

**AWAKENING  
CLIMATE CHANGE CONCERN IN SEMINARIES:  
for Bishops & Seminary Formators of Priests in ASIA**

**FABC Office of Clergy (OC) and  
Office of Human Development (OHD)**

**Salesian Center of Spirituality, Hua Hin, Thailand  
4 - 8 November 2018**

**Submitted by  
Fr. Philip Lazatin, SDB, Executive Secretary, OC**

**CONTENTS**

- I. FABC Office of Clergy and Office of Human Development  
Conference Statement**
- II. Participants**
- III. The Science of Climate Change  
- *Dean Antonio G. M. La Viña***
- IV. *Laudato Si'* and Its Implication in Seminary Formation  
- *Fr. Clarence Devadass***
- V. Women and Climate Change: Beyond Gendered  
Prescriptions  
- *Ms. Kochurani Abraham***

## **I. FABC OFFICE OF CLERGY AND OFFICE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE STATEMENT**

Deeply conscious of her mandate to incarnate the mission of Christ today, the Church recognizes that it is an integral part of her duty to respond to the climate emergency humanity faces today. With this in mind, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) Office of Clergy and Office of Human Development at Salesian Retreat House, Hua Hin, Thailand focussed on the topic 'Awakening Climate Change Concern in Seminaries.' We, the participants at this Conference consisting of 6 bishops, 26 priests, 1 religious brother and 8 lay people coming from 10 different countries (Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Hongkong, Vietnam) as well as the engagement of social media viewers realize that the priests of tomorrow will be key agents in the struggle for a sustainable world. To equip them for this mission, we resolve to offer an integral formation to enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and behaviour patterns.

We commit ourselves to introduce in Seminary formation a course on Eco-theology combining the latest findings of science with Christian teaching and praxis. The duration of this course and its integration into the existing cycle of studies will be determined by local conditions.

To foster an on-going ecological conversion, we resolve to inculcate in formators, seminarians and seminary staff a spirituality that embraces a grateful contemplation of God's creation. We will do this by emphasizing our interconnectedness with creation through liturgies, prayer exercises, eco-retreats and moments of quiet communion with nature.

A course on eco-theology would have no impact if it is not integrated into the very fabric of seminary life. We resolve to collaborate with all Seminary staff to introduce ecological concerns and reflections in other courses. We will also provide guidance so that the seminarians are able to engage in ecological issues during their weekend ministries. Above all, we commit ourselves to promoting a spirit of poverty and simple living in the seminary, starting with our own personal example. We commit to initiate a

green audit in our seminary and making our seminaries more eco-friendly.

To better understand the cry of the earth, it is necessary to also hear the cry of the poor. Women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups have suffered the most from climate disasters. Their stories of suffering and courage can contribute much to the formation of priests. We resolve to create opportunities whereby seminarians can be immersed in the reality of the poor and learn from them. This could be in the form of short immersion experiences or longer periods of residence among the poor. Additionally, we will also create opportunities to engage in dialogue with persons of other faiths, learning how their faith traditions inspire their commitment to care for our common home.

The climate emergency that is around us is also a Kairos moment – through it we are being challenged to fundamentally re-examine the very nature of our relationships and the existing structures of seminary formation. Perhaps the Spirit is beckoning us towards a completely new approach to formation. For the moment, we do not know what this fully entails but we resolve to continue this conversation in honesty and transparency. May the Lord who has opened our hearts to hear the cry of the earth now fill us with the grace to faithfully implement all that He is calling us to do.

## **II. PARTICIPANTS**

There were 40 participants from ten countries, viz.: Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Of the 40 participants there were 31 clerics (6 bishops, 26 priests, 1 religious lay brother) and 7 lay persons. However, there were more than 40 persons who applied, a few cancelled their participation due to medical reasons or pastoral reasons. A significant fact to note is the presence of four experts of EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network) and TV Maria who helped us in video-documenting the lectures and proceedings, and who made them available live by streaming on Facebook and downloadable by Dropbox on internet. This significantly increased the audience and viewers from a handful of 40 who were physically

present to thousands of virtual participants all over the world who viewed the lectures by live streaming on Facebook.

### **III. THE SCIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

*- Dean Antonio G. M. La Viña*

#### **Time to declare a climate emergency**

With this column, I begin a new series on the climate emergency. I write this first article from Songdo, South Korea where I am attending the Board meeting of the Green Climate Fund and I am realizing that there is a lot of new information and important global and Philippine developments on this issue. This series will shed light on these.

Last year, the, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's preeminent scientific body on climate change, published a report with a long and complex title: "Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty." With such a title, the message of the report could be lost in translation.

That is a pity because the findings of the report are crystal clear. As Brookings's Institution's Nathan Hultman pointed out in a blog posted right after the IPCC report was released: "An equally accurate but more evocative title could have been "We're almost out of time.""

In essence, we only have until 2030 to transform the global economy to avoid the worst impacts of climate change by 2050. This is very different from when I did a law dissertation on the subject for Yale Law School in the early 1990 when the science was much more uncertain and the projections of the worst scenarios were for the end of the 21st century or 2200 and thereabouts.

Of course between the 1990s and the 2010s, we have seen how the early science has underestimated in terms of timing and severity the arrival of the impacts of climate change. In the 1990s, whenever I

talked about climate change, I always mentioned how one day typhoons like Yolanda, Pablo, Sendong, Ondoy, etc. could devastate our islands and cities. But in my first presentations, because of the scientific information available then, I always said these storms were like to happen later in the 21st Century or early in the 22nd Century. I was a hundred years off in my projection.

Nowadays, in my climate change lectures, I point to our vulnerable cities, foremost of which are those in the Manila Bay region. I tell my usually younger audiences that I will not be surprised if within their lifetimes, they would have to deal with major storm surges that threaten the reclaimed areas and Manila's historic sites. When I give my usual lecture to our young diplomats undergoing training as cadets at the Foreign Service Institute, I ask them to imagine themselves or their colleagues one day trapped by floods and/or storm surges, exacerbated by sea level rise in the old Department of Foreign Affairs building in Roxas Boulevard.

In the context of the threat of climate change, all the efforts of Mayor Isko Moreno to revive the glory of Old Manila will come to naught. Certainly, all proposed reclamation projects in the region should be abandoned as they will increase the threat for all of us.

Given the magnitude of what the climate change impacts we are facing, it is time now to declare a climate emergency. The global community should do that. The Philippine government must do that. The city of Manila, all the cities of our metropolis, and all our coastal cities and provinces must do that.

Among others, instead of withdrawing or minimizing our diplomatic engagement on climate change, we actually need to give it more priority and emphasis. Our strong voice, effective for many years (including up to the 2015 Paris meeting, the last important gathering of heads of state), is needed to push this important goal of having the global community declare a climate change emergency.

I would encourage Foreign Affairs Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin, a man I will always admire even when I sometimes disagree with him, to plan ahead for the 2020 Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. That is a

critical conference if we want to push the agenda of climate justice forward.

A climate emergency declaration is also urgent for local governments.

Among others, New York City, London, Sydney and a total of 722 localities in 15 countries have already made this declaration of “an immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate.” The City of Manila should join this cohort as a matter of priority.

Indeed, we are faced with a climate crisis of immense dangers. The climate threat has been described as not just “dangerous”, or even “catastrophic”, but “existential” – “a threat that could annihilate most people on earth.”

The threat is not only to people, but to all life. Climate change, as pinned down by the recently released Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), accelerate the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of species. In that assessment, the authors conclude that a million species face extinction and rank five direct drivers of that, with climate change as the third biggest culprit following changes in land and sea use and direct exploitation of organisms and ranked higher than pollution and invasive alien species.

Time is running out to address the climate emergency, but actions being done are not commensurate to what has to be done. As pointed out by Jane Morton in *Don't Mention the Emergency: Making the Case for Emergency Climate Action* (See [climateemergencydeclaration.org](http://climateemergencydeclaration.org)), this is because “vested interests are running the biggest disinformation campaign in history”. Fossil fuel, mainly oil and coal interests, unfortunately have “a corrupting influence on politicians and the media and are prepared to spend millions of dollars to block action”.

Morton documents how climate scientists are pressured to understate the risks, threatened and harassed and risk losing research funding for making strong statements. She describes IPCC reports as tending towards reticence and caution, erring on the side

of 'least drama', and downplaying the more extreme and more damaging outcomes."

Having previously been Executive Director of the Manila Observatory, a 150 year old scientific research institution that used to be the weather bureau of the Philippines and is a leading climate change science institution in Asia, I appreciate the need for peer review and avoiding catastrophic language. Many of my colleagues have doctorates in Physics and are trained in the scientific method. Although they are not activists, they do know that what we are studying has serious consequences for human well-being and especially for the poor.

Morton quotes Kate Marvel, a climate scientist, who wrote eloquently that what we need to face climate change is not hope, but courage.

"I always end my talks on climate change with a message of hope. But I agree that such hope must be grounded in courage to change things. Without courage, hope is false."

I agree with Hans Schellnhuber, founding director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact, who points out that humanity is "now reaching the end-game." Morton is right: "There is now not enough time for a long debate about whether the current climate trajectory is an emergency or can be addressed with gradual change. The forecasts are compelling and the scenarios are devastating. It's time to move straight to the most important question of our times: how to restore a safe climate at emergency speed."

In the next column, I will write about climate change and poverty, summarizing and reflecting on a recently released Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. This will be followed by two columns on adaptation and mitigation solutions that can be done at the local, national, and global levels. Finally, I will write about what the climate emergency demands of our leaders - from national government officials, local leaders, and our diplomats.

## **Climate emergency and the poor**

In all my lectures on climate change, I always emphasize the double injustice in climate change: the poorest countries and the poorest communities in all countries will suffer first and most from climate change even as they have contributed the least to the anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions that causes climate change. Conversely, the richest countries and the wealthiest people in all countries will have more options in dealing with climate change.

This gross climate injustice and inequity will be exacerbated in the years and decades to come, as made clear in a recent report by Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. That report, issued last June 25, concluded: "Climate change will have devastating consequences for people in poverty. Even under the best-case scenario, hundreds of millions will face food insecurity, forced migration, disease, and death. Climate change threatens the future of human rights and risks undoing the last fifty years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction."

