing. Thus, once the killing of the animals later became the selling of the animals. That is why the proverb in our place, “An elephant, living or dead, is worth thousand gold”.

Perhaps Solomon learnt to sell the animals instead of killing from the brothers of Joseph!

**Contemporary Illegal animals trade**

Hunting, once what has been a seeking of food, a little later what has once been a sport, has become a mass killing of the animals and birds in our times. Today wild life trade is happening in a global scale and in huge proportions. Wild life trade is any sale or exchange of wild animal and plant resources. This can involve live animals and plants or a diverse range of products including skins, medicinal ingredients, timber, fish and other food products. While most wildlife trade seems to happen within the
national borders, at the same time, there is a large volume of wildlife in international trade also.

The primary motivating factor for wildlife trading is economic, ranging from small scale local income generation to major profit-oriented business, such as marine fisheries and logging companies. Between collectors of wildlife and the ultimate users, any number of middlemen may be involved in the wildlife trade, including specialists involved in storage, handling, transport, manufacturing, industrial production, marketing, and the export and retail businesses. In fact most of us are involved in wildlife trade in some way, even if it is just an end consumers of wildlife products.

As human populations have grown, so has the demand for wildlife. People in developed countries have become used to a lifestyle which fuels demand for wildlife; they expect to have access to a variety of sea foods, leather goods, timbers, medicinal ingredients, textiles etc. Conversely, extreme poverty of others means they regard wildlife as a means to meet their short-term needs and will trade it for whatever they can get.

The wildlife trade involves hundreds of millions of individual plants and animals from tens of thousands of species. Timber and seafood are the most important categories of international wildlife trade, in terms of both volume and value. More than $100 billion of fish were traded and nearly $200 billion timber in 2009. To put this into perspective, in the same year, the global trade value of tea, coffee and spices all together was a mere $24.3 billion.

It is estimated that 70,000 species of plants are used for medicinal purposes alone. An annual average of more than 317,000 live birds, just over 2 million live reptiles, 2.5 million crocodilian skins, 1.5 million lizard skins, 2.1 million snake skins, 73 tonnes of caviar, 1.1 million coral pieces and nearly 20,000 hunting trophies.

People depend directly on wildlife for consumption and as a way of earning cash. However, irresponsible wildlife trade is threatening this resource, and those most affected tend to be the poorest people, in developing nations where illegal wildlife trade causes additional problems. The species traded are often already highly threatened and in danger of extinction, conditions under which wildlife is transported are often appalling, operators are unscrupulous and do not care how they damage the environment. It is often said that illegal wildlife trade is the third most valuable illicit commerce behind drugs and arms.

Introducing invasive species that prey upon, or to compete native species is a major concern now. Invasive species are a major cause of recent extinctions. Wildlife traders have purposely introduced many invasive species, such as American Mink, Red-eared Terrapin and many plant species.

However, we must find a way out. This cannot continue to happen. We cannot deplete entire resources in our generations. Once destroyed is destroyed for ever. ‘TRAFFIC’, an organization is working against the illegal animal trading. seeks and activates solutions to the problems created by illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade. Our aim is to encourage sustainability by providing decision-makers, traders and others involved in wildlife trade reliable information about the environmental harm irresponsible trade can cause, and present guidance on how to counteract it. Above all, the human community must come forward to value the wild animals and subsequently our environment.

Legislation is a vital way to control wildlife trade, but to be successful, laws need to be widely understood, accepted and practical to apply. A major part of TRAFFIC’s programme is working closely with law makers, law enforcers and the judiciary, to ensure appropriate laws are in place, are fully understood by those enforcing them and transgressors receive appropriate penalties.

Judgment through animals
It is curious that Bible familiarises the idea, for reasons unknown, that the human beings who have inflicted violence on the life of the wild animals, will one day meet their judgement in the hands of the wild animals. They become active agents of God’s judgment.

God is inviting the ‘animals of the forest’ to judge the corrupt leaders. “All you wild animals, all you wild animals in the forest, come to devour! (Isaiah 56:9). God will send the wild animals if we reject the laws of God. “If you continue hostile to me, and will not obey me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins. I will let loose wild animals against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock; they shall make you few in number, and your roads shall be
deserted.” Leviticus 26:22. At one stage, God even gives up the idea of sending the animals, but he himself is coming against them, but this time, like the wild animal. “So I will become like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them” (Hosea 13:7-8). On the day of the Lord, the destroyers of the earth, the killers of the animals will themselves be killed, cooked and will be served as a delicious meal for all the animals, birds ad fishes of the world. “As for you, mortal, thus says the Lord God: Speak to the birds of every kind and to all the wild animals: Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth (Ezekiel 39:17-18). God joining hands with the wild animals against the human beings!

**Conclusion**

Paul says, “But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20). On the one side, people are becoming mass killers of wild animals. On the other hand, many people are actively involved in protecting the wild life. By bringing legislations to prevent illegal wild life trading and by so many other means. People must become aware of this mass sale and destruction of wild life. Every where societies of friends of animals and plants all over the world are emerging and are expressing their acts of compassion and solidarity. Compassion for life, particularly wild life is growing all over. They are taking an active role in the protection of wild life. Gospel challenges us to protect wild life for the future. We serve God when we serve for the preservation of wild life. God set a model for repenting from mass destruction of animals through the flood story. He even confessed, “Never again will I destroy” and he set the rain bow as a witness between him and the creation. Let us renew the Noachic covenant between God, human and the entire creation. A new covenant for the preservation of all living beings.

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**The Hindu Concepts of Ecology**

*N. Gopalakrishnan*

The information and experiences connected with the theoretical and applied aspects of Hindu ecology are distributed in Hindu literature, customs and rituals, concepts and faiths, and also in purely scientific literature. They discuss various subjects and aspects about earth, plants/ trees, rivers, mountains, monsoon, animals, and so on. In a nut shell these can be presented for glancing through.

Glance through the Hindu literature: There are 2000 foundation literature for Hindus and 10,000 commentaries, both in Sanskrit. More than on lakh sub commentaries are available, written in various Indian languages. They describe the themes given the foundation literature for the common men. They explain the human beings and all those which are connected with happy human life

The Vedas give the fundamental and in-depth messages of three peace through om santhi, santhi, santhi; They are aadhyaatmaeka saanthi, aadhiboudhika saanthi and adhidaivatha saanti. These are respectively internal /bodily peace (where the mental and physical aspects of the human body are included). These connect with the food we eat, water we drink, life we lead, and relations we make with inside and outside the body. The second saanthi is the peace around us which is contributed by everything around us like plants, the soil, and residence we live, materials we keep around us and so on. It is well known now that they influence our life and living) and the third peace in the peace in the celestial systems (the forests,
mountains, rain, clouds, the planets and so on influence us: in the modern science it is known as butterfly effect).

The Vedas look deep into these three aspects and analyze all living and non living being through spiritual angle (not on religious angle). These three should coexist, cooperate and complement for the best human life. Thus Vedic approach in a nutshell is that everything from an atom to the whole cosmic system are the manifestation and manipulation of the cosmic form of God; prapancha purusha. They exist in one body and should compliment each other. Hindus worship everything including living and non living beings, because they are the part of the cosmic divinity. This spiritual outlook is the Hindu specialty. We say eesaavasyamidam sarvam = everything existing here is the manifestation of god. Hindus never say god created them, instead they say god manifested in them.

For Hindus the producer and product are not different. They are the same. The individual soul is a part of cosmic soul, like a glass of sea water has the quality of sea in essence, even though dimensionally they differ.

Vedas inform us that this earth is our mother and I am the son of this mother earth. Earth protects us like a mother. Water is her milk and so on.

Vedas inform us that the air is divine and hence it should be worshipped and kept in the pure form. It is the manifestation of divinity because of which the living beings exist here.

Vedas inform us that water is the universal medicine, and it is divine hence with water the medicine become more powerful. Let that water in the earth be pure, free from dirt, clean, glorious and get purified with the rays of Sun. water is the life blood for plants, say the Vedas.

Vedas inform us that forests are the abode for many living beings and hence let the trees in forest live for long and control the life on the sea and land.

Vedas give information of ocean, river, life in the water and the divinity in them. We say pruthvi saanthi, saudra saanthi, oshadaya saanthi, visve devaa saanthi, giraya saanthi, and so on. Let each component exist in peaceful environment.

Veda mantras are chanted when yaagas are performed. Each mantra from the four Vedas adore the nature and nature is symbolically presented as vedic deity/god during the yaagas and prayers.

Aaranyakaas are the third part of Vedas where people after a certain age are told to settle in forest for mental peace and relinquishing from worldly life. Many rituals are explained in the books coming under Aaranyakaas to e performed for the three saanthies.

The epic of Ramayana has a part known aaranyakandam where the details of the forests, trees, mountains, rivers, and animals in these locations are explained in detail. The explanation is given as discussion among Sree Rama, his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana. They had to stay in the forest for 14 years. The glory of holy forests, holy mountains and holy rivers are explained in Ramayana which cannot be compared with anyoterh literature in the world. The word Sita means earth.

In Mahabharata, the second epic has similar explanation discussed by five brothers and their mother Kunti when they had to live in the forests for 13 years.

The explanations in the above two epics are so narrated that the forests, mountains, rivers, and ecological aspects from north of India right from the Himalayan valley till the southern tip of India, Kanyakumari, during their travel, when they had to live in the forests.

The 18 Puranaas and 18 Upa Puranaas were written in the forest known as Naimishaaranya which was an open university flourished in Haryana, in the present Neemsaar district. Hundreds of scholars used to visit this Open University and the discussions among the visitors, teachers, and students are given as the Puranaas in the question and answer style. There comes the pure forest life culture.

In many Puranaas, the rivers and mountains are embodiment of life and named like human beings. Ganga river is considered as the mother of Bhishma. Yamuna river is s part of Lord Krishna, Sarayu river is part of Lord Rama's life. Thamasaa river is part of Maharshi Valmeeki Brahmaputra river is worshipped as the son of Lord Brahma. Vedas and Hindu literature flourished in the ashrams on the banks of holy rivers like Haridwar, Rusheekesh, Narmada, Sindhu, Alakananda, and so on
The stories of Rushies, scholars, and kings, and so on living in the forest and doing penance in the mountains are narrated so beautifully bringing the nature in the readers mind.

Ayurveda literature describes in totality the plants and their medicinal effects and the environment for curative effects. The purity of medicinal plants grown under special conditions is mentioned clearly in the major literature of Ayurveda.

In Jyothisha the celestial sphere is divided in 27 stars and 12 signs. All the people in this world will come under anyone of the stars and signs. Each star has got a plant, shrub, herb, bird, animal, reptile, fish, connect with it. These are to be protected by the person born in that star. Each flower has affiliated with astrological concepts and a divine concept.

Thus each tree, leaf, flower, fruit and seed are linked with any of the deity concept in Hindu worship. Each god concept has to be worshiped with leaves and flowers of a particular plant to which this is linked.

Bruhatsamhita written by Varahamihira has classified the mountains, land, soil, forests etc with a scientific vision. Thus one can see that hundreds and thousands of Indian literature mentioned above (under each group) give lot of information on the ecological factors.

The Hindu rituals begin with chanting the names of rivers, mountains, holy lands, and so on. Right from birth till death, these holy spots are remembered through rituals. Even the ash after cremation is to be poured into holy rivers. Pilgrimage generally focuses on mountains and rivers. Indian culture and rituals focus on the river banks and valleys of mountains.

Many types of grass, rarely used flowers, plants, etc are used for specific rituals like those performed after death, after birth, during raining seasons, or on auspicious days once in a year, etc.

Many mountains and river banks are worshipped as the holy place where ancient Rushies did their penance like Badari asram (hermitage), agastyu guha (cave), Sabari mala (mountain), Gangotri, (beginning point of river ganga) yamunotri (starting point of river Yamuna), and so on.

Many divine concepts guide Hindus to protect the environment like Himalayas are considered as the above Lord Siva and Parvati. The Southern tip of India is abode of Goddess Parvati, Kanyakumari. Agastyu kootam abode of Maharshi Agastya and so on.

In India even the agricultural aspects, practices and rituals do have a variety of ecological connections starting from planets, Sun, moon, air flow, water flow, rain, wind, agricultural field, sowing the seeds, and so on. They are practiced through the day to day traditional traits, transferred from generation to generation.

Thus ecological knowledge existed in the practical life of India is something unique which cannot be explained in a small text like this. It needs thousands of pages quoting in Sanskrit lines from Vedas and other literature, rituals, traditions and so on.
Ecological Perspectives in Islam

Abdullah Manham

Islam is a complete and comprehensive code of life given by the Creator of the universe for all human beings, regardless of their caste, creed, colour, country and community. It is the religion of one third of the world population, and which touches the entire panorama of human life - ecology and environment is no exception. Can Muslims contribute something to save the earth?

Islam can make a substantive and distinctive contribution to that burning issue by infusing man’s management of the natural world with transcendent (revealed) values and ethics that look toward a common future of humanity and the well being of its earthly habitat.

Islam outlaws infliction of harm. Corruption and mischief making are prohibited. Purity of the earth and all what is available to human beings should be upheld. Therefore, it is the duty of all inhabitants of the earth to give due consideration to the environment, take care of it and maintain it clean and tidy. All causes of environmental pollution should be checked, and all efforts should be exerted to keep our eco system pure and perfect.

Muslims believe that God (Allah) is the only owner of the skies, earth and everything between them: “and to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between”; “They have no power, not the weight of an atom, in the heavens or on earth”.

Furthermore, Muslims are instructed to look after the environment and not to damage it:

“Devote yourself single-mindedly to the Faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah.” (Quran 30:30)

The association of rights and duties in the protection of the environment springs from the fact that a sound environment is a major manifestation of civilization and culture within society. Islam approaches it as a complementary and harmonious system, from its creation by Allah, to human beings’ responsibility to protect, maintain and develop it, in addition to striving not to destroy or spoil it. It hence put in place a number of parameters and standards in the form of its tolerant teachings that associate a sound environment with a good society.

“There is not a moving creature on earth, or a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like you (humans). We have neglected nothing in the Book; then unto their Lord they shall (all) be gathered.” (Quran 6:38)

All sorts of imbalance and corruption in the earth are due to the misbehaviour of its inhabitants:

“Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the evil) that the hands of men have earned, that (God) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil).” (Quran 30:41)

Another command of God can be translated as follows: “Make not mischief on the earth” (Quran 2:11) Rivers, streams, oceans, mountains, etc. were not brought by man nor do they take them with them when they pass away. It means that they are not theirs and their owner is God. Man is only given a temporary right to use it. If aggression on a single man is a serious crime, think about the gravity of the crime if the rights of future generations were encroached:

“A Sign for them is the earth that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which you do eat. And We produce therein orchard with date-palms and vines, and We cause springs to gush forth therein: That they may enjoy the fruits of this (artistry): It was not their hands that made this,” (Quran 36:33-35)

The status of Man on the earth is that of a vicegerent of God. Every human being, therefore, is bound to use the natural resources carefully, with no waste or abuse. Need, not greed, should be the criterion to utilize the resources. Man should bear in mind that he can use them without
forgetting the right of the generations to come. So, we are duty bound to make all-out efforts to preserve the eco-system for all members of the humanity living at present, and those generations not born yet.

Let me put it in perspective in the light of the Holy Quran. It speaks abundantly about nature and earth. The holy text is replete with numerous guidelines about our treatment of the earth and the rest of God’s creation so much so that the Quranic revelation intimately connects itself with the notion of sacredness of nature.

As a result, a whole echo-theology unfolds that distinguishes Islamic spirituality with characteristics of its own. A closer look at the Quran and Prophetic sayings (Hadith) reveals a set of principles that point to a rich reservoir of environmental ethics with far-reaching socio-economic and political ramifications.

 Almighty Allah says:

“...We have honoured the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation (Quran 17:70).”

The above verse suggests that human beings are endowed with the privilege to use natural resources of the mother Earth without creating havoc and wanton misuse. Therefore it is incumbent upon the entire humanity to preserve both land and sea uncontaminated.

According to Prophet Muhammad, “There are more than 70 branches of Iman (Faith). The foremost is the declaration: ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allah (God) and the least of it is removing harmful things from the path.’ [Bukhari, Muslim].

Protection of the environment has been built into the foundational core of Islamic faith that blocking public path and causing harms to the public by dumping garbage or otherwise are considered sinful offenses. Besides human beings, the flora and fauna are also given equal consideration in Islam.

The Quran gives us any number of examples. Almighty Allah says: “One of the ants said: “O ye ants, get into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it.” (Quran 27:18)

Protection of animal rights and prevention of cruelty on them are emphasized by the above verse.

What is more interesting is that several chapters in the holy Quran are named after animals and insects. Allah says in chapter “Spider”: “The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of the spider, who builds (to itself) a house; but truly the flimsiest of houses is the spider’s house.” (Quran 29:41)

Nature, in a sense, participates in the Quranic revelation. The nomenclature of the chapters of the Quran underlines diversity and remembrance not only of God’s exalted names and attributes, messengers and prophets, but also the earth, fruits and bounties of the earth, plants and animals, trees, mountains and insects, the wider worldview of the creation and beyond. A few examples are found in such chapters as Al Baqara (Cow), Al Anaam (Cattle), An Nahl (Bee), Al Adiat (Racing horses) and Al Fil (Elephant) etc.

Let’s see the insightful words of the Prophet: “A woman was put in Hellfire because of a cat she had kept locked in till it died of hunger. She neither fed it nor gave it water to drink, nor did she set it free to search for its food.” It is Allah who conceived, designed and created the entire universe in all its precision, beauty and perfection; and then He created Man immediately after that: “It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on earth; moreover His design comprehended the heavens, for He gave order and perfection to the seven firmaments; and of all things He hath perfect knowledge. Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth’.”(Quran 2:29-30). Thus Quran instills and inspires the human beings to maintain the perfection of the universe.

Divine Oneness

In order to develop a cohesive and coherent perspective and perception about how Muslims deal with ecological issues, we need to have a brief, basic grasp of the cardinal principles of Islam. Those principles can be summed up as follows: Unity of God, balance and perfection in creation, vicegerency of man on earth, accountability of human beings and care for others.
Unity of God
According to Islam God (Allah) is the only creator and master of the entire universe. He is the real owner of all the worlds and everything that exists, living and non-living. (cf. 2:255, 3:1-6)

Balance and Perfection in Creation
All that Allah has created is with measure, poise, due proportion and divine balance. Therefore it is the binding duty of mankind not to disturb this balance. Otherwise the balance will collapse and everything will end up in total chaos and destruction.

“And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance, In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures: Therein is fruit and date-palms, producing sheaths (enclosing dates); Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and scented plants. Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny? “(Quran 55:7-13)

The human being is part and parcel of a cosmic equilibrium that must not be disturbed, and effort must be made to strike a balance between the material and spiritual requirements of life.

Vicegerent (Khilaafah)
Quaran describes Man as God’s Khilaafah (vicegerent) on earth. Allah has created him to submit to His will in all aspects of life. He has endowed him with moral and physical resources to perform his functions on the earth. Shari’ah enjoins him to make efficient and equitable use of these resources and improve the quality of life.

The term used in the Quran implies holding a position of power, trust and responsibility that is exercised in harmony with the will of God. It also means that man’s authority is limited and he has to live and conduct himself as a representative of God on earth.

It is invariably used in connection with the phrase (fil-Ardh) – on earth, which signifies that its application is closely linked to planet earth. Each one of us inherits power and responsibility vis-à-vis the planet earth and all its life forms. Khilaafah generates many implications. Two of them, universal brotherhood and trusteeship of resources, are particularly important.

Universal Brotherhood
Khilaafah provides a framework of social equality and universal brotherhood. It introduces social equality among human beings irrespective of color, creed, caste and geographical location. These characteristics promote beneficial cooperation and mutual sharing of resources.

Trusteeship (Amanah)
Allah is the actual owner of all resources. Man is required to use them in right ways. After their acquisition, he is supposed to act as a trustee, benefiting from them according to the terms of the trust. He cannot waste resources in any case.

“Behold, God bids you to deliver all that you have been entrusted with unto those who are entitled thereto, and whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice. Verily, most excellent is what God exhorts you to do: verily, God is all-hearing, all-seeing!” (Quran 4:58)

This is then immediately followed, by the injunction “and when you judge among people you judge with justice.” Thus it appears that justice is the most important of all Amanah that God has entrusted to mankind.

“Beware that everyone of you is a custodian and responsible for that which is in his custody. The leader is a custodian and he is responsible for his subjects; a man is a custodian and he is responsible for his family; a woman is the custodian of her husband’s home and children and she is responsible for them. Surely each one of you is a custodian and responsible for his charge”. (Hadith).

Architects of the Earth
The status of a vicegerent confers on human beings, individually and collectively, the mission and responsibility to build the earth and harness its resources with moderation and care for its ecological balance (Quran 2:30).

Vicegerency is guided in turn by the principles of trusteeship (amanah), moderation and justice. Building and development with their broader physical and non-physical ramifications is another aspect of vicegerency that is informed, in turn, by the higher goals and purposes of Islam and its Shariah. “He has produced you from earth and given you the charge to build it…”(Quran11: 61)
“The Prophet elaborated the Quranic concept of building the earth in another inspirational Hadith: “If the day of resurrection comes upon any one of you while he has a seedling in his hand, let him plant it.”

**Vicegerency and the Promotion of Good**

Vicegerency demands the promotion of good and the prevention of evil, building the earth and establishing a just order therein:

“Let there be of you a nation that calls others to the good, establishes right and eradicates wrong. Such are they who shall prosper.” (Q 20:53).

Two of the broad and comprehensive principles of Islam that subsume most of these are justice and the doing of good (cf., Quran 16:91).

**The Hereafter (al-Akhira)**

It implies Islamic doctrine of accountability which is wider than the counterpart secular concept of accountability. A Muslim believes that every atom's weight of good and every atom's weight of evil will be weighed in al-Akhira. Practically, this belief acts as a monitoring system inside the mind and heart of a Muslim and thus helps him to do good deeds and avoid bad deeds. Islamic life has strong favourable implications for the environment.

**Grateful for the Favours**

“We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) 30 months. At length when he reaches the age of full strength and attains 40 years he says; “O, my Lord! grant me that I may be grateful for thy favour which thou hast bestowed upon me and upon both my parents and that I may work righteousness such as thou may approve and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly, have I turned to Thee and truly do I bow (to thee) in Islam”. (Quran 46:15).