The Alston report, from which I lifted most of what I say in this column, does not mince words, outlining how climate change will intensify existing poverty and inequality: "It will have the most severe impacts in poor countries and regions, and the places poor people live and work. Developing countries will bear an estimated 75-80 percent of the costs of climate change."

This is because poor people live in areas more vulnerable to climate change, including in housing that is less resistant. The poor "lose relatively more when affected; have fewer resources to mitigate the effects; and get less support from social safety nets or the financial system to prevent or recover from the impact." For obvious reasons, the livelihoods and assets of the poor are more exposed. In addition, poor communities are "more vulnerable to natural disasters that bring disease, crop failure, spikes in food prices, and death or disability."

These observations are true in the Philippines. We have seen the poor suffer the most in all our big disasters, including when Yolanda



devastated the Visayas, Pablo destroyed huge areas of Mindanao, and Sendong killed thousands in Cagayan de Oro.

Alston observes that climate change could end up undoing decades of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction. He notes: “Middle-class families, including in developed countries, are also being rendered poor. The World Bank estimates that without immediate action, climate change could push 120 million more people into poverty by 2030—likely an underestimate, and rising in subsequent years. Eight hundred million in South Asia alone live in climate hotspots and will see their living conditions decline sharply by 2050.”

Quoting the most recent scientific studies, Alston points out that, at 2 °C degrees of warming, 100-400 million more people will be put at risk of hunger and 1-2 billion more people may no longer have adequate water. He also cites studies on how climate change could result in global crop yield losses of 30 percent by 2080, even with adaptation measures.

The Alston report highlights public health impacts, which the poor will bear disproportionately: “Between 2030 and 2050, it is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. With people in poverty largely uninsured, climate change will exacerbate health shocks that already push 100 million into poverty every year.”

Alston describes how poor people in poverty face serious threats of losing their homes, highlighting how in 2050, climate change could displace 140 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America alone. He emphasized the impact of flooding and landslides, weakening “already degraded infrastructure and housing—especially for people living in unplanned or unserviced settlements.” According to Alston, “2017 saw 18.8 million people displaced due to disasters in 135 countries—almost twice the number displaced by conflict. Moreover, since 2000, “people in poor countries have died from disasters at rates seven times higher than in wealthy countries. Sadly, he points out, “authorities have a history of prioritizing wealthier areas for protection, further endangering people in poverty.”

As I noted at the beginning of this article, what is particularly galling about climate change is the inequity and injustice that characterizes it. Alston documents this as well: “Perversely, the richest, who have the greatest capacity to adapt and are responsible for and have benefitted from the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, will be the best placed to cope with climate change, while the poorest, who have contributed the least to emissions and have the least capacity to react, will be the most harmed. The poorest half of the world’s population—3.5 billion people—is responsible for just 10 percent of carbon emissions, while the richest 10 percent are responsible for a full half. A person in the wealthiest 1 percent uses 175 times more carbon than one in the bottom 10 percent.”

Alston also cites data that illustrates how “climate change itself has already worsened global inequality and that the gap in per capita income between the richest and poorest countries is 25 percentage points larger than it would be without climate change.”

In the face of these impacts, action has been wanting. According to Alston: “Somber speeches by government officials at regular conferences are not leading to meaningful action. Thirty years of conventions appear to have done very little. From Toronto to Noordwijk to Rio to Kyoto to Paris, the language has been remarkably similar as States continue to kick the can down the road. The essential elements of climate change were understood in the 1970s, and scientists and advocates have been ringing alarm bells for decades. Yet States have marched past every scientific warning and threshold, and what was once considered catastrophic warming now seems like a best-case scenario.”

It’s not just governments that have failed us. Big business has been complicit, especially fossil fuel companies: “In 2015, the fossil fuel industry and its products accounted for 91 percent of global industrial greenhouse emissions and 70 percent of all human-made emissions.” It is an industry that has known for decades about their responsibility for rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels and the likelihood that the rise would lead to catastrophic climate change. And yet, it took no action to change its business model.

According to the Alston report: “From 1988 to 2015, fossil fuel companies doubled their contribution to global warming, producing in 28 years the equivalent of their emissions in the prior 237 years since the Industrial Revolution. During that time, just 100 companies produced 71 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.”

Finally, the report concludes with constructive proposals on how to move forward: “Addressing climate change will require a fundamental shift in the global economy and how States have historically sought prosperity, decoupling improvements in economic well-being and poverty reduction from resource depletion, fossil fuel emissions, and waste production. This will entail radical and systemic changes including incentives, pricing, regulation, and resource allocation, in order to disrupt unsustainable approaches and reflect environmental costs in entire economic subsystems including energy, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and transportation.”

We can still avert the worst impacts of climate change. The poor do not have to be sacrificed and thrown to the mercies of the storms and droughts that are coming. But to succeed in this, we must declare a climate emergency now – globally, nationally, and locally.

### **Urgent climate emergency measures**

This is my third column on the climate emergency.

In the first article, I summarized the latest scientific information on climate change, which collectively point to the conclusion that what we are facing is a climate emergency. The familiar way of framing the issue – that climate change is a long-term challenge and we still have the time to address it effectively - is no longer tenable. Climate change is already here and it will get much worse, and the worst impacts will be felt by 2050 or even earlier. In addition, we only have 11 years from today – up to 2030 – to transform the global economy to avert the worst scenarios for 2020.

In my column last Saturday, I wrote about the impacts of the climate emergency on the poor. Citing mainly a recent report on climate change and poverty by Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, I highlighted

how the climate emergency will exacerbate economic inequity and social injustice.

In this column, citing extensively again from the Alston report and also from a colleague from the World Resources Institute (WRI), I write about the solutions. Truth be told, climate science might be complex but what we need to do to mitigate and to adapt to climate change does not require hard science.

I endorse the view of Mr. Alston that addressing climate change effectively require a fundamental shift in the global economy. It requires rejecting the traditional way States have achieved prosperity, “decoupling improvements in economic well-being and poverty reduction from resource depletion, fossil fuel emissions, and waste production.” According to the Alston report, “This will entail radical and systemic changes including incentives, pricing, regulation, and resource allocation, in order to disrupt unsustainable approaches and reflect environmental costs in entire economic subsystems including energy, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and transportation.”

“Much of post-industrial poverty reduction and economic growth has been based on unsustainable resource extraction and exploitation. Certain people and countries have gotten incredibly wealthy through emissions without paying for the costs to the environment and human health—costs borne disproportionately by people in poverty. Staying the course will not preserve growth in the long term, but will be disastrous for the global economy and pull hundreds of millions into poverty. Climate action should not be viewed as an impediment to economic growth but as an impetus for decoupling economic growth from emissions and resource extraction, and a catalyst for a green economic transition, labour rights improvements, and poverty elimination efforts.

Climate change will require deep structural changes in the world economy. It is imperative this is done in a way that provides necessary support, protects workers, creates good jobs, and is guided by international labour standards. A robust social safety net and a well-managed transition to a green economy will be the best response to the unavoidable harms that climate change will bring.”

There is no way around this need to transform the global economy. As WRI's Kelly Levin put it when the 1.5 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change came out last year: "While there have been examples of rapid change in specific technologies or sectors in the past, there is no precedent in our documented history for the rate of change at the scale required for limiting warming to 1.5°C. In other words, we have never before witnessed such widespread, rapid transitions, and they will need to be made across energy, land, industrial, urban and other systems, as well as across technologies and geographies.

Alston points out that renewable energy will create jobs and energy-efficient investments will lead to greater energy savings and fewer emissions. He also emphasizes the positive impacts of climate adaptation and a sustainable economy on healthcare costs and preventing environmental degradation. It could "restore overused and exhausted resources, increase food and water security, and reduce poverty and inequality."

The Alston report cites how twenty-three countries have succeeded in decoupling economic growth from carbon emissions. Renewable energy, carbon pricing, and green subsidies and jobs, are solid economic strategies that work for the poor.

But let's be clear, while we know what we should be doing, it won't be easy getting these to happen. But what prevent us from addressing the climate emergency effectively are social and political, not technological or economic, barriers.

According to Levin: "There's no sugarcoating it. Keeping warming to 1.5°C will be hard. Really hard. But the IPCC report also makes it clear that the world has the scientific understanding, the technological capacity and the financial means to tackle climate change. Now what we need is the political will to precipitate the unprecedented concerted actions necessary to stabilize temperature rise below 1.5 C."

Governments, the private sector, local governments and communities, families and individuals have roles to play. The youth have a particular role to play.

Governments must take the lead by declaring a global climate emergency and increasing their commitments in the Paris Agreement. According to Alston: “Climate change should be a catalyst for States to fulfil long ignored and overlooked economic and social rights, including to social security, water and sanitation, education, food, healthcare, housing, and decent work. Revenue from climate action including emissions control and tax restructuring should be used to fund social protection programs to protect those affected.”

Developed countries and the big developing countries must still take the lead. But middle income countries and the least developed countries, including the most vulnerable, must also reduce emissions. The richer countries must increase their financial assistance to developing countries so that the latter can adapt better and contribute more to mitigate climate change.

We should assign and send more, not less, diplomats to the annual climate change negotiations. We should rejoin the Like Minded Developing Countries bloc and there carry the banner of climate justice.

We might want to revisit our climate governance system, based on a flawed design of a Climate Change Commission (CCC) headed by the President. I have worked with all four of the Vice-Chairs of the CCC since it was established in 2010 and they have been dedicated and committed but with a system designed to fail, they have had to deal with enormous challenges. I prefer a new department perhaps combined with our disaster resilience needs or with the current environment department as a way forward.

For sure, as Alston highlights it, companies can provide and implement solutions to climate change, but he warns that an overreliance on voluntary, private sector efforts would be wrong. According to Alston: “Climate change is a market failure, and voluntary emissions reduction commitments will only go so far . . . . An over-reliance on the private sector could lead to a climate apartheid scenario in which the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict, while the rest of the world is left to suffer.”

Local governments must now take the lead in addressing the climate change. Hundreds of local governments have now declared a climate emergency. Young and progressive leaders lead the cities of Manila, Pasig, San Juan, Makati, Quezon City, Valenzuela, and Dumaguete and the province of Dinagat Islands, among others. They should make this a priority and have their councils declare a climate emergency, prioritizing climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

Finally, the youth have the most important role in what has to be done to fight the climate emergency. I encourage and support the climate strike movement inspired by Greta Thunberg of Sweden. Young people have the most at stake in the climate emergency. They also have the energy and courage to insist on what has to be done.

The climate emergency is the biggest challenge the world faces. The Philippines is going to be particularly hit by it. Working together, we still have time – not much yes, but enough – to avert the worst. But we have to start now.

#### **IV. LAUDATO SI' AND ITS IMPLICATION IN SEMINARY FORMATION**

**- Fr. Clarence Devadass**

Abstract

*Protection of the common home (environment) is no longer optional or secondary to the Christian life. This care for the common home come from a genuine relationship with God who is the Creator of all things. Despite the many challenges and obstacles that one may face, the care for the common home is an integral part of the human vocation and that living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue. For these reasons then, seminary formation must be geared towards the formation of future priests to be "men of communion" – with the God, self, other, and the cosmos.*

The topic of seminary formation is one that evokes different sentiments in many people. It is a topic that has been worked on and continuously reworked since the Council of Trent in the 16th century. Over the years, not only the contents of seminary formation have evolved, but also the models for seminary formation have been

experimented in different eras and also in different localities. However, we can all agree that the primary purpose of seminary formation is to produce holy priests and non-other. Let me state from the outset that there are many documents regarding priestly and seminary formation. For the purpose of this presentation, I have limited myself to only 3 documents namely, (1) *Laudato Si'* (LS) - 2015; (2) *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (RF) (The Gift of Priestly Vocation) - 2016; and (3) *Veritatis Gaudium* (VG) - 2018.

Yesterday, we had been reflecting on climate change - not a random reflection on the phenomenon and the impact of climate of climate change, but more towards its concerns for the seminaries. This objective is at the front of our minds. Four years ago (May 2015), Pope Francis had offered not only to the Church but the whole world, a 'position paper' on care for the common good.

Before we jump straight into what implications do *Laudato Si* offer seminary formation, I would like to look more broadly at what kind of formation seminaries and other institutes of higher learning can offer in the light of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (8 Dec 2017). This is crucial because the position that I would like to take in this presentation is not merely adding another subject on care for the common home into the curriculum as we (those who are formators and teach in the seminary) know how "crowded" the curriculum already is and adding another will just end up being "another subject." This could be counter-productive towards its intended goal.

The document *Veritatis Gaudium* itself does not deal with climate change per se, apart from encouraging the setting of research centres that could help understand climate change. However, the document does provide some direction as to what kind of approach we could possibly take with regard to LS and seminary formation:

4 (a) First, the most urgent and enduring criterion is that of contemplation and the presentation of a spiritual, intellectual and existential introduction to the heart of the *kerygma*, namely the ever fresh and attractive good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which continues to take flesh in the life of the Church and of humanity.



4 (b) A second guiding criterion, closely linked to and flowing from the first, is that of wide-ranging dialogue, not as a mere tactical approach, but as an intrinsic requirement for experiencing in community the joy of the Truth and appreciating more fully its meaning and practical implications. Today our proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's doctrine are called to promote a culture of encounter.

4 (c) The third fundamental criterion is the inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches carried out with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation. What distinguishes the academic, formative and research approach of the system of ecclesiastical studies, on the level of both content and method, is the vital intellectual principle of the unity in difference of knowledge and respect for its multiple, correlated and convergent expressions.

In the light of these directions, if LS is to make inroads into seminary formation and even seminary life as a whole, it is necessary that this be done in the spirit of contemplation, dialogue, inter/cross disciplinary. The care for the common home cannot be seen in isolation with other aspects of seminary formation and life. It has to become an integral part of this greater whole for the training of future priests.

Subsequent to the *Veritatis Gaudium*, in a meeting on the theme "Theology after *Veritatis Gaudium* in the Context of the Mediterranean" promoted by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy, the address of Pope Francis (21 June 2019) speaks of starting processes in the pursuit of theology. He speaks of four processes that would help facilitate doing theology and these have consequences when we are reflecting on the topic at hand: (1) theology of welcoming; (2) theology of listening; (3) interdisciplinary theology; and (4) networked theology. The implication here is that theology develops through dialogue, not an aggressive defense of doctrine that seeks to impose its beliefs on others.

Having this at the back of our minds, let us return to our topic. In the light of our discussions here, Chapter Six which is entitled 'Ecological Education and Spirituality' is probably most relevant for those overseeing and those involved in seminary formation. Please

note that I am not discarding or excluding the importance of the other chapters, but for the purpose of having a focal point, I have chosen to focus on this. The opening words of Chapter Six reminds us of the following:

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (LS 202).

Despite the cultural, spiritual and educational challenges that are put before us, what Pope Francis is asking for is to look at the care of the common home as “an integral ecology [which] includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered” (LS 225)

What LS calls for a kind of harmony that is reflected on our lifestyle and ideals that includes a contemplation on God which is inclusive of all other realities around us. The key here seems to be not just a theoretical ideal that LS calls for but a concrete and profound conversion that impacts life and everything that life was intended for and that which flows from it.

The focus on this integral ecology especially for seminaries and houses of formation lies in these words of Pope Francis: “It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment” (LS 214). With reference to seminary formation, it would seem that LS is geared towards four goals: (1) simplicity of life; (2) contemplation of God; (3) concern for the poor; (4) protection of the environment. The question before us is how do we express these in seminary formation?

## **1. Simplicity of Life**

In this post-modern era, our lives are impacted by consumerism. No one here can claim that consumerism has not affected our lives. In fact, consumerism is one of the strongest forces affecting our lives in the modern world. Everyone knows that we live in a culture of consumerism but only a few people understand the full extent of the problems it causes or the effects that it has on each one of us. Whether we live in urban, suburban or even rural areas, consumerism not only affects us but more worryingly it defines what the good life is.... fundamentally consumerism promotes material goods.

Info-Fact: In one study, it was documented that on an average, every day, each of us is bombarded with around 1,600 commercial messages. This sounds like a massive number, but when you think of a typical day in your life, it is quite possible. A typical day might feature the following activities – wake up, read the paper (featuring advertisements), listen to the radio (advertisements), travel to work (roadside advertisements), arrive at work (advertisements of the internet, email, social media, etc), and the whole process is continued as you return home to relax and turn on the TV (advertisements). How impossible it is to isolate ourselves from this phenomenon?

LS uses of the phrase ‘Less is more’ (LS 222) and therefore brings together the need for personal conversion and corporate responsibility. Institutions of Christian inspiration such as seminaries and houses of formation need to be wary of an unhealthy obsession with consumption and material prosperity for its own sake. LS warns that “obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction” (LS 204).

LS calls for a new lifestyle and primarily the shift has to be from a “throwaway culture” to a “life-giving culture.” I am not just reducing this to the “throwaway” of material things but also in terms of relationships. Much of the relationships that we engage in can be considered pragmatic and even utilitarian. Human relationships as seen in terms of its usefulness and not beyond. Seminary formation needs to promote relationships that are life giving, within the seminary and outside the seminary too.

The way forward for seminaries is to promote a counter consumeristic world view (not merely reduce, reuse, recycle) and in doing so, choosing a life that promotes the gospel values of humility and simplicity: "Seminarians should cultivate the spirit of poverty in practical ways. They should be formed to imitate the heart of Christ, who, "became poor although he was rich" (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), in order to enrich us. They should seek to acquire the freedom and docility of sons of God, attaining to the spiritual self-mastery that is needed for a proper relationship with the world and worldly good." *Pastores Dobo Vobis* (PDV) (1992) states that "poverty alone assures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed even at the cost of personal sacrifice" (PDV 30).

With regard to seminary formators / professors who play the role of the "teacher." One cannot become that of an innocent bystander who simply observes and does not engage in student's formation. In the context of our discussion, the formator / teacher / professor is there to act as role model and guide. RF speaks of both personal and community accompaniment as a means of formation (RF 44 - 52)

## **2. Contemplation of God**

In LS, the idea of contemplation is focused more to the ability to seeing the beauty of God in His creation. In doing so, not only the sense of appreciation increases but also a deep respect for the creative power of God: "This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since "for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice" (LS 85).

The ability to contemplate in the context of LS is to be able to read, feel and respond the signs of the times. Why contemplation? In the words of St. Bonaventure, as quoted in LS, "contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves" (LS 233). Contemplation offers the searching heart an "alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption" (LS 222) - contemplation for the purpose of a renewed lifestyle.

In this context then, seminary formation can offer a renewed understanding of spirituality – not just the emphasis on prayer or methods of prayer but a spirituality that leads to forming future priests who are capable of being “completely present to everyone and to everything” (LS 226).

The contemplation of God comes from our corporality that is indeed connected profoundly to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is here that our relationship with God finds meaning: “All the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation” (LS 235).

Contemplation also calls us to celebration and to celebrate the gift of the cosmos in our sacraments is part of the corporeality (incarnation): “The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane” (LS 235).

### **3. Concern for the Poor**

In the late sixties and right through the seventies, the theme of the poor dominated much of our theological discussions. The poor at that time was in reference to those who are economically poor. However today, the description of the “poor” can be widened to include many other aspects of poverty. For instance, poverty in Asia shows its face in many different forms: hunger, discrimination and violence against women, abuse of children and the vulnerable, destruction of the unborn life, natural disasters and climate change, forced migration, the rise of rural and urban poor, human trafficking, corruption and abuse of power, illiteracy, oppression of the indigenous communities, and many others. Despite the progress in some Asian countries, across Asia poverty remains the greatest challenge.

LS primarily speaks of the economically poor, the marginalised, and the unjust situations caused by capitalism. The word poor appears 44 times in the document and perhaps it is the group that is most mentioned and cared for in LS. In the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, it is stated

that the future priests “should have a special place in their hearts for the poorest and weakest” (RF 111). This simply means that seminary formation should find ways to help seminarians to be “permeated by a pastoral spirit” (RF 119) because this will “make them able to demonstrate the same compassion, generosity, love for all, especially the poor...” (RF 119).

As mentioned earlier, in a consumeristic world, it will be a challenge to inculcate the spirit of poverty in young men who are training for priests. The challenge is further compounded when some of these young men see the seminary as a way out of their poor environment. Though our seminaries are fairly equipped, the challenge is to imbue these young men with the spirit of poverty and generosity.