**Accountability of Human Beings**

In Islam, all the words and deeds of man are tethered to divine discipline, and on the day of judgement he shall be answerable and brought to justice for all his actions without exception. Muslims believe that every atom's weight of good and evil will be weighed in the Hereafter world (al-akhira). Practically, this belief acts as a monitoring system inside the heart and mind of a Muslim and thus helps him do good deeds and avoid bad deeds.

“So whoever does an atoms weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atoms weight of evil will see it” (Quran 99: 7-8)

**Man and Cosmos in Harmony**

Quran visualizes man and the cosmos in a state of harmony that reaffirms man's inner bond with the natural world. Natural forms as well as human beings addressed, while God takes non-human members of His creation, such as plants and animals, the sun and the stars to witness in certain other verses. The soul which is nourished and sustained by the Quran does not regard the world of nature as its natural enemy to be conquered and subdued but as an integral part of man's religious universe sharing in his earthly life, and in a sense, even ultimate destiny.

**Equilibrium and Greening**

Other aspects of imar that are highlighted in the sources include due observance of the Divinely-ordained cosmic equilibrium, greening the earth through plantation and agriculture, and cleanliness (taharah) as are discussed below.

**Nature & Other Inhabitants**

The responsibility to safeguard the rights not only of his fellow humans but also of nature and other inhabitants of the earth. Man is God's servant ('abd Allah) and must obey Him. As 'abd Allah, he must be passive towards God and recipient of the grace that flows from the world above.

**Care for the Ambience**

Man must nurture and care for the ambience in which he plays the central role. Man cannot neglect the care of the natural world without betraying its trust of vicegerency (cf. Quran 7:172).

Man has been entrusted with authority to manage the earth in accordance with the purposes intended by its Creator. Need not greed should be his motive. Man needs light, air, water, food, shelter and community and may utilize the resources of the earth to secure those needs but to also share them with other living creatures.

The Quran often mentions the domestication of animals and plants as God's special favours on humankind. Then comes the reminder: “We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put people
to test,” to see how well they measure up and conduct themselves. (Quran 18:7).

**Balance Set up**

“And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance, in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fill not short in the balance. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures: Therein is fruit and date-palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny?” (Quran 55:7-13)

**Keeping the Balance**

The recharge of ground water and its drainage occur according to properties of water, soils, and other factors that God has determined in due proportions. This basically conveys the purport of the verse:

“We send down water from the sky in accordance with a determined measure, and then We cause it to settle in the earth; We are most certainly able also to drain it off.” (Quran 23:18)

All parts of the natural world, with its enormous diversity, have a value to each other and to the total global system over and above their value to mankind. The text repeatedly alludes to biological revival of the lifeless earth through rain which is likened to man’s resurrection on the Day of Judgement: God sends forth the wind that raises the cloud and drives it towards dead land, and from it issues rain which enlivens the earth after it had been lifeless; much like the resurrection and return of life after death (Quran 35:9).

“To the Madyan people We sent Shu’aib, one of their own brethren: he said: “O my people! worship Allah; Ye have no other god but Him. Now hath come unto you a clear (Sign) from your Lord! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due; and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if ye have Faith.” (Quran 7:85)

**Care for Others**

And We have provided therein means of subsistence, - for you and for those for whose sustenance ye are not responsible. (Quran 15:20)

Make not Mischief on the Earth:

“Make not mischief on the earth” (Quran 2:11) “Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the evil) that the hands of men have earned, that (God) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil).” (Quran 30:41)

“There is not a moving creature on earth, or a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like you (humans). We have neglected nothing in the Book; then unto their Lord they shall (all) be gathered.” (Quran 6:38)

Muslims are instructed to look after the environment and not to damage it:

“Devote yourself single-mindedly to the Faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah.”(Quran 30:30)

“But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief (Fasad) in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief.”(Quran 28:77)

**Fasad (Corruption)**

Fasad in the Quranic language is connected to the destruction of tilth and fertility (cf., Quran 2:205):

“When he gets power he directs all his efforts towards spreading mischief in the land, destroying harvests and killing the human race whereas Allah (Whom he makes his witness) does not like mischief.” (Quran 2:205 Maududi)

**Qaradhawi**

A world renowned modern scholar of Islam, Sheikh Yusuf al Qaradhawi, identifies conservation of the natural environment as an extension of one of the higher objectives of Shariah, namely of the protection of life, and elaborates that environmental pollution, resource depletion, and disturbance of its ecological balance constitute major threats to human life and safety as we experience today.
No Harm

“Harm must be eliminated” is the exact wording of one of the leading maxims of Islamic law. (Hadith: “harm may neither be inflicted nor reciprocated.”) Yet “it is obligatory,” according to al-Qaradawi, “that industrial installations and factories are further removed from residential quarters so that the people are safe from their harmful emissions, smoke, smell and other pollutants—simply because Islam outlawed infliction of harm.

Ban on Cutting Trees

Abu Dawud (d. 899 CE), one of the most authentic collectors of Prophet’s sayings, has recorded reports to the effect that in some parts of Madinah, the Prophet had strictly prohibited the cutting of trees and hunting of animals.

Warning Against Excess

The Quran warns the people to take personal responsibility for their well-being and health: “Men! The excesses you commit will be of harm only to yourselves, (Enjoy, if you will) the fleeting pleasure of this world; in the end you shall all return to Us, and then We shall tell you what you did.” (Quran 10:23 Maududi)

Ants Protected

The Prophet forbade setting of fire to an anthill by one who might have been stung by a single ant.

Hell for Cutting Trees

In a frequently quoted Hadith the Prophet is thus reported to have said that one who (wastefully) cuts down a tree invokes upon himself punishment of Hell in the Hereafter.

Innate Nature Preserved

When man acts, instead of a trusted custodian and architect of the earth, as its most dangerous destroyer, driven by greed rather than need and becomes an extravagant and insatiable consumer, when the earth is made into a testing field for deadly atomic bombs with immeasurable radioactive emissions, its fitrah (innate nature) is subjected to dangerous distortion.

Personal Hygiene

The Quran and Hadith are emphatic on cleanliness, in terms of both personal hygiene and the living environment. Thus the Prophet declared that “cleanliness is a part of the faith (of every Muslim).”

Humanity Must

In order to save the planet from its grave crisis, collaboration among all members of the humanity is a must. It is encouraging to note also “The Muslim Seven Year Action Plan on Climate Change (2010-2017),” created at a landmark event at Windsor Castle in November 2009 titled “Many Heavens, One Earth,” organized by the United Nations and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to encourage environmental action among a variety of faiths.

Focus on Public Interest

Private or local interest should not be promoted at the expense of public interest and damage to the larger society.

Public Rights Issue

Mischief making would thus appear to be a public rights issue for the most part, often involving individuals and communities, and may entail not only civil damages but also punitive sanctions, whereas infliction of harm often gives rise to a civil claim for compensation.

Punitive Measures

Shariah guidelines on elimination of mischief and darar authorize the government to take necessary measures for elimination of manifest damage to public interest, seek indemnity and impose deterrent punitive sanctions, on individuals, organizations, national and multinational companies and governments, for the damage resulting from their activities. The Shariah rules in this regard as we already examined dictate that “harm shall be eliminated,” and that “harm shall be eliminated to the extent possible.”

Mutual Dependence

The existence of this balance in turn implies two constraints: one is that human and non-human beings can neither demand more resources than the natural ecosystem is capable of providing them on a sustainable basis.
Moral Dimension
Consideration of moral responsibility and care can never be ignored in our responses to the plight of the disadvantaged among us and the manner in which we address the need to protect and repair the natural environment. Modern environmental problems have not only material but also moral and spiritual dimensions.

Remedial Measures
The Shariah (Islamic law) authorises the ruling authorities to take preventive and remedial measures so as to curb and contain environmental degradation and its adverse consequences for the human and other life forms in the earth.

Prophet Mohammed declared a sacred piece of land—approximately 720 square km—surrounding the holy city of Makka, which Muslims turn to five times a day during their prayers, in what should be realized as a model of a green Earth. He prohibited not only cutting down trees there but even thorny plants. “The grass of Makka and its thorns should not be removed and its trees should not be cut.” He called the area “Haram” (sacred or inviolable sanctuary), where peace, tranquility and greenery should be fostered. A daily reminder, and not once a day, but five times a day, which inspires the faithful to keep the ecological system intact!

Ecology: Some Theological Challenges

K.C. Abraham

Ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis. The relation between human and nature is based on a vision of God who created heaven and earth as an interdependent organism of unity. Any disruption in this fragile unity mostly by human irresponsibility and avarice is a grievous problem and plunges our life into great peril. The purpose of this article is not to analyse the earth crisis and to suggest a remedy. But to look afresh some of the challenges it brings to our understanding and practise of Christian faith, including raising some critical observations about some aspects of church tradition. We are committed to a vision of human astuteness, which includes not only our relationship with one another as humans, but also our relationship vis-à-vis nature and universe.

Our thinking and theology is totally anthropocentric. The world of non-humans rarely comes to our consciousness. Salvation is understood as a process by which humans and humans alone are rescued from the material world. The pious Christians believe that the created world will face the dooms day and it is pointless to try to alter the destiny. These movements are challenging us to commit ourselves to a radical restructuring of the given patterns of relationship and moral presuppositions that govern society. For many it means changing our tradition-bound attitudes and value system.
Ecology and the debates on it are not merely about growing more trees, caring for the gardens or even of growing organic food, although they are all necessary. Thanks to the NGOs, UN related agencies and other social activists there is a greater awareness about ecological issue. Even the governments and planners are forced to address this concern in their policy decisions. At least they have adopted the rhetoric on ecology in their open statements, but when they have to make a choice between the so-called “development” and ecological damage they opt for the former. This is abundantly clear in the attitude of political leaders and technocrats involved in the Narmada valley issue.

Ecological crisis raises some fundamental questions to our value system and life style especially to the modernist totalizing ideology of progress. An alternate 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. The discussion, especially from the third world focuses its attention on justice concerns.

It is a well-known fact that the resources are distributed unevenly. The industrialised nations consume disproportionately high share of resources and contribute by their life style to the destruction of the ecological equilibrium in the South. Many low-lying areas of Bangladesh are being subsumed under water not by the ‘fault’ of the people in Bangladesh, but by the impact of the economic activities of the people in the Northern hemisphere, in particular the burning of fossil fuels for space heating, transportation industry and electricity production; they cause global warming and the resultant rising of sea level. The same imbalance in the consumption pattern is found within each nation. A discussion on ecology has to address the justice issue.

A couple of years ago I joined with a North American professor to teach environmental ethics at San Francisco Theological Seminary. The global warming was the focus of the course. In the discussions, I found myself raising at every point the justice perspective. This I feel is the role of third world scholars. But the justice concerns should be discussed in relation to other issues that are considered for constructing a discourse on environmental ethics.

This article will discuss the following issues that reappear in our debates on ecology:

1. The relation between ecology and technology
2. Ethical issues especially the right of non-human nature
3. The Bible and Ecology: especially the problem of the anthropocentric orientation of the Bible.

These are by no means new issues; but new questions and concerns have been raised in recent discussions. The new insights we gain from them are helpful in giving a firm foundation to our commitment to the life of the earth. It is our hope that the discussions on these issues will help us to draw some implications for our theology and spirituality.