#### **4. Protection of the Environment**

In the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016) paragraph 172, it states that “protecting the environment and caring for our common home – the Earth – belongs fully to the Christian outlook on man and reality. They constitute in some way the basis for a sound ecology of human relations. Hence, they demand, today above all, a ‘profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So, what they all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS 217). Therefore, it will be necessary for future priests to be highly sensitive to this theme and, through the requisite Magisterial and theological guidance, helped to “acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face” (LS 51). This must then be applied to their future priestly ministry, making them promoters of an appropriate care for everything connected to the protection of creation.

As we all know, the call to care for the common home from the concept of stewardship that is found in the creation accounts in the book of Genesis. This idea of stewardship is also integral to our Catholic Social Teaching. The interplay between stewardship and creation needs to be widened so as to provide a broader inclusiveness for the purpose of an integral ecology that begins with a personal conversion. Primarily, stewardship is understood as a mission of the Church and therefore the care of the common home has to be an integral part of the Church's mission. The mission is then based on the building of relationships - with God, self, the other, and the cosmos.

The Christian understanding of stewardship is founded on a relationship with God which defines human beings and founds their relationships with other created beings. It is this relationship that defines us as the *imago Dei*. For us priests, it is within this communion of love that the mystery of all being, as embraced by God, finds its fullest meaning, both theologically and pastorally-spiritually. Stewardship is our way of life, that which characterises our journey in the priestly ministry as..."servants of God and stewards of God's mysteries."

## 5. Dialogue

In the light of *Veritatis Gaudium*, intercultural - interfaith dialogue can be a key feature in the Asian reality. Dialogue in this context offers an opportunity to encounter others the Catholic way: "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity" (LS 201). LS opens the pathway for dialogue - the capacity to enter into meaningful conversations: "The future priest must seek to develop a balanced and mature capacity to enter into relationships with his neighbour... [that] allows him to be a man of communion, of mission and of dialogue" (RF 41).

With regard to dialogue and seminary formation, LS affords us the opportunity to develop "an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially

forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities (*Evangelii Gaudium* 250).

Inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary conversations are equally important. The theology of creation must be in constant conversation with other sciences in order to provide a grounded rationale for the care of the common home: “Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is also needed between the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that ‘realities are greater than ideas’” (LS 201). In short, LS calls for “the priest [to be] a man of communion, in his relations with all people [and] a man of mission and dialogue” (PDV 18).

## **Conclusion**

At the launch of a joint report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber (Director of the Potsdam Institute) said, “The Asian countries hold Earth’s future in their hands. If they choose to protect themselves against dangerous climate change, they will help to save the entire planet. The Church in Asia has its task set before her. The Church has to take up a pivotal role in the restoration of Mother Earth – to play a critical and prophetic role in restoring the earth’s equilibrium.

If seminary formation is geared towards a journey of transformation that renews the heart and mind of a person so as to be able to discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (cf. RF 43), then there is always a need for an ongoing personal conversion – that which includes an “ecological



conversion.” – that which can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable” (Rom 12:1). This then is our mission.

Therefore, the Church in her efforts in restoring the “face of the earth” cannot be blinded by this emergency that is staring right into our eyes. “[Mother earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’” (Rom 8:22) (LS 2).

## **V. MEETING WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE: BEYOND GENDERED PRESCRIPTIONS**

*- Kochurani Abraham*

“Humans are latecomers to the planet. The plants and animals existed billions of years before us. We are descendants of the long evolution of increasingly complex life forms on earth...We were not created to dominate and rule the earth, for it governed itself well and better for millions of years when we did not exist or existed as a non-dominant mammal...Immortality does not lie in the preservation of our individual consciousness as a separate substance, but in the miracle and mystery of endlessly recycled matter-energy out of which we arose and into which we return.”

*- Rosemary Radford Ruether<sup>1</sup>*

“Soil is not our prison, it is our liberator. The soil is our meaning, and disengaging from the oil economy in a post-peak oil world means re-engaging with the soil and all of its life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology”, *Deportate Ensuli Profughe*, no. 20, (2012), p.28.

All of its life includes the ability of the soil to renew itself, the ability of the soil to provide for the needs we have, the ability of the soil to give us back the meaning of being human.”

- Vandana Shiva<sup>2</sup>

It is an irrefutable fact that climate change poses a serious challenge to life at large. All the same, it is a wake-up call challenging us humans, to rethink our very way of being human – as noted by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Vandana Shiva – at this critical juncture of the unfolding of life in this universe. Our response to climate change is conditioned by our positioning as human beings in relation to the earth and the place we think we ought to occupy in this web of life.

Going through the Seminar Schedule, I have been rather curious to know why ‘women’s’ perspective is seen as important to the climate change discourse. Is it because of a consideration that women are more affected by climate change or is there a thinking that women would have something significant to say about the climate change question? Whatever be the reason, I have taken the liberty to add a subtitle ‘*Beyond Gendered Prescriptions*’ to the issue of ‘Women and Climate Change.’ This is because I believe that a gender analysis could help us understand the problematic of climate change better and see what role we can play as humans to redress it. In bringing a gender dimension to the topic, we’ll see how this is a systemic problem and how women and men need to be together in addressing it.

Undoubtedly, we are in a state of what has been rightly termed as ‘*climate emergency*.’ The “special report”<sup>3</sup> published recently by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on oceans and the Earth’s frozen zones, known as the cryosphere, stated in unambiguous terms about the unfolding climate crisis and its impacts on biodiversity, forest management and food. It also

---

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Vandana Shiva’s keynote speech at the Soil Association One Planet Agriculture Conference, 2007, see

[https://www.soilassociation.org/media/4964/policy\\_report\\_2008\\_soil\\_not\\_oil.pdf](https://www.soilassociation.org/media/4964/policy_report_2008_soil_not_oil.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See IPCC Special Report: Global Warming 1.5C on <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>, accessed on 10 September 2019.

indicated how the effects of a 1.5 Celsius increase in average global temperatures since pre-industrialization will be felt. In the recent times these have been laid bare before the eyes of humanity across the globe, often as contrasting phenomenon. The unbridled Amazon fires and the fast melting glaciers, the horrendous floods in one part of a country alongside long spells of droughts on another side. My own home state Kerala has been badly affected by devastating floods repeatedly since last year. This has been happening while heat waves killed hundreds in many parts of India and the accompanying water scarcity accentuated the vulnerability and crisis situation. In the Indian cities like Chennai and Ranchi, water stress led to violent clashes, distress, and desperation. As lakes and reservoirs dried up, people began to fight in order to find water for their everyday needs.<sup>4</sup> This signals to the fact that when there is a breakdown in the relationship between humans and nature, the human-human relationship also breaks down and vice versa, since we are all part of an inter-connected whole.

To my reading, climate change is like the symptom of an autoimmune 'dis-ease' afflicting the body of the earth. Why do I call it an autoimmune disease? Though there are different reasons why autoimmune diseases are triggered in the human body, prolonged stress and strain is certainly an important reason why the immune system that was meant to protect the body caves in, leading to such diseases. I can say this authoritatively because I have known this in my own body on getting rheumatoid arthritis after going through considerable stress and strain at a certain phase in my life. I think we can say that similar to what happens to the human body over a shorter spell of time, could happen also to the body of the earth over a longer period of excessive stress and strain. The ecological disasters of the present times could be taken as symptoms of the autoimmune disease afflicting the earth and if we do not take adequate care of the earth, the eco-system could collapse on reaching a point of no-return. I think this is the climate change concern that we need to wake up to.

---

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, Parched Present, Parched Future? *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 54, No. 26-27, 29 June 2019.

I do not take the crisis of climate change in an anthropocentric sense, that the planet needs to be protected so as to ensure the sustainability of human life. Climate emergency calls us to take life in its connectedness and inter-relatedness as powerfully brought out in *Laudato Si*, so that all people particularly the vulnerable sections, other species, and ecosystems can survive and find life. This is the premise on which I would like to start the discussion on women and climate change.

### **Climate Change and the Gender Question**

A primary consideration here is whether this topic should be addressed as *Women and Climate Change* or as *Gender and Climate Change*. In my opinion, the issue at stake is not women in the biological sense but gender in the analytical sense.

Gender has multiple meanings - as ideology, as social process, and as a social product.<sup>5</sup> It expresses 'socio-cultural definitions of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles.'<sup>6</sup> Women, for their sexual difference are expected to possess a specific set of capacities deemed 'womanly' or 'feminine', and men are expected to be 'manly' or have 'masculine' qualities as per the cultural notions of gender. This social production of difference is problematic as it is not neutral but marked deeply by relations of power. The trouble lies in the fact that in situations where women and men see themselves as different kinds of people, they are not expected to occupy a similar position within social structures and 'therein lies the power of gender.'<sup>7</sup> In today's understanding of gender, we have moved beyond the male-female gender binary to include transgender persons and those coming under the category of sexual minorities.

When seen through a gender lens, we comprehend better why women are affected differently and perhaps more intensely by climate change. Many environmentalists have noted that climate

---

<sup>5</sup> See Maithreyi Krishnaraj, "Is 'Gender' Easy to Study? Some Reflections", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLI, No.42 (October 21, 2006), pp. 4440-4443.

<sup>6</sup> Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Risman BJ, "Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism", *Gender & Society* (2004), Vol.18, No.4, pp.429-50, p. 432.

change is not gender-neutral but has gender differentiated causes and effects.<sup>8</sup> Generally, women are more dramatically affected by environmental degradation than men. This is due to their gendered positioning in the family and in the wider socio-political setting. The gendered roles that women are expected to play as provisioners and caregivers often expose them to environmental problems in ways that are more direct and harsher than for men.<sup>9</sup> In the case of poorer households, women depend on common natural livelihood resources. Their responsibility for fetching water and fuel can place them under increasing strain as they trek further in search of these resources. This also affects the academic performance of young girls who are often kept at home to help with household duties, this being a reality in rural India and perhaps in many countries of Asia.

Gendered roles that women and men play within the family and in the larger society are dependent on many socio-cultural factors. The intersectionality of gender with other factors that underlie human identity construction such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion and the like have a say on how gender is defined in a particular community. On the question of climate change, while women from economically better off households may not have the drudgery of finding the basic necessities of everyday life, they too have unequal access, control and ownership to natural resources, and are often excluded from important decision and policy-making forums and institutions that govern them. In areas where men control household or communal resources and are the predominant political decision-makers, women's marginalization means they will have less control over responses to climate change.<sup>10</sup>

The greater vulnerability of women to climate change concerns than men, has been attested by the United Nations *Women Watch* for the following reasons: because they make up the majority of the world's

---

<sup>8</sup> See Irene Dankelman, "Climate change: Learning from gender analysis and women's experiences of organizing for sustainable development", *Gender and Development*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, (2002), 21-29.

<sup>9</sup> Buckingham-Hatfield, S., *Gender and Environment*, London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Hemmati, Minu and Ulrike Röhr, A huge challenge and a narrow discourse: Ain't no space for gender in climate change policy? *Women and Environments International*, (2007) 74/75:5-9.

economically poor, do most of the agricultural work, bear unequal responsibility for household food security, carry a disproportionate burden for harvesting water and fuel for everyday survival, and rely on threatened natural resources for their livelihoods.<sup>11</sup> It is widely accepted that the distribution of vulnerability to climate hazards and environmental degradation is not equal across societies and countries. Adaptation – the ability of human systems to adapt to and cope with change – depends on factors such as wealth, technology, education, information, skills, infrastructure, access to resources, and management capabilities.<sup>12</sup> The adaptive capacity of men and women to environmental degradation will depend largely on the extent to which they can draw on these variables within varied contexts. Those with the least resources have the least capacity to adapt and are the most vulnerable.<sup>13</sup>

Women and girls also face an even more serious risk with the onslaught of climate-induced disasters like human trafficking. Organized trafficking of women is emerging as a potentially serious risk associated with environmental problems. Climate-related disasters such as flood, drought or famine may disrupt local security safety nets, leaving women and children unaccompanied, separated or orphaned due to the erosion and breakdown of normal social controls and protections. This makes them especially vulnerable to the exploitation of human trafficking. Disasters that lead to increased physical, social and economic insecurity affect women and children more adversely as they are among some of the push factors that give rise to trafficking.<sup>14</sup>

Social researchers on climate change argue that any attempt to tackle this problem that excludes a gender analysis will be insufficient, unjust and therefore unsustainable. According to them, shedding

---

<sup>11</sup> UN Women Watch, 'Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change', 2009.

<sup>12</sup> IPCC 2001, *Climate Change: Scientific Basis*, doi.org/10.1002/joc.763

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Masika, Editorial, *Gender and Development and Climate Change*, Oxfam Gender Series 2002, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Nellemann, C., Verma, R., and Hislop, L. (eds) *Women at the frontline of climate change: Gender risks and hopes*. A Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP GRID-Arendal) 2011, pp.5-7.

light on the gender dimensions of climate change will enable a more accurate diagnosis and a more promising 'cure' than is possible with a gender neutral approach.<sup>15</sup> Environmental consultant Candice Stevens, a former sustainable-development adviser to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, recently suggested that the "abysmally slow" progress on sustainable development might be linked to "sluggish" advances in achieving gender equality, and called for research to investigate this question.<sup>16</sup>

### **Gendering of the Earth: Its Consequences and Challenges**

Academics, development practitioners, and women's rights advocates have begun grappling with the many gender dimensions of climate change over the last few decades. When French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "*ecological feminism*" in 1974, calling attention to women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution,<sup>17</sup> it served to bring to surface the deeper entanglements of gender and ecology. Ecofeminism refers generically to a wide variety of "women-nature" connections. It explores the connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature; critiques male-biased Western canonical philosophical views (assumptions, concepts, claims, distinctions, positions, theories) about women and nature; and calls for alternatives and solutions to such male-biased views.<sup>18</sup>

Language has been a powerful medium that reinforce the gendered connections between woman and the earth. In my own mother tongue Malayalam, I have heard the phrase *Pennayal Bhoomiyolam*

---

<sup>15</sup> Sherilyn Mac Gregor, "A stranger silence still: The need for feminist social research on climate change" on [amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/25887296/session2\\_macgregor\\_2010.pdf](https://amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/25887296/session2_macgregor_2010.pdf)?accessed 22 August, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Stevens, C. *Are Women the Key to Sustainable Development?*, Boston Univ./UN, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Feminisme ou La Mort*, Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Gaard, G. and L. Gruen, "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health", in Zimmerman et al *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (4th ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005, pp. 155-157.

*Kshamikkanam* often repeated, which means to say, 'a woman must be patient like the earth.' Patience is prescribed here as an antidote in the face of suffering. Ecofeminism brings out the connectedness in the suffering experienced by women and the earth, in the violence of unjust, non-sustainable economic systems that afflict the earth and in the growing frequency and brutality of violence against women. In doing so, it shows how the structures of traditional patriarchy merge with structures of capitalist patriarchy to intensify violence against women and the earth.<sup>19</sup> Ecofeminists argue that no solution to ecological crisis [will be realized] within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination.<sup>20</sup>

Feminist environmental thought since the 1970s, began with interrogating and/or challenging the complexities of women's long history of being equated with nature. Ecofeminist thinkers have shown that linked histories of capitalism and colonialism bring out the global subjugation of women and nature and argue that global capitalism destroys women and the environment alike, and this shared experience under capitalist structures of domination must be rejected in favor of local, diverse, self-sustaining communities of production.<sup>21</sup>

On the structures of domination, eco-feminist discussions make important critical observations about the western philosophical tradition.<sup>22</sup> In the dualistic positioning of male vs female and culture vs nature, it is noted that men have appropriated all that is associated with culture in terms of knowledge production, construction of ideologies and belief systems, the creation of language and particularly in defining what religion is all about, religion being one of most powerful vehicles of culture. In the bargain, women have been identified with nature, the earth, all the

---

<sup>19</sup> See Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, London, Zed Books, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *New Women/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. 204.

<sup>21</sup> Sandilands Catriona, "Ecofeminism by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva", *Economic Geography* 72/1 (January 1996), pp. 96-99.

<sup>22</sup> Val Plumwood, "Ecofeminism: An Overview of Critical Positions and Arguments", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplement to Vol.64, June 1986.



more for the essentialized association of women with body and reproduction.<sup>23</sup> While culture dominated by men was meant to be active and dynamic, rational and productive, female bodies and the earth remained passive and receptive, vulnerable to exploitation by pleasure seeking and profit oriented masters of culture. Even as nature was clothed in cultural assumptions, idealized or romanticized as mother bountiful, mother nature, endless source of nourishment and the like, nature was also considered irrational, chaotic, mindless. It was claimed that vast tracks of wilderness were to be tamed or domesticated. Her resources needed to be plundered and exploited for human enjoyment.<sup>24</sup>

Further, it is argued that seventeenth-century science could be implicated in the ecological crisis, the domination of nature, and the devaluation of women in the course of production of scientific knowledge. Ecofeminists trace the historical roots of gendering of the earth to the heroes of English Renaissance like Francis Bacon and William Harvey who deployed sexual politics to structure empirical method as power over nature. As Carolyn Merchant observes, nature for Francis Bacon and nearly everyone else in the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution was female. Bacon advocated extracting nature's secrets from "her" bosom through science and technology. As woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harbored secrets that through technology could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition.<sup>25</sup> The subjugation of nature as female was thus integral to the scientific method. One of Bacon's earliest (though posthumously published) works, *The Masculine Birth of Time* (written in 1602-1603) is subtitled *The Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man over the Universe*. For many ecofeminists, his words take on a chilling significance as he wrote this at the time of the great European Witch

---

<sup>23</sup> See in this regard, Ortner, Sherry B., "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" In M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974. pp. 68-87.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Grey, "Ecofeminism and Christian Theology", *The Furrow*, Vol. 51, No. 9 (Sep., 2000), pp. 481-490.

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990.

Hunt, when many defenseless women were being tortured on a huge scale in order to extract the truth behind the powers that they exercised.<sup>26</sup>

The gendering of the earth and the basic tenets of Western philosophical tradition that views reason as the quality that makes humans superior to nonhuman animals and nature, and the assumption that there is an ontological divide between humans and nonhuman animals and nature is being seriously challenged by many ecofeminists today.<sup>27</sup> The shift in ecofeminism from women as individuals/groups to gender as a system structuring power relations is an important development in feminist responses to climate change.<sup>28</sup> It is within this framework that it is argued that women hold the potential to “bring about an ecological revolution ... [that] would entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature”<sup>29</sup>

### **Gender Justice as Imperative to Climate Justice**

At the Bali Climate Conference in 2007, a slogan that found a strong echo was ‘No climate justice without gender justice.’ This was emphatically stated on the grounds that gender analysis should be integral to the appraisal of public policies designed to reduce carbon emissions and other measures taken to address climate change.<sup>30</sup> While women continue to experience acute and differential impacts given the accelerated pace of climate change, and these impacts exacerbate existing inequities in socially-constructed gender roles, responsibilities, perceptions and skewed power relations that tend to disadvantage them, it is to be noted that they do not remain mere victims of climate crisis. We find women also providing vital hope

---

<sup>26</sup> Mary Grey, “Ecofeminism and Christian Theology”, *op cit*.

<sup>27</sup> Warren, K.J, *An Unconventional History of Western Philosophy: Conversations Between Men and Women Philosophers*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Gaard Greta. “Ecofeminism and Climate Change.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 49 (March–April 2015): pp.20–33.

<sup>29</sup> Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> Geraldine Terry “No climate justice without gender justice: an overview of the issues” *Gender and Development*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Climate changes and climate justice (March 2009), pp. 5-18.

for successful adaptation through their critical knowledge, experience, agency and unique role in agriculture, food security, livelihoods, income generation, management of households and natural resources in diverse eco-systems, and participation in a variety of socio-cultural, political-economic and environmental institutions.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, from among many women who are eco-champions across the globe, I would like to highlight here the contributions of two Indian women: Mayilamma, an illiterate indigenous woman who has been hailed as the 'Eco-Warrior' for fighting a multinational polluting corporate giant in India, and Vandana Shiva, the globally acknowledged food sovereignty advocate and alter-globalization author who has authored more than twenty books on climate justice.