Ecology and Technology

Larry Rasmussen, in his admirable volume ‘Earth Community, Earth Ethics’ draws our attention to three revolutions that have drastically changed human-nature relationship. They are Agricultural, especially the intensive form of cultivation for large-scale production and Industrial and Informational. The crucial factor in all these revolutions is the technology used. The nature of technology has an impact on the character of the work humans do. The pressure on environment also varies according to the kind of technology that is used. Perhaps the industrial revolution brought about a situation where earth’s resources are exploited and manipulated to such an extent that the life of the earth itself is in great peril. “To earth, industrialization looks more and more like a succession of more complex and environmentally disruptive and damaging ways to meet the needs and wants of one particular, inordinately aggressive species”.

The industrial culture is based on particular mind-set or an assumption that aggressive domination over nature is the absolute right of the human species and earth has limitless resources for human use. Science and technology are tools for further exploitation. We need not repeat the discussions on the ecological damage, in most cases irreparable, of the industrial revolution. But we need not repeat the discussions on the ecological damage, in most cases irreparable, of the industrial revolution. But we note that industrial era paradigm for development consists of the following elements:

- ‘expectation of unlimited material progress and ever growing consumption; faith in science and technology to solve all problems; goals of efficiency, growth, and productivity; mastery of nature; and competition and individualism’.
This paradigm has led to ‘environmental degradation, resource depletion, loss of meaningful work roles, inequitable distribution, and ineffective control of technology’

Further it paved the way for the ‘rule of corporations’ over the world creating not only a global economic order but also a culture. “The emphasis is to overrule all local interests and local culture, to give way to the larger global good that free market exchange creates” Korten gives a summary of “the ideal world of global dreamers”

“The world’s money, technology, and markets are controlled and managed by gigantic global corporations;
A common consumer culture unifies all people in a shred quest for material gratification;
There is perfect global competition among workers and localities to offer their services to investors at the most advantageous terms; (One may be reminded of the competition for outsourcing among third world countries)
Corporations are free to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences;
Relations, both individual and corporate, are defined entirely by the market;
And, there are no loyalties to place and community”.3
For our purpose it is to be reiterated that technology is the tool for creating a new culture. The question is how to change this paradigm. What kind of growth? And whose growth? What is the role of technology? These are relevant questions. They have to be raised even now when, as we will presently see, the nature of technology has changed.

Information Technology and Cyber Culture
Our attention is often drawn to the fact that we are now in the informational age. The cyber culture has opened new possibilities for humans to continue their production process without serious damage to the earth. Again technology has won; we will go on with our life style and expand our growth-oriented activity.

No doubt, achievements brought about by the new technology are remarkable. The cyber culture has ushered in a new world. Peter Drucker a sociologist suggests that this technology is bringing about a massive social transformation. He writes,

“It is the first society in which ordinary people – and that means most people- do not earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow. It is the first society in which ‘honest work’ does not mean a callused hand. It is also the first society in which not everybody does the same work, as was the case when huge majority were farmers or, as seemed likely only forty or thirty years ago, were going to machine operators” This is far more than a social change. It is a change in the human condition”4

Its culture creates borderless networks and for this reason loyalty to localities and community is not a virtue to be jealously safeguarded. A global culture that cuts across all barriers is in the making and we still do not see the full impact of it. As someone said a civilizational change is envisaged. Already we see signs of this new culture and the attitudes in our urban areas where IT industry is flourishing. Many ethical questions can be raised to the situation created by this new culture. We cannot go into them here. Our purpose is to ask how it impacts the life of the earth.

The claim is that the new technology is less polluting and more desirable than the heavy machines of the industrial era. Rasmussen analyses this question. “Information societies “writes Rasmussen, “try to break loose from earth and its distress. “Information” here is largely disembodied content, the “codes” of things abstracted from all that makes the codes living flesh…Information as coded, recoded, transcoded reality carries a certain contempt for being earthbound at all. It prefers avoiding the messy world of finite, limited, placed, dependent bodies.”5 He adds, “the earth bound is denigrated, the abstract and precisely mathematical is elevated”. The logic of unlimited growth and control of the nature remains the same. Enormous power is now concentrated in humans who have the access to the new technology and there is no guarantee that they will use it for the well being of the earth. In fact the corporations to increase their profit by managing money and market are using the new technology. In split seconds investments can be withdrawn as it happened in the some of the South Eastern countries a few years ago.
Rasmussen closes his analysis of the information technology with raising some questions. “What kind of knowing that we need? Is it “information” via the information superhighway or other routes? Are we dying for want of information? Is earth's distress traceable to facts we need that are not yet known?” He says, “it is not so much information of the kind the information revolution manipulates as it is the choices that ethics poses; what understanding do we lack in order to live with earth and one another, on terms enhancing for life in its many guises?...What norms and values do we measure information itself by, as a moral guidance system for kind of society?”

Earlier Ian Barbour has developed some typologies on our attitude towards technology. One, the optimists view. It is characterized by the argument, “better technology is the solution”. There is always a technological solution for our ills. The IT culture has heightened this sense of optimism. But the optimists overlook the fact that “the solution to one problem often creates new problems”. The other typology is expressed in the phrase “Technology it self is the culprit” The “pessimists say that technology is inherently destructive of both environmental and human values”. But a third typology holds the view that “technology is neither inherently good nor inherently but an ambiguous instrument of power whose consequences depend on its social context”. He argues for a redirection of technology. The discussion arose in the context of the Industrial culture. But with modification it can apply to the new technology. In other words how can the new technology, the border less and powerful as it is, can be accountable to ethical guidelines, especially as they relate to the ecology? Here ethical is used in a foundational sense. It is the responsibility to the “Other.” In this case the “Other” is the Earth. This is an area where political action and community participation in development becomes crucial. In fact technology is power; who controls technology becomes a crucial question.

We seem to hear this question from many of Gabreille’s writings on technology and culture. The new technology has not obliterated our ethical concern rather a heightened awareness of the questions, who controls it and for what purpose, become urgent. The other question that looms large is, what kind of development is envisaged? The concept of sustainability is suggested as the goal. I have dealt with this concern in one of the pervious articles. The important point raised in the current discussions is that sustainability should not be reduced to merely a strategy of development but it incorporates a vision of alternate consciousness and life style. It presupposes a renewed relationship between humans and human and nature. A participatory society that assumes responsibility for one another and for earth alone is sustainable.9 (Santana 14)

The right of non-human nature.

The perspective that the Earth and every form of life have intrinsic worth/value is an ethic currently developing and debated within ecological discourse. The classical discussion on rights is solely related to human. The assumption is that only creatures with consciousness and reason can be aware of their rights. The non-human world exist for human and they have no innate right.

Aristotle’s view is typical of Western intellectual tradition. “If nature makes nothing without some end in view;” he argues, “nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all of them (animals and plants) for the sake of man” Using teleological mode of ethical reasoning he asserts that by nature animals are human slaves. His reasoning is that if they were not that they would ‘refuse’, but since they do not, it is natural to enslave them. Incidentally the same argument is used to justify the existence of human slaves! He writes,

“...Therefore whenever there is the same wide discrepancy between human beings as there is between soul and body or between man and beast, then those whose condition is such that their function is the use of the other bodies and nothing better can be expected of them, those, I say are slaves by nature”.11

Slaves are tools and none other than a piece of property. Only those who posses reason, have rights. You have to have consciousness, awareness, reasoning capacity for assuming your rights. Those who do not posses are there to be exploited and manipulated. By this logic the babies, mentally-disabled and aged who lost reasoning power have no rights. What is surprising is that Aquinas followed the same logic. He says

Dumb animals and plants are devoid of the life of reason whereby to set themselves in motion; they are moved, as it were by another, by a kind of natural impulse, a sign of which is that they are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others.12
Against this background that deep ecologists affirm the intrinsic right of the non-human world to exist. A statement often quoted is from Aldo Leopold: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise”. The rights language now used for the non-human world represents a sharp change in our attitude towards them. They have intrinsic right to exist, to be free. They do not exist for human; the anthropocentric world always considers them as objects of our pleasure and exploitation. There is of course difference between human rights and biotic rights in the sense that humans can exercise moral responsibility about the treatment of non-human world but not about flora’s and fauna’s treatment of one another.

The important point to be noted is the shift in ground on the right’s language. As we have noted the classical discussion assumed that the reason and awareness alone are the grounds on which the concept of right be constructed (Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas). These grounds will exclude not only the animal and plant world but also the new born babies and mentally disabled and aged. The intrinsic right of the biotic world should be based on other ground than rationality.

Asian Religious and cultural tradition is noted for their attitude of reverence for life. The non-violence and vegetarianism are expressions of this basic attitude to life. It is Albert Schweitzer who developed this as an ethical concept. In his Civilization and Ethics, he makes a critical survey of the Western world-views and argues ‘our philosophising has become more and more involved in the discussion of secondary issues. It has lost touch with the elemental questions regarding life and the world which it is man's task to pose and solve’. From this perspective he has a classic definition of Ethics,

Ethics consists, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have given is that basic principle of the moral which is a necessity of thought. It is good to maintain and encourage life; it is bad to destroy life to obstruct it.

Life is sacred and our attitude towards it is that of reverence. This absolutist ethics brings a new awareness of human responsibility to nature and paves the way for the recognition of the inherent value of the non-human world. Although it was a minority view when it was propounded, it assumes greater significance today when we are seeking for an ethic to ground our commitment to the earth.

Another ground for biotic right is also mentioned in the current discussions. I am indebted to Andrew Linzey (Animal Theology) for pointing out to a minority view in the early discussions on the right of the animals and plants. It is by “a little- known eighteenth century divine” Humphry Primatt. He differs from Aquinas who following the Aristotalian line of thinking, considers animals and plants are irrational and they have no right. While he accepts significant differences between humans and animals, he insists that the feeling of pain is common to both:

Pain is pain, whether it be inflicted on man or on beast; and the creature that suffers it, whether man or beast, being sensible of the misery of it whilst it lasts, suffers evil; and the sufferance of evil, unmeritedly, unprovokedly, where no offence has been given; and no good end can possibly be answered by it, but merely, to exhibit power or gratify malice, is Cruelty and Injustice in him that occasions it.

Animals are included in the discourse on justice on the basis of sentiency, the capacity for experiencing pain. One may extent this argument to the whole biotic community. Primatt adds, ‘a man can have no natural right to abuse and torment a beast, merely because a beast has not the mental powers of a man’. "Any creature" writes Justus Lawler, “when it reaches the threshold of experiencing and anticipating pain possesses rights”. Could one extend this ground when we speak of the intrinsic right of the entire non-human world? They do not exist for human.