Mayilamma initiated the struggle against the beverage giant Coca-Cola for its mindless destruction of groundwater at Plachimada in Kerala. The multinational Company Coca-Cola through its Indian subsidiary Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCBPL) acquired 34.64 acres, mostly paddy fields in 1998. In the year 2000, Coca-Cola had the permit to produce 5,61,000 litres of soft drink per day, but it needed 3.8 litres of water for a litre of soft drink. In order to meet this requirement, six bore-wells and two open-wells in the factory compound sucked out some 0.8 to 1.5 million liters of water daily.

Within a short period, the people around the plant experienced problems of receding water levels and a drastic change in the quality of water as the groundwater started getting contaminated with solid wastes containing hazardous chromium, cadmium, lead, etc. Regardless of the fact that these could cause severe health problems to the villagers, the company went to the extent of distributing the solid wastes to the farmers as fertilizers, thus harming also the farmland.

---

<sup>31</sup> Nellemann, C., Verma, R., and Hislop, L. (eds). 2011. *Women at the frontline of climate change* Op cit.

Women of this locality were the first ones to wake up to the alarming reality when their open wells started drying up and the little water left in them became unpalatable. As noted by Mayilamma, “Water tasted bitter. When used for bathing, it leads to itching and swelling on the body and a burning sensation in the eyes. My grandchild was born retarded. I suspect this has got something to do with the water.”

As a tribal woman who could not claim any academic credentials, Mayilamma relied solely on her unvarnished experience. She could clearly perceive that the unrestrained extraction of ground water would pull down the local biosynthesis leading to grave ecological imbalance.<sup>32</sup> Under the banner the *Coca-Cola Virudha Samara Samiti* (Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee) she organized protest in front of the company’s gate. The tribal uprising against a corporate giant took a different turn when many interest groups and NGOs joined the affected people. Protests, public speeches, processions, rallies and humiliation followed as the villagers struggled to voice their concerns. Alongside fighting the corporate giant, they had to struggle against local bodies with vested interests and also with the state. Coca-Cola refuted the accusations of excessive exploitation and pollution. As the agitations by the people continued, the plant was forced to stop production in March 2004. Then on there has been a confusing array of legal battle between the Village Council, the State and the company.

The “Plachimada Declaration” pronounced at the end of the three-day World Water Conference at Pudussery, near Plachimada in January 2004, made the following assertion: “Water is the basis of life; it is the gift of nature; it belongs to all living beings on earth. It is not a private property but a common resource for the sustenance of all...Water is not a commodity. We should resist all criminal attempts to marketise, privatise and corporatise water...The right to conserve, use and manage water is to be fully vested with the local

---

<sup>32</sup> Jinu, Dimple M. Scaria, “Defeating Endosulfan, the Behemoth and Coca-Cola, the Giant: Life Narrative as Environmental Justice”, *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering* (IJRTE), Volume-8, Issue - 1C2, May 2019, pp.1071-1073.

community. This is the very basis of water democracy. Any attempt to reduce or deny this right is a crime.”<sup>33</sup>

The Plachimada struggle has gone beyond the frontiers of the state and the nation and has attracted world-wide attention. Slogans like “Coca-Cola: Stop De-Hydrating the World” and “Coca-Cola: Destroying Lives, Livelihoods and Communities” have echoed in front of the Company’s headquarters in the US. The campaign against Coca Cola has spread, particularly on college and university campuses, as well as among trade unionists and religious organizations. Thus, the Plachimada uprising became a prophetic voice stirring up the world conscience to defend water which is one of the most important base of life.<sup>34</sup>

During the long-drawn campaign against the MNC, Mayilamma shared dais with leaders of international repute like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, and others. Mayilamma became a symbol of resistance like David confronting Goliath, but in the course of the long struggle she died of Psoriasis in January 2007. A book on her, *Mayilamma: The Life of a Tribal Eco-Warrior* has attained the status of a planetary narrative of environmental justice. It connects the local destruction and ransacking of natural resources and other environmental struggles by disadvantaged groups with the arrogance and impunity of the corporate giants. The book illustrates, as noted by the translators that ‘the subaltern can indeed speak,’ her story translates the mantra of ecology that – everything is connected – into a web of concrete relations that includes not only the ecological, but also cultural, economic and political processes.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *The Hindu*, January 24, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Plachimada struggle, see Bijoy, C.R., “Kerala’s Plachimada Struggle: A Narrative on Water and Governance Rights”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 14, (2006), pp.4332-39. See also Aiyer, Ananthakrishnan, “The Allure of the Transnational: Notes on Some Aspects of the Political Economy of Water in India”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 22, Issue 4, (2007), pp. 640-65.

<sup>35</sup> Mayilamma’s story was transcribed by poet Jyothibai Pariyadath in 2005. The book initially came out in Malayalam in 2006 with the title *Mayilamma: Oru Jeevitham*. The English edition which came out in 2018, was translated by Prof. Swarnalatha Rangarajan, of IIT Madras and Dr. Sreejith Varma, of *Christ*

Vandana Shiva, besides her many contributions as a celebrated writer on eco-feminist concerns, built *Navdanya* (Nine grains), India's biodiversity and organic farming movement on realizing there is a convergence between objectives of conservation of biodiversity, reduction of climate change impact and alleviation of poverty. Her work gains great significance against the backdrop of increasing farmers suicides in many states of India. According to Shiva, biodiverse, local, organic systems produce more food and higher farm incomes while also reducing water use and the risks of crop failure due to climate change. Increasing the biodiversity of farming systems can reduce contribution to drought. We need to move from the myopic obsession with monocultures and centralisation, to diversity and decentralisation. Diversity and decentralisation are the dual principles to build economies beyond oil and to deal with the climate vulnerability that is the residue of the age of oil.<sup>36</sup>

In her classic work *Soil Not Oil*, Shiva connects the dots between industrial agriculture and climate change. Shiva shows that a world beyond dependence on fossil fuels and globalization is both possible and necessary. Condemning industrial agriculture as a recipe for ecological and economic disaster, Shiva's champion is the small, independent farm: their greater productivity, their greater potential for social justice as they put more resources into the hands of the poor, and the biodiversity that is inherent to the traditional farming practiced in small-scale agriculture. What we need most in a time of changing climates and millions hungry, she argues, is sustainable, biologically diverse farms that are more resistant to disease, drought, and flood. In her trademark style, she draws solutions to our world's most pressing problems on the head of a pin: "The solution to climate change," she observes, "and the solution to poverty are the same."<sup>37</sup>

---

University. See *Mayilamma: The Life of a Tribal Eco-Warrior*, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Diversity is the key to halting climate chaos", *The Guardian*, 7 Jun 2006.

<sup>37</sup> See Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*, North Atlantic Books, 2015. Some of the celebrated works of Vandana

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) asserts that women's voices, responsibilities and knowledge on the environment and the challenges they face will need to be a central part of the adaptive response to a rapidly changing climate. In a Rapid Response Assessment, UNEP affirms that women's labour, power, knowledge, expertise, and organizations, their roles in stewarding food, water, fuel and natural resources for households and communities make them indispensable allies and innovators in any efforts at disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in rural areas now and in the future.<sup>38</sup> According to Achim Steiner, former UN Under Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, women represent a primary resource for adaptation through their experience, responsibilities, and strength. He argued that since women play a much stronger role than men in the management of ecosystem services and food security, sustainable adaptation must focus on gender and the role of women if it is to become successful.<sup>39</sup>

However, even after several decades of women carving out a niche as advocates and exemplars of more sustainable ways of living, climate change has brought about a *masculinization* of environmentalism. Among the social actors involved in bringing climate change to the top of the political agenda, men are in the majority as they dominate the issue at all levels, as scientific and economic experts, entrepreneurs, policy makers and spokespeople.

At the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), gender statistics for IPCC structures, such as Plenary delegates, staffing of the TSUs and Secretariat, Bureau members, and authors teams show a gradual increase over time of the share of women in all functions, related both to governance and management activities as well as to

---

Shiva include *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi Zed Press, 1988; *Ecofeminism*, co-authored with Maria Mies, Canada: Fernwood Publications, 1993; *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, Cambridge Massachusetts, South End Press, 2000; *Earth Democracy; Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*, Boston: South End Press, 2005..., the latest being *One Earth, One Humanity vs. the 1%*, PM Press, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Nellesmann, C., Verma, R., and Hislop, L. (eds). 2011. Women at the frontline of climate change, pp.5, 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,5.

the assessment process leading to IPCC's reports. The proportion of women authors of IPCC reports has increased from below 10% in 1990 to around 30% today. A survey conducted for the Report the IPCC Task Group on Gender 2019, among member countries and observer organizations indicates that gender balance and gender related issues are typically embedded in national legislation, policies and structures, and operationalized in various forms and actions. Gender-relevant national level policies specifically tailored to IPCC-related processes are, however, few.<sup>40</sup>

Globally, women are significantly under-represented both in the scientific work of documenting climate change and in political bodies that have a say on climate change policy making.<sup>41</sup> The current landscape of industries, governments and other bodies with a say in climate-change issues – including transport, energy, waste management, architecture and city planning – is predominantly male. In 1992, the United Nations called for women to be engaged in environmental decision-making at all levels. Almost two decades on from that UN call, women's views are still not being heard where they count. It is argued that given the political deadlock over addressing global warming, a critical mass of female voices could change the tenor of political and corporate decisions and should be used to galvanize climate policy.<sup>42</sup>

Besides the question of women's representation in policy/decision making bodies, eco-feminist critics have suggested that the dominant responses to climate change mitigation and adaptation<sup>43</sup> display a stereotypically masculine focus on supply side, technical

---

<sup>40</sup> IPCC, Report the IPCC Task Group on Gender, Kyoto, Japan, May 2019 IPCC-XLIX/Doc.10, Rev.1 (11.V.2019).

<sup>41</sup> HEMMATI, Minu and Ulrike RÖHR 2007 A huge challenge and a narrow discourse: ain't no space for gender in climate change policy? *Women and Environments International*, 74/75:5-9.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Buckingham, "Call in the women", *Nature*, Vol. 468, 25 November, 2010, p.502.