The rights language is a latecomer in theology. Biotic rights have not accorded any theological status. But there are some stray and effective voices by theologians. Bonhoeffer is the first among protestant theologians who have reflected on human rights. As he was fighting the gross violation of human rights by Nazi regime, it was but natural from him to reflect on this issue. Rasmussen helps us to see how Bonhoeffer's discourse is set within the ambience of his commitment to creation. He was critical of the some of the trends in Protestant theology that devalues creation with its preoccupation with otherworldliness. Bonhoeffer sees bodily integrity as “foundation of all natural rights without exception”, “The living human
body is always the person himself/herself. Rape, exploitation, torture, and arbitrary confinement of the human body are serious violations of the right which is given with the creation of the humankind” (Cited in Rasmussen 309). For him human right is grounded in creation itself and the rights of natural life are “the reflected splendour of the glory of God’s creation”. Further Bonhoeffer argues that ‘the essential point of human existence is its bond with mother earth, its being as body.” Christian understanding of the rights of the non-human world is, to borrow a term from Linzey, is “Theos –Rights”. Creation exists for God. All living and non-living things do not exist for man, as it has been affirmed in modern, especially Western thought, but they exist for God. James Gustfson has made this point clearly “If God is “for man”, he may not be for man as the chief end of creation. The chief end of God may not be the salvation of man”. ‘human beings, given their power and place in earth’s present reality and their nature as self-conscious moral creatures, may inevitably be the measures of all things. But the measure itself is that we “relate to all things in a manner appropriate to their relations to God”’. The “good” all things are more than their good for us, and our own interests are relative to larger wholes than those of immediate human welfare. “This requires …a moral and emotional nervous system that opens out beyond a strict anthropocentric circumference”. Gustafson in a recent discussion further affirms, “What is finally indisputable, I think, that human other forms of life are dependent upon forces we do not create and cannot fully control, forces that bring us into being and sustain us and life around us, but forces that also limit and destroy us and determine the destiny of the cosmos. This dependence- a matter of fact, no matter how it is interpreted- evokes a sense of the sublime, or for some us a sense of the divine”.21

Philosophical and theological base for a clearer understanding of the ethical standing of the non-human world will deepen our commitment to it. A wanton destruction of life in the world and callous disregard earth’s resources is a violation of the inherent and God given right to them. This awareness is essential for an ecologically sensitive life.

Certainly the discussion on values cannot be isolated from the context in which it is raised; they are shaped by particular contextualised questions and struggles of all oppressed groups. The struggles of the marginalized and the struggle of the earth are inter-related. To deepen this struggle clarity on the rights of all, including the subjugated earth and people is important.

The Earth and the Bible
We will now turn to another crucial issue that has been discussed: The bible and ecology. Earlier there has been a discussion on the thesis of Lyn White who maintained that the roots of environmental crisis could be traced to the Christianity, especially the Biblical command to human to have dominion over earth and all creatures in it. Our attention is now turned to the problematic use of the Bible and a possible reading of the Bible from the perspective of Earth. I find the book, Readings From The Perspective Of Earth, ed, Norman Habel, a significant publication. It has brought together mostly Australian scholars to reflect on the question of Biblical hermeneutics from earth perspective. This landmark publication should deserve the attention of all who are committed to develop ecological ethics from a Christian perspective.

It begins by acknowledging the anthropocentric orientation of the Bible and the problem it poses for an interpretation from the ecological perspective. “We may legitimately suspect the biblical texts, written by human beings, reflect the primary interests of human beings- their welfare, their human relationship to God and their personal salvation. I short we may suspect that biblical texts are anthropocentric. As these texts were also written by men, we can expect them to be androcentric, and probably patriarchal”. For this reason a reading of the bible from the perspective of earth becomes an arduous task. It is further complicated by the fact that our interpretation of even passages that do not have an explicit anthropocentric orientation is influenced by the Western dualistic perceptions of reality. Contrasting pairs characterize the dualistic thinking:

Human/nature; male/female; heavenly/earthly; reason/matter and so on. These pairing have been understood to have a hierarchical relationship. Human is superior to nature and male superior to female. To see them as complimentary we need a change in our perspectives. For this reason it is argued that we need to retrieve the biblical texts from this distorted reading. For example, the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ can be read through the western dualistic terms as one opposing the other. But if it is rendered ‘sky and land’ they are understood as complimentary
A new way of reading the text is advocated - reading with Earth. This methodology is influenced by the liberationist and feminist reading of the bible. “Liberationist stand with the oppressed poor as they read; feminists stand with oppressed women as they read; we stand with the oppressed Earth in our dialogue with the text. We are concerned with eco-justice: justice for Earth. Our approach therefore can be called eco-justice hermeneutic.” It is reading Earth as a subject rather than an object in the text.

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 injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.26

These principles give us a direction in the new reading of the Bible. The method adopted is similar that has been followed in the re-reading of the Bible from the perspectives of women, dalits and other marginal groups. Here the Earth and its interest will provide the interpretive focus. The reader response approach which claims “that meaning is a property of the act of reading and is located predominantly in the reader” (Habel 60) ‘Readers engage in meaning production by reflecting upon the text with her/his plural identities, eco-social locations, commitments and subject positions, directed also by the conventions of the time’.

The book gives examples of the study 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 rulership 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’.27 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,
• to recognize Earth as a subject in the text with which we seek to relate empathetically rather than as a topic to be analysed rationally;
• to take up the cause of justice for Earth to ascertain whether the Earth and the Earth community are oppressed, silenced or liberated in the biblical text;
• to develop techniques of reading the text to discern and retrieve alternate traditions where the voice of the Earth community has been suppressed.

In the above commitments the use of 'Earth community' is important for our perspective, for we are assuming that it is not only the biotic community but also the poor and marginalized who live in solidarity with the earth. The cry of the poor and the cry of the earth are inseparable.

Some Theological Hesitations
In the development of theology and church one may identify an anti-ecological stance to them

Boff has identified following anti-ecological accents in Christian theology and in Church life:

1. Patriarchy. Male values are preferred in the Church. Women and earth are ignored as if the experience of them has no consequence whatsoever for theological reflection. Theological reflection almost exclusively is based on male experience where earth is subjugated by human greed.

2. Anthropocentricism in the interpretation of Biblical texts and the development of theology. For example, Boff points out that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis. The first narrative says ‘Let us make man (man and woman) in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion… Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea...(Gen. 1:26, 28). “The original meaning” says Boff “of the text is this: The human being, man or woman, is a representation of God in creation, his son or daughter, helping carry out God’s creation work. The terms ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue’ are to be understood in this sense and not in any despotic sense.’ But the culture that gave rise to the economic expansion interpret the words ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue’ literally making them an excuse for plundering the earth.

There is a second narrative of creation that says, human beings were placed in the garden of Eden “to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). But this version of human participation in creation as a gardener is vastly ignored by Christians. It is important to recover this original vision, rejecting the cultural distortion in the interpretation. Anthropocentric bias of the Bible and the biblical interpretation is to be noted. Earth always takes a subordinate position, as footstool of God, and earth is considered lesser reality than that of heaven.

In a landmark publication, Readings From the Perspective of Earth, ed, Norman Habel (Shefield Academic Press, 2000), it is observed that “we may legitimately suspect the biblical texts, written by human beings, reflect the primary interests of human beings- their welfare, their human relationships to God and their personal salvation. In short we may suspect that biblical texts are anthropocentric. As these texts are written by men, we can expect them to be androcentric, and probably patriarchal” (p.39). Further, Western dualistic perception of reality – human/nature; male/female; heavenly/earthly; reason/matter and so on – has influenced our interpretation of the meaning of the texts. These pairing have been understood to have a hierarchical relationship. Human is superior to nature and male, superior to female. To see them as complimentary, we need a change in our perspectives. This change is essential for evolving a new paradigm of ecumenism.

3. Tribal theology of election. It is believed that Jews are the chosen few to work out God’s salvation in history. ‘Nothing is more hostile to ecology than this fissure of solidarity’. You stand apart from other nations and the earth in working out the salvation for the world.

4. The fall of nature. The reformation emphasis on the fall that affects human life and nature has dominated our theological construction. Whole universe seems to have lost its sacred character; it is no longer the temple of spirit. The evangelical emphasis presupposed the depravity of human nature. Certainly the grandeur and wretchedness exists together; this paradox of human nature is in delicate balance.
5. Monotheism. While mono-theism was accepted as important in the context of Christianity’s struggle against idol worship, its exclusive emphasis has generated a preference for ‘mono’ in the Church and in society. Political authoritarianism and monarchical form of governments are justified by the preference for ‘mono’. One God, one church and one pope – all these are rooted in the mono-culture. Globalisation has created mono-cultures that exclude all diversity and forges a monolithic system of thought and social structure and finally, one God, one church and one pope – all these are rooted in the mono-culture.

6. The teaching on original sin. An interpretation of a fundamental experience of human beings as evil is inherent in them. They are prone to destroy the other. There is a modicum of truth in this observation but to see this as the sign of human depravity and as the natural state of human is to ignore the creativity bestowed in humans by God. Rather ‘fallen’ is to be seen as a condition of all things within and evolutionary process.

Boff concludes: “a certain theological tradition dominant in some ecclesiastical circles encouraged suspicion of physicality, disdain for the world, rejection of all forms of pleasure, and contempt for sexuality and femininity. It favoured the idea of a God detached from the world, thus promoting the formation of a world separate from God. All such tendencies assist in the abandonment of the world to human aggressivity.”

Nevertheless, Boff and other theologians do not agree with Toynbee or Lynn White in their negative judgement about Christianity nor pantheism as the solution for the present predicament. They are fully aware that there is at least a minority view in Christian tradition, a positive attitude to the earth-bound realities. They further argue that these positive insights should form the ‘core of an ecologically sensitive theology. Going beyond anthropocentrism, we need to start with creation and see humans as part of it.

Boff observes,

“But certain positive elements act as a counterbalance to these negative trends: the affirmation of matter by virtue of the mystery of the incarnation; the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the eucharist; the resurrection as a transfiguration of the world, of matter, and of the human body; the discovery of the sacramental nature of the cosmos, receiving the very blessing of God; the mystery of creation, which makes all living creatures brothers and sisters; and the mysticism of brotherhood and sisterhood of St. Francis, St. Clare, and their followers.”

And again,

“we should see creation as an expression of God’s joy, as dance of God’s love, as the mirror of both God and all created things”.

This is the new paradigm of theology that helps us construct a new paradigm for ecumenism. As mentioned, it is different from ‘wider ecumenism’. Boff’s suggestion is to reconceive God as an ‘ecological God’. He takes Trinity as the Christian understanding of God and not necessarily monotheism. Trinity presupposes community. Trinity becomes the paradigm for society. Boff writes,

“The universe is a reproduction of this diversity and of this union. The world, indeed, is complex, diverse, one, united, interrelated, because it is a reflection of the Trinity. God invades every being, enters into every relationship, erupts into every ecosystem”.

The Trinitarian understanding has helped Boff to formulate a new way of articulating God reality. He would differ from Toynbee that Christian concept of God, a monotheist God, should be replaced by pantheism, seeing God in everything. Boff has made a beautiful suggestion that Christian concept is panentheism and not pantheism. Whereas pantheism maintains that everything is God, panentheism starts from ‘the distinction between God and creature, yet always maintains the relation between them. He writes,

“The one is not the other. Each of them has his/her/its own relative autonomy yet is always related. Not everything is God, but God is in everything, as we might deduce from the etymology of the word pantheism. God flows through all things; God is present in everything and makes of all reality a temple. And then, vice versa, everything is in God. We are only through God, we move only through God because we are always in God, for indeed: “It is in him that we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)”.

This Trinitarian understanding of God interpreted ecologically is the basis of a new paradigm for ecumenism.