<sup>43</sup> Mitigation refers to policies aimed at reducing CO2 emissions in order to slow the speed of climate change and adaptation is about the growing focus on improving people's capacity to adapt to things like water shortages, extreme weather and coastal erosion.



solutions and militaristic ‘muscle-flexing.’<sup>44</sup> Issues that women traditionally organize around environmental health, habitats and livelihoods; have been marginalized in debates that treat climate change as a scientific problem requiring technological and scientific solutions without substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism.<sup>45</sup> Rather than looking merely to technical fixes it is argued that women bring into focus the social dimension in addressing environmental problems.<sup>46</sup> Ecofeminists like Val Plumwood and others also questioned environmental philosophy’s engagement with the rationalist tradition, one in which Plumwood argued was inherently masculine and inimical to both women and nature.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Anthropocene Challenge: Eco-feminist Reconsiderations**

Into this discussion on Women and Climate Change, I would like to bring in the notion of the Anthropocene, which has been an issue of serious contention after the current geological age has been named the Anthropocene epoch. The term ‘Anthropocene’ has been assigned to the present, in view of the fact that human activity has become the dominant influence on climate and the environment.<sup>48</sup> Feminist theorists have problematized the naming of the present age as Anthropocene epoch taking into consideration the increasingly urgent and unequal effects of climate change, and the political and ethical responsibilities posed by it.

Feminism in the Anthropocene raises a collective challenge to masculinist rationality and knowledge production, insists on the

---

<sup>44</sup> Denton, F., (2002), Climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation: why does gender matter? *Gender and Development* 10 (2): 10–20., 18.

<sup>45</sup> Greta Gaard, “Ecofeminism and Climate Change” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 49 (2015), pp. 2-42.

<sup>46</sup> Johnsson-Latham, G., (2007),. Report to the Environment Advisory Council, Ministry of the Environment, Sweden, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>48</sup> The term Anthropocene was coined in the year 2000 by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to denote the present geological time interval in which human activity has profoundly altered many conditions and processes on Earth. See Crutzen, P. J. “Geology of Mankind.” *Paul J. Crutzen: A Pioneer on Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Change in the Anthropocene*. 2016, pp. 211–15.

myriad ways in which culture must inform scientific thought, in order to gain fuller understanding of, as well as to think up possible reparations for, what is nothing short of global ecological catastrophe.<sup>49</sup> Naming of the Anthropocene epoch has been contested by raising questions such as ‘How can an epoch be named after a species that is not equally responsible for its conditions throughout history? Might not the Anthropocene represent the Anthropos as an inaccurately undifferentiated species, thereby eclipsing the responsibility that may lie more with one group of humans in one place and time than another?’<sup>50</sup>

The difficulty to think of a, universal “Anthropos” arises because indigenous and other non-industrial, non-Western cultures, while not contributing to climate change, are at the highest risk of violence from the effects of projects that continue to exacerbate environmental degradation as well as of the increasingly violent social relations that accompany these projects. Therefore it is argued that environmental justice work cannot focus only on the universal level of the “Anthropos” but must also, be attuned to local and particular groups that feel unjustly oppressed and exploited under the stresses of climate change and its many diverse causes.<sup>51</sup> This issue is raised also from the perspective of LGBTIQI groups and so the overwhelming singular question that feminism cannot stop asking is: “*whose* Anthropocene?”<sup>52</sup>

Besides raising the difficulty of universalizing the human person, feminist theorists refute the centrality of humans in the cosmos and demand political and ethical orientations to the environment not merely for the sake of humans or their brief time on earth, but for the preservation of an earth long after humans are gone. This calls

---

<sup>49</sup> Alison Sperling, ‘Anthropocene’, Robin Truth Goodman (ed) *Bloomsbury Handbook of 21st Century Feminist Theory*, London, New York: Bloomsberry Academic, 2019, pp. 311-323.

<sup>50</sup> Schneiderman, Jill S. “The Anthropocene Controversy.” *Anthropocene Feminism*. Ed. Richard Grusin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2016, pp. 169-95, p.189.

<sup>51</sup> Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indiana UP, 2001 cited by Alison Sperling, ‘Anthropocene’, p.314.

<sup>52</sup> Braidotti, Rosi. “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminis.” *Anthropocene Feminism*. Ed. Richard Grusin. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2017, pp. 21-48.

for a rethinking of the relationship between humans and nonhumans, and the radical redefinition of nonhuman matter as having its own agential force, effectively challenging both nature's and women supposed linked histories as passive bodies.<sup>53</sup>

Feminist discourse on climate change has shifted gears from an initial focus on women to the gender question and then on to a planetary identity. The question raised is: How can feminism "develop planetary and very long-term perspectives in a geocentered and not anthropocentric frame?" The concept of 'post-human' has evolved in the sense of a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman.<sup>54</sup> The notion of the cyborg developed by noted feminist theorist Donna Haraway opened a new chapter to feminist theorizing on human identity construction. Haraway developed the notion that we are all cyborgs, hybrids of machine and organism. In speculating toward a world without gender and drawing primarily from women of color feminisms, Haraway advocates for the dissolving of boundaries between dualisms between the technical and the organic. But instead of linking women to some natural organic past, Haraway refuses essentialism in favor of technological hybrids, no longer able to separate oneself from the nonhumans and technologies that are both unavoidable and necessary for survival.<sup>55</sup>

### **Freeing Ourselves for Healing the Planet: Towards a Theology of Inter-Being**

Since the early 1990s, there has been a greater consciousness about the looming ecological disaster and the need to take remedial measures to deter it. When eco-feminist theologian Sally Mc Fague spoke of human culpability in the ecological predicament, it was like a voice crying out in the wilderness. In her words: "We become so used to diminishment, so used to environmental decay that many deny that it is even occurring... We are then dealing with a wily

---

<sup>53</sup> Alison, *Anthropocene*, p. 317.

<sup>54</sup> Braidotti, Rosi. "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism, p.27.

<sup>55</sup> Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 292-324, p. 292.

crafty enemy: ourselves, as perpetrators of the ecological crisis.”<sup>56</sup> Today, since we have reached a state of climate emergency, there is a critical search into the deeper roots of the problem and consequently we have begun talking about ecological sin and ecological conversion.<sup>57</sup>

Catholic teaching has been consistent in exhorting the faithful to ecological conversion. In 2001, Pope John Paul II called the Catholic people to an ecological conversion for the human failure in the stewardship of creation entrusted to us.<sup>58</sup> This was reiterated in *Laudato Si'*, as Pope Francis' repeated the call to ecological conversion as a response to the cry of the earth and of the poor. A powerful cry to the churches that emanated from the Rio Summit called for a profound repentance and return to the earth.<sup>59</sup> However, it is only in the recent times that the gravity of the situation has dawned upon human consciousness and so the call for ecological conversion is being echoed with greater urgency.

Ecological conversion follows a deeper awareness of the ecological sin, which has personal and structural dimensions. Heeding the cry of the poor and of the earth – necessary conditions for ecological conversion as pointed out by *Laudato Si'* – makes it imperative that we address the ideological systems underlying the human-human divide and the human-nature divide. This calls for a rethinking of the theology and its praxis that legitimizes systems of domination and alienation among humans and with the earth.

Eco-feminist theologians trace the deeper roots of problem to the hierarchical structures of domination and the dualistic thinking that have marked the relationships among human beings and with the earth over the ages. As noted by Rosemary Radford Ruether, when

---

<sup>56</sup> Mc Fague, Sallie, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

<sup>57</sup> William Ng OFM, Ecological conversion: Greening the Christian Heart, La Croix International, 8 August, 2019.

<https://international.la-ceeroix.com/news/ecological-conversion-greening-the-christian-heart/9180>

<sup>58</sup> John Paul II, General Audience, 17 January 2001.

<sup>59</sup> See “Letter to the Churches, Redeeming the Creation, the Rio Earth Summit: Challenge to the Churches.” Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992.

systems of domination were shaped socially, ideological tools were constructed to ratify it as a reflection of the “nature of things” and the “will of God/the gods.” Law codes were developed to define these relations of power of dominant men over women, slaves, animals and land as property. These law codes are depicted as handed down to an inspired lawgiver by God/the gods. Creation stories were spun out to depict this hierarchical social order itself as a reflection of the cosmic order.<sup>60</sup> As observed by noted eco-feminist theologian Ivone Gebara, the impulse to dominate and exploit the vulnerable is at the root of ecological sin, and this system of exploitation threatens to undo the processes that maintain the lifecycle of all earth beings in relation to one another, crafted by the earth over billions of years.<sup>61</sup> When hierarchy is established as a divinely ordained system of relationships, domination among humans in the name of racial, class, caste, ethnic and gender identity construction and the human mastery of the earth gets religious legitimization leading to ecological sin.

The present ecological crisis also poses a serious challenge to the theological articulations that are coloured by dualistic philosophical principles. The basic assumption of eco-feminist theology is that the dualism of soul and body must be rejected, as well as the assumptions of the priority and controlling role of male-identified mind over female-identified body. This anthropology is traced to be at the heart of the distortion in Western thought in our relation to ourselves, as well as to our fellow earth creatures and the cosmos as a whole.<sup>62</sup> It is argued that the mind/matter and spirit/flesh divide resulting from dualistic thinking has done incalculable damage to the flow of spirit, that is life energy between the different forms of life on this planet. Hence, the ecological crisis is increasingly seen as a spiritual crisis of huge proportions.<sup>63</sup> The roots of ecological sin lie

---

<sup>60</sup> Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, DEP 2012, p.23.

<sup>61</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Teología a Ritmo de Mujer*, San Pablo, Madrid 1995, pp. 146-156. See also, Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, Fortress Press 2011, Ch. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, p.28.

<sup>63</sup> Oddbjorn Leirvik, “Our Living Earth in Crisis - a Joint Call for a Spiritual Awakening”, Norway, Emmaus, 1994.

in the hierarchical and dualistic thinking patterns that stain human consciousness. For this reason, ecological conversion needs to be a spiritual process liberating the human mind of such distortions so that it set off the much-needed healing of the earth and its diverse forms of life.