A new understanding of the God experience is, for Boff, crucial for an altered ecological consciousness. In a recent article he says about two
distinct but interrelated ways of experiencing God. The first he describes as the ‘Personal Path of Communion with God, Who is all’, this is the way of the West. God is perceived as the absolute “Thou”, a fundamental alterity, an insurmountable opposite. The basic characteristic of this path is love. But this tradition, points out Boff, entails a risk: the feeling of exclusivity; the attitude that others do not have the truth, an attitude that is at the root of crusades and religious warfare. The other path, which is Eastern, is the ‘Path of Communion with the All, which is God’.

“Everything meets in the One, diverse and dynamic. This final unity is the result of a process of identification with that which is different, of action that creates identity with what is different.” “God” is the word that translates the experience of the unified all. In this way of experiencing God also there is risk. “The mystical experience runs the risk of being transformed in to mysticism, which at times becomes mixed with the business interest of gurus or supposed spiritual masters who accumulate influence and wealth” Boff argues that these ways are not opposed to each other; they are complimentary. He says, “there is an urgent need to connect or reconnect all things by means of a powerful Centre. …..This Centre makes us suffer when it breaks apart, which we perceive as an unjust attack against the earth, its ecosystems, its flora and fauna, and particularly against its poor and oppressed, both men and women.” Again he observes, “the first path, that of the West, is more that of the prophets, men and women of the word and of dialogue. The second that of the East, is that of the mystics, men and women of reverent silence and visions of totality. We need both these paths”

Boff closes his article with these words and they could be a fitting conclusion to this article: “As always, though particularly at the present time, spirituality demands a prophetic commitment, born not of simple indignation, but of a mystic experience of unity with the Divine and with all things. Such commitment well be indispensable in inaugurating or at least reinforcing a new civilizing paradigm that is more spiritual, compassionate, tender, and fraternal. This spirituality will help to guarantee a promising future for planet Earth and for all tribes that inhabit it”.

Endnotes
1 Rasmussen 60.
2 Ian Barbour 258.
3 Korten, 122.
4 Quoted in Rasmussen 70.
5 Rasmussen 71.
6 Rasmussen 74.
8 Levinas.
9 Santana 14.
10 See Habel 64.
12 Quoted in Linzey from Aquinas in AAC 125.
14 Quoted in Andrew Linzey, Animal Theology, University of Illinois p.1994 24 from Schweitzer, Civilization and Ethics.
16 Cited in Linzay 17.
17 Cited in Linzey 20.
18 Bonheoffer, Ethics, 151.
19 Cited in Linzey 24 from James Gustafson, Theology and Ethics, 96.
20 Quoted in Rasmussen 345 from Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective.
21 Rasmussen, 345.
22 A Sense of the Divine, 44.
24 Habel, 39.
25 Habel, 34.
26 Habel, 26.
27 Habel, 51.
29 Ibid., p.48
30 Ibid., p.51.
31 Sharma ed. 147. Article from Religion in a Secular Society.
Eco-Linguistic

John Samuel Ponnusamy

1. The Definition

Eco-linguistics is a new branch of study which investigates the relationship between ecology and languages. It is the study of the linguistics and biological diversity. Eco linguistics criticize and point out unecological language uses and anthropocentrism which represent nature from the point of its usefulness for humans. In a wider understanding the 'growthism', 'sexism', 'classism' and anthropocentrism' inherent in many language and language uses are criticized.

This field of eco-linguistics, was pioneered by Professor Einar Haugen in his book The Ecology of Language (Stanford University Press, 1972). Haugen defined language ecology as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment.”

2. The Story

Most of the days, Boa Sr would sit silently in the jungle surrounding her home on one of India’s Andaman Islands and gaze up at the sky. According to researchers who looked on, birds flying above would descend to the ground and inspect her; in turn Boa Sr spoke to them in her native tongue, calling them her ancestors and her friends. Her speech was rich with words of the natural world, words of the forest and the sea that some linguists suspect date back tens of thousands of years to the first migrations of human.

Boa Sr was the last person alive to know them. In early February 2010, she passed away, leaving behind no surviving siblings or children. As she died, so too died the language of her people. Boa Sr, thought to have been around 85 years old at the time of her death, was the last living member of the Bo, one of 10 tribes that comprise an ethnic group known as the Great Andamanese people. Like some other indigenous groups on this archipelago 745 miles (1,200 km) east of the Indian mainland, the Great Andamanese evolved in isolation for millenniums until the 1850s, when the colonial British began to settle the Andamans.

Boa Sr was in effect their last link to the olden days. “It’s the end of thousands upon thousands of years of history,” says Miriam Ross, spokeswoman for Survival International, a London-based NGO that defends the rights of tribal peoples. “A whole way of looking at the world is finished, and there’s no way of bringing it back.”

Experts say the vanishing of the Bo language comes at a particularly perilous moment in the history of human speech. “There’s a consensus [among linguists] that we are seeing an unprecedented pace of language extinction. Of the world’s roughly 7,000 spoken languages, over half are spoken by only 0.2% of all the people on earth. Nearly 80% of the world’s population speaks just 83 languages, a proportion that is growing as globalization and urbanization encourage migrants and rural outliers to learn the dominant tongue in lieu of their own. Every 14 days, estimates Harrison's institute, a language dies.

Over the centuries, obscure dialects and isolated communities have come and gone, dispersed by conquest or ecological disaster. But linguists stress that something vital gets lost with the death of each oral language. Anvita Abbi, a professor of linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi who spent the better part of the past decade studying the languages of the Andamans, says the speech of hunter-gatherer societies like the Bo carry an intimate, encoded understanding of the natural world and its biodiversity. Though the Bo seldom strayed from the few islands they inhabited, they have at least 67 words for varieties of birds and some 150 for fish. “There’s a vast knowledge base slipping from our grasp,” says Abbi.

The way of life of the Great Andamanese (whom the Bo belonged to) was dramatically disrupted once the British set up a penal colony in
the archipelago in 1858. Punitive raids as well as the spread of diseases brought in by settlers decimated their ranks. After Indian independence, New Delhi attempted to save the Greater Andamanese by forcibly relocating all the tribes’ remaining members to one isle, but that led to the gradual loss of distinct hereditary tribal customs and lore. Today, says Abbi, there is no infrastructure to teach children the language of their forefathers.

Of course, most indigenous peoples don’t have the good fortune of being left alone. With a corporation stripping a forest here and a megacity sprouting there, the pressures of the globalized world are weighing all the more heavily on some of humanity’s oldest communities. But, says Harrison of the Living Tongues Institute, all’s not doom and gloom for the planet’s endangered languages. After decades of neglect, governments and international organizations like UNESCO have started committing significant funds to tribal research and education projects. This is happening in tandem with recent grass-roots efforts to defend native tongues. “There are signs of a growing global movement to revitalize these languages” says Harrison.

Still, while once endangered languages like Maori or that of native Hawaiians now have a good chance of survival, it’s too late for Boa Sr’s ancient language. Over the years, she was reportedly patient and eager when sitting down with Abbi and a team of researchers as they compiled an incomplete glossary of Bo vocabulary and made recordings of her singing some folk songs, including parts of an old island creation myth. Boa Sr once lamented to Abbi that she had forgotten so many of the tales of her long-deceased elders. Says Abbi: “She forgot these stories because she had no one to tell them to.”

3. Indian context

India speaks 780 languages and lost 220 languages in last 50 years – survey

India is a land of many cultures, many faiths, many traditions, and many forms of art. India is a land of religious pluralism, where Hindus, Islam, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhism, Jainism, tribal religions etc all live together in peace and amity for centuries. This diversity extends to the languages as well. It is held that there are about 780 languages in India.

No one has ever doubted that India is home to a huge variety of languages. A study, says that the official number is around 780. Earlier, the Irish linguistic scholar George Grierson estimated the existence of 364 languages between 1894 and 1928. The survey, which was conducted by the Bhasha Research & Publication Centre concludes that 220 Indian languages have disappeared in the last 50 years, and that another 150 could vanish in the next half century as speakers die and their children fail to learn their ancestral tongues.

There is a major reason for the disparity in the government’s number of languages versus what the survey found: the government does not count languages that fewer than 10,000 people speak. Devy and his volunteers on the other hand have tried to find languages such as Chaimal in Tripura, which is today spoken by just four or five people.

Devy’s view of language is ‘a marker of the well being of a community’. Languages are being born and dying as they evolve. But bringing attention to Indian languages with small numbers of speakers, Devy said, is a way of bringing attention to the societies that speak them, along with the well being of their people.

There are all over the world serious alarms about disappearance of languages and culture. India has a fascinating diversity of languages unlike anywhere else in the world, with 780 languages and maybe another 100 or so which we were not able to report. So it is like having about 900 living languages in a country.

Because of change in the sea farming technology, local people have lost their livelihood. They are no longer into fishing, making of nets, ship breaking. They have migrated inward. So they have migrated out of their language zones… Wherever people move from one livelihood to another livelihood, they carry their language for a while. But in the second generation, or the third generation, a shift takes place. The third generation no longer feels related to the earlier language the same way.

Nomadic communities are another case. We had a very terrible law brought in by the British called the Criminal Tribes Act 1871. Under that act, many communities were described as criminal by birth, not criminal by act. So those communities got stigmatised. They are mostly nomadic in habit, and today in India those people are trying to move away from
their cultural identity. They are trying to conceal their cultural identity. Therefore they are giving up their language.

Papua New Guinea is the country which has a rich diversity of language. There are about 1,100 languages in that country. The next is Indonesia, which had, at least 40 years back, 800 languages. Then comes Nigeria, which has about 350 languages.

Languages cannot be preserved by making dictionaries or grammars. Languages live if people who speak the languages continue to live. So we need to look after the well being of the people who use those languages.

In history, very large languages also go down sometimes. Latin is one example. The (ancient) Greek language is another, Sanskrit is the third one. A language does not have to be small in order to face extinction. That is the nature of language … In India linguistic states are created. If there is a very large language for which there is no state, then slowly that language will stop growing. This has happened.

For example, Bhojpuri is a very, very fast growing language, but there is no state for Bhojpuri. So after some time this vitality will be lost. So small is not the condition for the death of a language. Several external elements play a role. On the contrary, some of the languages that are small may assume prominence, grow and emerge as a powerful language.

With transgenders, the interpretative ability of the brain is handled differently. They may use the same words as we use, but the meaning drawn out of those words by transgenders is different.

All over the world there is a concern about the disappearance of languages. Languages are dying in a very big way everywhere in the world. Secondly, wherever the English language has gone in the last 200 years, it has managed to wipe out the local languages… But in India, English did not manage to do that because Indian languages have a historical experience of having to deal with two mega languages in the past – one was Sanskrit, and after that, Persian… So Indians knew how to cope with English. And that is why even today, though so many of us use English as if it is our first language, we still do not pray in English, and we do not sing our songs in English.

4. Eco linguistics in the Global context

There are about 7,000 languages in the world. And it is an irony, 78% of the world’s population speaks the top 85 languages. As the smaller cultural communities begin to abandon their native languages for dominant languages such as English and Spanish, the number of the world’s languages decrease. If so, in this globalized world, are we linguistically moving back to the land of Babel? Do we move towards a world which speaks a unified language, allow its inhabitants to become one people, as the inhabitants of Babel once thought?

We are in a period of rapid language loss. There are many indigenous, languages, both small and large, that are losing speakers when parents choose not to teach their language to their children. When new generations are not learning these languages, the knowledge of the language gradually becomes something only older people know, and fewer and fewer speakers use the language. Once these older speakers die and no one speaks the language natively, a language is considered ‘dead.’

Every language has something unique to tell us about human language in general, and the speakers of that language in particular. The pressures on people who speak smaller languages, economic, political, social, to switch to more powerful and prominent languages are acute.

Apparently, people are fond of the cultures they have formed, and many refuse to adapt to a global language system. In many places, we have seen a backlash to English language and culture, which they view such languages as an intrusive and unwanted force. Yet the growing idea among linguists and anthropologists is that we must keep as many languages alive as possible, and that the death of each language is another step toward humankind’s cultural demise.

Last year, the last speaker of the Eyak language of southern Alaska died. That death did mean, to be sure, that no one will again use the word demexch, which refers to a soft spot in the ice where it is good to fish. Never again will we hear the word ‘a’ for an evergreen branch, a word whose final sound is a whistling past the sides of the tongue that sounds like wind passing through just such a branch. And behind this small death is a larger context. Linguistic death is proceeding more rapidly than the deaths of many species. According to one estimate, a hundred years from now the 6,000 languages in use today will likely dwindle to 600.
We feel very sad when a language dies. Each language can put concepts together in ways that make them more fascinating than most of us are aware they can be. In the Berik language in New Guinea, which is doing fine for now, but is probably one of the languages which will not survive beyond the year 2109.

As people speaking indigenous languages migrate to cities, inevitably they learn globally dominant languages like English and use them in their interactions with one another. The immigrants’ children may use their parents’ indigenous languages at home. But they never know those languages as part of their public life, and will therefore be more comfortable with the official language of the world they grow up in. For the most part, they will speak this language to their own children. These children will not know the indigenous languages of their grandparents, and thus pretty soon they will not be spoken. This is language death.

Many scholars hope that we can turn back the tide with programs to revive indigenous languages, but the sad fact is that this will almost never be very effective. Learning small indigenous languages tends to be a tough business in the context of the attraction for the global languages.

Of course there is the success story of Hebrew, but that unlikely revival came about because of a confluence of religion, the birth of a nation, and the obsession of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who settled in Palestine and insisted on speaking only Hebrew to all Jews. It also helped Hebrew’s successful comeback that it had a long tradition of written materials. Only about 200 languages are truly written and most others are only spoken.

Perhaps a future lies before us in which English will be a sort of global tongue while people continue to speak about 600 other languages among themselves. English already is a de facto universal language. However, the discomfort with English “taking over” is due to associations with imperialism, first on the part of the English and then, of course, the American behemoth. We cannot erase from our minds the painful aspects of history. Nor should we erase from our minds the fact that countless languages—such as most of the indigenous languages have become extinct not because of something as abstract and gradual as globalization, but because of violence, annexation, and cultural extermination. What makes the potential death of a language all the more emotionally charged is the belief that if a language dies, a cultural worldview will die with it.

There are probably between 6,500 to 10,000 spoken (oral) languages in the world, and possibly an equal number of sign languages. Today, linguistic diversity is disappearing much faster than biodiversity. According to conservative assessments, more than 5,000 species disappear every year; pessimistic evaluations claim that the figure may be up to 150,000. Then, 20% of the biological species we have today might be dead in the year 2100, in ninety years’ time. But 50% of languages may be dead in a 100 years’ time. Pessimistic estimates are that 20% of biological species but 90% of languages may be dead in ninety years’ time.

The main reason for the disappearance of biodiversity is as follows: - The poor and powerless economic and political situation of people living in the world’s most diverse eco regions. Habitat destruction through logging, spread of agriculture, use of pesticides & fertilizers, deforestation, desertification, overfishing, etc. Knowledge about how to maintain biodiversity and use nature sustainably disappears with disappearing languages.

There is a close relationships between linguistic diversity and biodiversity : Both languages and biological species become thicker on the ground the closer to the equator one moves, and arctic areas have fewer species and languages. Harmon compared the top 25 countries in the world with the largest numbers of endemic languages and on the other hand of biodiversity, such as endemic higher vertebrates (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) or flowering plants. 16 countries (of the 25) are on both languages and vertebrates lists, a coincidence of 64%. “It is very unlikely that this would only be accidental”. He got similar results with flowering plants and languages: a region often has many of both, or few of both. The same is true for butterflies and languages, and birds and languages, etc. The conclusion is that at least when using the species mentioned as indicators, there is a high correlation between countries with biological and linguistic mega diversity.

Furthermore, there is evidence from many parts of the world that healthy, non-degraded ecosystems - such as dense, little disturbed tropical rainforests in places like the Amazon, Borneo or Papua New Guinea - are often inhabited only by indigenous and traditional peoples. This also means that where invaders have settled, meaning often in temperate climates, they have been a disaster to the world’s biodiversity.
Some critics accuse those worried about endangered languages, and according to them, they are preventing indigenous peoples from becoming modern, implying that they want to assimilate into larger, mostly western, languages and cultures, at the cost of their own. “Traditional” to these people still seems to mean backward, static, non-scientific, foreclosing all economic and social mobility.

In other words, the social process of learning and sharing knowledge, which is unique to each indigenous culture, lies at the very heart of its “traditionality”. And it is exactly this transmission process that is at grave risk as soon as indigenous children attend schools where their languages are not the main teaching languages and where their cultural practices do not permeate the learning processes. This is linguistic and cultural genocide.

In short, when indigenous children are taught in science class that the natural world is ordered as scientists believe it functions, then the validity and authority of their parents’ and grandparents’ knowledge is denied. While their parents may possess an extensive and sophisticated understanding of the local environment, classroom instruction implicitly informs that science is the ultimate authority for interpreting “reality” and by extension local indigenous knowledge is second rate and obsolete. This tendency is dangerous for humanity. Actions are urgently needed to enhance the intergenerational transmission of local and indigenous knowledge. Traditional knowledge conservation therefore must pass through the pathways of conserving language as language is an essential tool for culturally-appropriate encoding of knowledge.

5. Biblical reflection

The text: The tower of Babel: (Genesis 11: 1-9)

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’ The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The Tower of Babel

The Tower of Babel is a beautiful story in the Hebrew Bible. The story is itself narrated in the shape of a tower like the story of the flood is constructed like a rising and lowering wave. Its linguistic, poetic, phonetic, artistic quality is par excellence. This story, for a very long time, was read as a story of defeat and disappointment. It was a story of defeat of those who wanted one language, becoming one people, and above all making a name for them. The iconography of the story all over the world is drawn in the form of an unfinished tower, a symbol of human arrogance and God’s punishment. May be, only after the time of enlightenment, they began to see this story as a possible story of the progress of civilization and a process of settlement. The post modern reading of the story seems to take a very different road, as an epoch making event and a path breaking turn in the history of the interpretation of the story.

Post modernity as a method

Post modernism may be understood as the philosophical interpretations of unity and complex diversities all at once. Post modernism developed around the three claims, Derrida’s ‘nothing outside the text’, Foucault’s, ‘power is knowledge’ and Lyotard’s ‘incredulity toward meta narratives’. Post modernism is the end of big stories or the meta narratives. Smaller stories and fragmented narratives began to enter into the centre stage of literary debates. How can we come to a post modern reading of our theological essentials? How can we construct our theological premises for our post modern times? We shall discuss on the ‘Derrida inspired reading of the Babel story’ as a test case for our post modern reading of the Bible.

1 The post modern landscape is diverse and assessment of its significance for Biblical interpretation will mean close examination of particular thinkers and their hermeneutic. Derrida is undoubtedly a major player in post
modernism. We can see the challenge post modernism represents for Biblical interpretation via Derrida’s reading of the tower of Babel narrative.

In fact post modernism seem to look at this story as its foundational myth. Babel, according to post modernism, is a story of glorifying diversity instead of a killing unity. Derrida explains, When they tried to build a city, build a tower, and to speak one language for the whole world, God forced them to translate the (into many) language. This is post modernism in its essence.

Derrida reads this story in a way of deconstruction. Deconstruction is neither a method nor a concept. It is a new way of reading. It is very difficult to explain post modernity theoretically. Deconstruction is not the opposite of construction, but it is an interpretation of the construction and of the constructed. It is an analysis, a dissolution of simple binary opposites of yes and no. Deconstruction is not destruction. Whenever we want to interpret deconstruction, it will complicate what we try to understand and also allow new perspectives. Derrida tries to give a new meaning to the story by his deconstruction method. On the other hand, in the writing of Derrida, the story of Babel explains what is deconstruction.

Derrida and Babel
Derrida’s reading of the story (Des Tours de Babel, 1985) shows that reading or writing a story is an endless rereading and retreating from the path. This de tour of the story may have come from the writings of Voltaire’s ‘Dictionnaire Philosophique’. Derrida seems to follow Votaire in saying the word B “Babel” means ‘Father God’ and not ‘Gate of God (heaven)’.

For Derrida, the ‘Tower of Babel’ narrative is not just one narrative among others, but is a ‘meta narrative’, the narrative of the narratives. Derrida understands the narrative as the story of the multiplicity of the languages. The Shemites tried to establish their empire and to impose their language upon the world. It reveals their aspirations to challenge the realms of God with their high tower into the heaven. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They wanted to gather themselves lest they scatter. They believed in the unity of a place all at once in language and in a tower. Genesis holds together the building of a tower, constructing a city, making a name and gathering a filiation. This brought God’s punishment on them. God descended, confused their lips and scattered them over the face of the earth. They ceased to build the city. God pronounced the name ‘Babel’ for the whole event.

Derrida understands God’s punishment in terms of the multiplicity of the languages. God imposed both the necessity and the impossibility of translation. In His jealousy and resentment, against the single and common language, God imposed His name, ‘Babel’ as His punishment. Unlike the common understanding that the Babel signified the name of the city, Derrida understands it as the name of God. Derrida connects God’s unpronounceable name, ‘Yahweh’ as descending with the present name, ‘Babel’. God declares his war with the Shemites by proclaiming His name, ‘Babel’. Derrida claims that the word ‘Babel’ functions as a proper noun as well as a common noun (confusion) at the same time. Derrida says that, had their aspirations would have been fulfilled, certainly it would have been achieved by force and violent hegemony over the rest of the world.

They sought a universal genealogy. God disseminated them and here dissemination is deconstruction. God limits its universality, forbidden transparency, impossible univocity. Translation becomes a duty, but a duty which one can no longer discharge. Such insolvency is found in the very name of Babel, which at once translates and does not translate itself, belongs without belonging to a language and indebts itself to its insolvent debt, to itself as another. Such would be the Babelian performance.

Derrida follows Voltaire’s translation for the word ‘Babel’. Voltaire condemns the Hebrews for mistranslating the word, ‘Babel’ as confusion. They translated it like that, either because the architects were confused and could not complete the tower or because the one language was confused so that one could not understand the other. The interfacing of the words BLL (confuse), BLBL (Bilbul, confusion), BVL (Bavel Babylon,) may have led to the translation of the word Babel as confusion. Derrida interprets ‘Ba’ as father and ‘bel’ as God. The city was given the name of God as Babel. Babel means the city of God or the holy city.

Derrida is interested in what brings about this scattering and imposition. God imposed a completely unresolvable double bind on the Shems: on the one hand, hear my name and obey my voice, for I am God
(ie translate my words into your tongue and obey them). On the other hand, God says, You will not understand my proper name, understand that I am beyond, and that my rules are total and transcendent (ie., do not translate me, for I exceed your worldly economy of life).