Eco-feminist theologians have contributed much to a re-thinking of theology that facilitates ecological healing and liberation. In their opinion, a Christian eco-feminist theology of creation demands a radical re-thinking of all our cosmic, cultural and vital theological reference points.<sup>64</sup> They articulate a theology of Creation that involves experiencing the world as sacred, as held by sacred being or God. God is not extraneous to the world, but both transcendent/immanent, as power of life, energy, love, sustaining and energizing this web of life. God is seen as the Mystery of relational life and being itself, God's energy sustaining the entirety of life forms. Taking the strong mystical tradition of Christianity, instead of seeing this as an individual's visionary experience, ecofeminist theology recovers mystical experience as a community experience both of God's energy – expressed by Hildegarde of Bingen as *greenness/ viriditas* – and the darkness of God's pain in the suffering/dying of creation. The cross of Christ is re-planted ever anew in the suffering and fragility, the vulnerability of the flawed places of existence.<sup>65</sup>

From this theology of creation follows the ecofeminist spirituality that takes God as the immanent source of life and the renewal of life that sustains the whole planetary and cosmic community. God is neither male nor anthropomorphic. God is the font from which the variety of particular beings 'co-arise' in each generation, the matrix that sustains their life-giving interdependency with each other, and also the judging and renewing insurgency of life that enable us to overcome the distortions that threaten healthy relations.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization*, SCM Press, London, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Grey, *Ibid.*.

<sup>66</sup> Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, p. 30.

Feminist Liberation Theology has been offering a powerful new naming of God as the passion for Justice, as *the power that works for justice and makes it*.<sup>67</sup> Liberation Theology expresses faith in this God who hears the cry and the anguish of the poor. But in times of ecological crisis, it is observed that we have to widen the categories of poverty, for *nature is now the new poor*. The compassionate, liberating ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, must be understood as inclusive of the suffering of birds and animals, of land turned to desert and streams polluted – and focused on the anguish of poor people sustaining life in these conditions.<sup>68</sup>

To me, an ecological Christian theology implies not just stretching our theological imagination to extend the ministry of Jesus to healing the earth. It means re-visiting the theology of incarnation by stretching it beyond anthropocentrism. According to conventional theology of incarnation God becomes human because what is not assumed cannot be saved. When it was stated emphatically at a certain ecclesiastical moment that women's bodies could not represent Christ, feminist theologians have asserted that incarnation is all about God assuming human nature, not male nature. Stretching our theological imagination, we can very well argue that even the cosmos is assumed by the Word become flesh, as Jesus' humanity was nourished and sustained by the earth and its resources. This theological understanding of the Cosmic Christ, which is all encompassing, invites us to extend the saving action of the paschal mystery to the whole universe.

In articulating an ecological theology of Spirit for the crisis of our times, feminist theologians argue that we need to be attuned to the paradox of the Spirit's activity, which on the one hand works in silence, in the waiting time, in unseen creativity and hidden depths, awakening mutuality and empathy, touching sensitivity and longing for beauty and on the other hand, in a more subversive public face, as a disruptive Spirit, keeping chaos and spontaneous prophetic activity alive, fueling a compassion that crosses rigid boundaries.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> See Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice*, New York: Pilgrim 1984.

<sup>68</sup> Sally McFague, *The Body of God*, London: SCM 1993.

<sup>69</sup> M. Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalisation*, London: SCM, 2003.

Hence it is suggested that the special symbol of the Spirit for our times, may not be so much the peaceful dove, but "*the Wild Bird who heals.*"<sup>70</sup> Thus the Trinitarian dynamic of life is both creational and salvational; it both creates new life and seeks to correct distorted relations and reestablish life-giving, loving relationality. For eco-feminist theologians, the name of the Trinitarian God as sustaining, redeeming matrix of cosmic, planetary, social and personal life is Sophia: Holy Wisdom.<sup>71</sup>

### **Ecotheological Christian praxis**

The intensity of the ecological crisis affecting life on this planet calls us to translate the 'text' to the 'texture' of life with a sense of greater urgency. Christian praxis can have no higher ideal than the ethics of peace and justice, that is fundamental to the realization of the Reign of God. Ecological justice demands humans making peace with one another and with the earth, peace that is founded on justice. Since ecological consciousness implies a sense of interconnectedness and inter-dependence of all species on earth we need to re-read our creation story and our scriptures through the eyes of the wounded planet so that the transition from 'master' to 'steward' to an 'inter-being' is facilitated through our diverse pastoral practices.

Eco-theological Christian praxis entails re-envisioning Christianity's powerful sacramental tradition and Sabbath traditions of blessing to include directly the honouring of creation as it affects the suffering of the earth and the need for justice for the poor.<sup>72</sup> Our penitential services could highlight the woundedness of creation by the acts of humanity and its ruthless systems. The raw elements of eucharistic liturgy - bread/body and wine/blood - affect the lives of poor people directly, yet, we allow these symbols to free-float, without anchoring it in the daily anguish of poor people the world over in their sustaining the very life for which Jesus lived and died.<sup>73</sup> We could evolve liturgies and other pastoral practices that will help the

---

<sup>70</sup> See Mark Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit*, New York: Continuum, 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, New York: Continuum 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization*, Op.cit.



faithful to celebrate the wonder of the whole cosmic process and find ways of harmonizing our lives with the life of the whole earth community. This demands – as noted by Ruether, a spirituality and ethic of mutual limitation and nurture of reciprocal life-giving, the very opposite of the spirituality of separation and domination.<sup>74</sup>

*Laudato Si'* reminds us of the urgency of 'caring for our common home.' Caring has been conventionally gendered as women's task as girls and women have been socialized to be expert caregivers in the family and the Church. Women have been professionally assigned the title of 'home makers' for their role as care-givers in the family. Women's role as care-takers of the environment got symbolized in the imagery of women from northern India hugging the trees to prevent their felling, what became global later, as the Chipko movement – "Chipko" in Hindi means "to embrace" or "hug". Today more than ever, there is an urgency for caring for the earth, our common home and in this task, it is imperative that all human persons – women, men and all people irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation become 'home makers' and care-givers.

Moving beyond the gendered prescriptions of care giving, care has to inform every aspect of public life be it in the sphere of politics, economy, religion and the like, so that decisions affecting life of humans and the earth are taken 'care-fully', causing no harm to anyone or anything. This ethics of care will help forge new forms of affective and life-sustaining relations with the nonhuman world. It is within this framework that we speak of care economy so that development becomes sustainable. This would help us to move beyond anthropocentrism and discover our ecological selves, that is nurtured by environmental resources and in inter-dependent relationality with them. Since very many people are still fixated in gender prescriptions and related roles, gender and environmental education need to inform ecological Christian praxis at every level of formation of children and adults, starting with the pulpit, catechesis, basic Christian/human communities and other spaces of Christian formation and education.

## **Conclusion**

---

<sup>74</sup> Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, p. 28.

Climate change, in spite of all its disastrous consequences can still be taken as a *kairos*, a decisive and grace-filled moment in our evolutionary story of human becoming. It is a crucial phase that invites us to a core conversion experience, which could liberate us from hierarchical and dualistic thinking patterns and make us grow with other life forms on this planet. It is a decisive and critical moment that calls us humans to evolve with the rest of creation, not as masters or mere stewards but as Eucharistic inter-beings, who break themselves to feed one another, who is willing to die that the other may live.

In this urgent task of 'caring for our common home', two radical thinkers who lived their lives passionately with a certain 'holy' impatience have something to say to us. Both of them had dreams of a new world order, and of a new way of being human. I would like to conclude borrowing the words Martin Luther King, who, in sharing his 'dream,' spoke of a "fierce urgency of now. This is no time...to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."<sup>75</sup> And Adrienne Rich, a feminist poet in her *The Dream of a Common Language* has this to say: '*This is what I am: watching the spider rebuild - "patiently" they say, but I recognize in her impatience - my own - the passion to make and make again where such unmaking reigns.*'<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps, this holy impatience is the challenge posed before us by climate change.

**Editorial note:** *Aside from the Dean Antonio G. M. La Viña, Fr. Clarence Devadass and Ms. Kochurani Abraham, also Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, Fr. Luke Rodrigues SJ and Fr Niphot Thienvoharn were speakers.*

Published March 2020

---

<sup>75</sup> King ML, *I have a dream: writings and speeches that changed the world*, New York: Harper Collins, 1963.

<sup>76</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources", *The Dream of a Common Language*, W. W. Norton & Co.;1978.

## FABC Papers:

150. FABC Papers Periodic Index (Papers 126-150), James H. Kroeger M.M., 2017
151. "The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy", XI FABC Plenary Assembly, Colombo, Sri Lanka, FABC Central Secretariat, March 2017
152. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 1, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs - BIRA VI, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
153. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 2, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs - BIRA VI, Dialogue with Religions in Asia and Interreligious Marriage, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
154. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 3, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs - BIRA VI, Dialogue with Religions in Asia and Interreligious Marriage, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
155. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Myanmar and Bangladesh, 26 November - 2 December 2017, organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, edited by FABC Central Secretariat, December 2017
156. Business in the Context of *Laudato Si'* - 1) *Laudato Si'* & Christian Business, 13 November 2016, organised by FABC Climate Change Desk in collaboration with the Christian Business Forum for Climate Change. 2) Business Sector's Response to *Laudato Si'*, 6-7 November 2017, organised by FABC Office of Human Development - Climate Change Desk with FABC Central Secretariat and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, edited by FABC Office of Human Development - Climate Change Desk. Conferences sponsored by CAFOD, December 2018
157. Shepherding Families in Asia: Contemporary Challenges and Responses for Bishops, Priests and Lay Leaders, 16 - 20 May 2016, Salesian Retreat House in Hua Hin, Thailand by FABC Office of Clergy and Office of Laity and Family, December 2018

158. Meeting of the Presidents of Doctrinal Commissions under the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), 15 - 18 January 2019, Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Bangkok, Thailand by FABC Office of Theological Concerns and Central Secretariat, March 2019
159. Responses to Doubts, Questions and Criticisms with regard to Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*, Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, Pontifical Alphonsian Academy, Rome, June 2019
160. Catholic Schools in Asia: A Shared Mission among Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful in the Light of Recent Papal Documents, 24 - 28 September 2018, Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand, FABC Office of Consecrated Life (OCL) and Office of Education and Faith Formation (OEFF), edited by Pablito A. Baybado Jr., Executive Secretary, OEFF, September 2019
161. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan, 19 - 26 November 2019, organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, edited by FABC Central Secretariat, December 2019

**FABC Papers is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), published continuously since 1976, designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. All of the FABC Papers are freely available on-line in pdf format on the FABC website: [www.fabc.org](http://www.fabc.org). To facilitate access and research of all of the FABC Papers, various indexes are available in FABC Papers Nos. 100, 125, and 150. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: [fabccentral@yahoo.com](mailto:fabccentral@yahoo.com)**