For Derrida, this double bind, structures every use of a proper name, which calls out for recognition (translatability) and for a status of non-appropriation (non-translatability). This double bind is ethical. There is a duty to translate and not to translate, to understand and to enter into a relation with the other and at the same time not to enter into the otherness of the other (not to translate them). Translation is the name of readability for Derrida. Translation is the condition of possibility of the survival of the text. To refuse translation is to refuse life

God confused the language of the Semitic people. God did not punish them for building a tower, but, because they wanted to make a name for themselves. God himself gave a name for the city, Babel. The name entered into the language as a noun, both as a proper noun and as a common noun. Thus the word Babel began with a double meaning. Babel not only represented the confusion of the language, but it also signified that the building could not be completed. God as the deconstructionist, in the deconstruction of the tower and the multiplication of the language deconstructed Himself. Derrida insists that “Babel can provide an epigraph of all discussions on translations”. Like the imperfection in the completion of the tower, its architecture, technology, system, instructions, so is the imperfection in the translation, in a real, transparent, structurally perfect, coherent and complete translation.

5.5. Architecture of the Tower and the Philosophy of Language

The tower acts as the figure of philosophy because the dream of philosophy is that of translatability. Philosophy is the ideal of pure translation, the careful recovery and unmediated presentation of an original truth. But the language of the builders of the tower is not the language of philosophy. It is an imposed order, a violent imposition of single language. The deconstruction of the tower of Babel gives a good idea of what deconstruction is. An unfinished edifice whose half completed structures are visible. If the tower would have been completed, there would have been no architecture. Only the incompleteness of the tower makes it possible for architecture, for multitudes of languages and to have a history. The tower of Babel does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues, it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something. It is the very thing which is living today, which lives through deconstruction, in as much as ‘deconstruction is survival’.

Derrida contrasts the tower with the image of the labyrinth. He deconstructs the tower into a labyrinth. He puts the image of a labyrinth into the tower to gain new ways and new perspectives. When the text wants to stress the character of the tower as a center, to be immobile in the center, Derrida contrasts it with the image of fluidity. As far as language is concerned, it is the fluidity of the notions. In each case, according to the story, God himself deconstructs the tower and the universal language.

Stout writes Babel as a prominent image for our times. Kafka revisits the story of Babel frequently in his writings. Blanchot discusses the story of Babel in the light of his theory of ‘textuality’. Benjamin mentions Babel in his discussions on ‘language’. Gillian Rose argues for her post modernism, particularly the discussions on ‘architecture and theory’ on the basis of the ‘Tower of Babel’. This clearly shows that Babel is clearly a central myth for the contemporary reflections on language, text and post modernity.

What has the Derrida’s reading of this text, to offer to us? Like Kant’s ‘prologue to John’, Kierkegaard’s ‘Fear and Trembling’, Derrida’s ‘Tower of Babel’ is not about accuracy or the meaning of the text. On the contrary, Derrida is setting the narrative, ‘Tower of Babel’ at play in the context of its discourse. It seems that the discourse of Derrida on this narrative leads us to an area hitherto unnoticed by others, particularly in the world of scholarship. Derrida seems to be true to the text so far as he focuses on the language in Genesis 11. The question of language and translation is central to post-modernity and to the story of the ‘Tower of Babel’. Babel has become a powerful symbol of fragmentation and pluralism in our days.

When we are on a journey, when we take the right turn, whereas we have to take a left turn, we are happy until we discover that we made a faux pas. Sometimes we never discover the mistake at all! Such confusion may also lead to many interesting discoveries. Derrida, the rabbi of deconstruction, in his ‘tower of Babel’ makes some interesting mistakes
like translating Babel as ‘Father God’ instead of ‘Gate of heaven’. But how true it is to acknowledge that such confusions took him and the readers of his story on a very interesting detour!

Derrida did not try to mythologize history. When Derrida dug deep into the sedimentations of the text, what interested him was history. He discovered that the surface text had more that an expected relationship to the layers of the text underneath. We can see such imaginative excursions than fidelity to the surface text in the Rabbinical commentaries on the Torah. Derrida’s deconstruction of the story and the story as a (Derrida’s) deconstruction of the global hegemony – is a study par excellence in the history of religion and language.

6. Conclusion
Mark Abbey says, “What the survival of threatened languages means, perhaps, is the endurance of dozens, hundreds, thousands of subtly different notions of truth. With our astonishing powers of technology, it’s easy for us in the West to believe we have all the answers. Perhaps we do—to the questions we have asked. But what if some questions elude our capacity to ask? What if certain ideas cannot be fully articulated in our words? ‘There are amazing things about Aboriginal languages,’ Michael Christie adds, ‘Their concepts of time and agency, for example. They go right against our ideology of linear time—past, present, and future. I reckon they’d completely revolutionize Western philosophy, if only we knew more about them.’

We are living in a world where we want to reduce the multitude of the languages. Nietzsche claimed that the language of numbers take the precedence over the language of qualities. The language of power dominates the language of tolerance and mutuality. Post modernism is a new perspective for a more and more of the differentiated world. Globalisation tries to create one language, the language of market, the tower expressed in the form of share markets, a name which gathers the whole multitude of the earth, the capital. It tries to create the meta narratives to make the people serve the immovable centre. However the story is incomplete if it does not perceive God descending, confusing and scattering. Post modernity, deconstruction, translation, small story (11 verses) all become the commentary of the story. Diversities and multiplicities must restore the place of one language and one centre. Jerusalem and Pentecost is not gathering to come together, but to be scattered to the ends of the earth, with Jews first and others to follow.

Endnotes
1 J. Derrida, ‘Des Tours de Babel, Semeia, 54 (1991) p.17 ff,
3 Einar Haugen in his book The Ecology of Language (Stanford University Press, 1972)
6 Mark Abley, Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages. Houghton Mifflin, 2003
### Books Published by CSI Synod

#### Department of Ecological Concerns

**Appendix - 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reconciling with Nature (English, Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada)</strong> 2002</td>
<td>A Guide to a Green Church. Published by CSI SECC. Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad</td>
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<td><strong>God is Green (2004)</strong></td>
<td>Ecological concerns and work of CSI Synod and Dioceses. Published by CSI SECC. Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Eco Vision and Mission (English and Tamil) 2006</strong></td>
<td>A guide to Sunday School teachers, Contributors: Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad, Ms. Jessy Jeyakaran, Dr. Edwin Chandrasekharan, Published by CSI SECC</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A Christian Response to Ecological Crisis (2009)</strong></td>
<td>Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad and Rt. Rev. Thomas Samuel. Published jointly by CSI SECC and CSS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Green Gospel (2011)</strong></td>
<td>Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad and Rt. Rev. Thomas Samuel, Published jointly by CSI SECC and CSS</td>
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<td><strong>Forest: Our Good Neighbour (2011)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Word &amp; World (2013)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Renewed Faith for a Redeemed Earth (2014)</strong></td>
<td>Eco-Theological Reflections, Published by CSI, UTC &amp; CSS, Edited by Viji Varghese Eapen &amp; Allan Samuel Palanna</td>
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<td>Ecological sermons Published jointly by ISPCK and CSI, Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad</td>
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<td>Ecological sermons Published jointly by ISPCK and CSI, Edited by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad</td>
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Contributors

Rev. Vincely Jabasekhar, Presbyter of Kanyakumary Diocese; email: vincicat2007@rediffmail.com

Rev. Binu C. John, Presbyter of Karnataka South Diocese; email: revbinucjohn@yahoo.com

Rev. R. Shibu Mayam, Presbyter of South Kerala Diocese; email: mayamshibu@gmail.com

Rev. Pratap Vasamalla, Presbyter of Dornakal Diocese; email: pratapvasamalla@gmail.com

Rev. Devanand Subuddy Kummithi, Presbyter of Rayalseema Diocese; email: devpastor@gmail.com

Rev. Nixon Leo, Presbyter of Vellore Diocese; email: leomarsb.rpf@gmail.com

Rev. Vincent Rajkumar, Presbyter of Krishna Godavari Diocese; email: vincentpreethi@gmail.com

Rev. P. Victor Paul, Presbyter of Karimnagar Diocese; email: vickypaulraj@gmail.com

Rev. Immanuel Koilppillai, Presbyter of Madras Diocese; email: koilpillai@live.com

Rev. R.S.V. Sukumar Babu, Presbyter of Rayalseema Diocese; email: sukkumar82@gmail.com

B. Silpa Rani, M.Th Student from CNI, UTC, email: silpa.smile09@gmail.com

Rev. Grace Christina, Deacon from Karnataka North Diocese; email: itzgracechristina@gmail.com

Rev. J. Vedamuthu, Presbyter of Madurai Ramnad Diocese; email: jesvetha@yahoo.com

Rev. T. Johnson Jesudas, Presbyter of Dornakal Diocese; email: johnsonjesudas@gmail.com

Raju Cheeran, BD Student KUTS email: arikaco@gmail.com

Rev. D. Jeysing, Presbyter of Trichy Tanjore Diocese; email: jeya.singh@rediffmail.com

Rev K. Jason, Presbyter of Krishna Godavari Diocese; email: jasongillespy@gmail.com

Rev. V. Paul Robert Kennedy, Presbyter of Vellore Diocese; email: paulnimmu2014@gmail.com

Palleti S Santhi Swaroop Presbyter of Rayalseema Diocese; email: palletriswaroop9@gmail.com

Rev. G. Asirvatham Rajukumar, Presbyter of Tirunelvelvy Diocese; email: revasir@yahoo.com

Rev. Jawahar Paul Presbyter of Karimnagar Diocese; email: bjpaul7@gmail.com

Rev. Asok Kumar, Presbyter of Krishna Godavari Diocese; email: kastalaashokkumar@gmail.com

Rev. D. Paul Yesudasen Presbyter of Tirunelvelvy Diocese; email: kirsbadpaul@gmail.com

Ratheesh N BD Student KUTS, email: ratheesh.psla@gmail.com

Rev. B.E. Wilson, Presbyter of Tirunelvelvy Diocese; email: bewilson94@gmail.com
Appendix A
The papers presented at various eco programmes organised by CSI.

Rev. Dr. Prakash K. George, Principal, Marthoma Theological Seminary Kottayam,

Rev. Dr. John Samuel Ponnusamy, Professor of Old Testament, TTS Madurai

Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Scientist & Director, Indian institute of Scientific Heritage, Trivandrum, Kerala

Rev. Dr. K.C. Abraham, Eco theologian, former Director SATHRI, Bangalore

Mr. Abdullah Manham Islamic Scholar, Malappuram

Theological Consultants
Rev. Dr. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, General Secretary of Church of South India (CSI), Professor of New Testament at Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore.

Rev. Dr. Chilkuri Vasantha Rao, Professor of Old Testament, Andhra Christian Theological College (ACTC), Former Principal of ACTC.

Rev. Dr. Mervin Shinoj Boas, Professor of Theology, UTC, Bengaluru


Rev. Dr. V.J. John, Professor of New Testament, Bishop’s College, Calcutta.

Rev. Dr. John Samuel Ponnusamy, Professor of Old Testament, TTS Madurai, presently working at ECC, Bengaluru.