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Editorial |

The Call of *Laudato Si'* |

In a highly anticipated papal encyclical released Thursday, June 18, 2015 at 3:30 PM (IST), Pope Francis called on Catholics worldwide to make safeguarding the environment and battling climate change an urgent and top priority of the 21st century. The title, *Laudato Si'* is taken from St. Francis Assisi's famous The Canticle of the Sun, "*Laudato Si', mi' Signore*" – "Praise be to you, my Lord"

Pope Francis released an encyclical focused on ecology. The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to the discussion of environmental questions, by lifting up the moral dimensions of these issues and the needs of the most vulnerable among us. This unique contribution is rooted in Catholic teaching calling us to care for creation and for "the least of these."

In the lengthy encyclical, addressed to "every person" who lives on Earth, the pope lays out a moral case for supporting sustainable economic and population growth as part of the church's mission and humanity's responsibility to protect God's creation for future generations. While saying that there were natural causes to climate change over the earth's history, the letter also says in strong words that human activity and production of greenhouse gases are to blame.

The Holy Father accepts the data from the sciences with regards to the ecological problems and tries to bring in religion to

handle the challenging situation. He is remarkably straightforward:

A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it....The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes (#23).

It is hoped that these collection of articles will help us to understand the original document better. Three of these articles – those of George Pattery, Aloysius Britto and Johncy SMI – came from a seminar organised by Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeth on August, 10, 2015. The readers, I am sure, will respond personally to the challenges offered by the Holy Father. Because of it, this issue of AJRS primarily devoted to this valuable encyclical.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor



Pope Francis' Call for Sustainable, Integral and Human Development

Bishop Thomas Dabre
Bishop of Pune

The title of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* is significant on two counts as it is a call to praise and thank God for creation which is his gift to all humanity as it is also a hard-hitting critique of us all for polluting and depleting it.

It is for the first time that an entire Papal Encyclical letter is devoted to the issue of environment and climate change. Thereby Pope Francis has inserted ecology into the all-important eschatological process of salvation. “...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God...the whole creation has been groaning in travail together, not only the creation, but we ourselves, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.”(Rom 8:21,22)

Generally we are living as though salvation is limited to God-human relationship and human issues of justice, truth and

love. The encyclical widens the scope of our understanding of our salvation and faith. In simple terms this would mean, we cannot simply continue with our faith, devotions, piety and prayers and let God's creation to go from bad to worse.

The Holy Father says in the encyclical our mother and sister are crying "This sister 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 soil, the water, the air and all forms of life have been depleted and degraded by our greed. The earth herself is burdened and laid waste, and is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22).

However, unlike us, the Creator on the other hand, has love and tenderness towards the things of his creation. The Holy Bible says, "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (*Wis 11:24*). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection, says the Pope with a moving fellow-feeling for creation.

We cannot use and consume the goods of the earth as we wish. Sometimes people are inclined to say that since they have the money they can buy and use as they like. But that is a gross error. It is God's creation. We respect it as such. It is given to all human beings of all time. We must leave the earth and its goods also for the others who will come after us. We cannot follow the simplistic practice of "first come first served and bones for the late-comers," when it comes to the use of things of the earth.

The Pope urges us to feel responsible for creation and take care of it and develop it. He says, "Judeo-Christian thought emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature." He affirms "the responsibility of human beings who, as part of

the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.” We cannot simply take the resources and riches of the earth and use them at will. We have to take steps to develop what God has laid out before us.

The Church therefore cannot be indifferent to the problems of environment and climate change. The Holy Father implies that if we are not careful with regard to the use of the earth and its goods, we may well destroy ourselves. The Church must therefore give a shining example of the protection of environment and of dealing with the dangerous situation of global warming and climate change. This would also demand a re-ordering and re-prioritizing of the Church work and ministry. The pastors and ministers of the Church should not limit themselves to the typical spiritual ministry of celebrating the sacraments and pious exercises of prayer, worship and piety. These certainly are most important and should be promoted by all means. The Holy Father inspires us not to limit ourselves narrowly to these practices. Indeed these spiritual practices themselves invite us to expand the horizons of our mind and involve ourselves in the care and promotion of the earth and its goods.

Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all.

The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and

through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

The exaggerated use of technology has led to the ecological crisis. Therefore the Pope's warning against the dangers of technology is well-founded. "...technology sometimes solves one problem only to create others." Technology is only instrumental. The human agent behind technology has abused these instrumental resources and created the present ecological problems.

The encyclical affirms that all and everyone must help to protect the environment and deal with the challenges of the ecological crisis.

Development is necessary for humans to be able to attain the fullness of life. Besides it should not lead to the marginalization of the poor; nor should it lead to the degradation and depletion of environment and resources of the earth which are meant for the benefit of all human beings. In the use of material resources human beings must maintain their unique dignity and not become a slave of these and be addicted to these. Therefore the call of the Pope to effect a change of models of production and consumption needs to be heeded. More importantly, it is incumbent on all, especially the leaders at all level to ensure a sustainable, integral and human development. 🌱



The Seamless Garment of God's Creation

George Pattery SJ

Jesuit Provincial of South Asia, New Delhi

In an article titled “The Flowers of Papa Francesco”¹ Sudheendra Kulkarni, one-time ideologue of BJP, made this insightful observation: “at a time when official India, after a long slumber of denial, has woken up to the harsh realities of poverty and wealth inequality brought to light by the Socioeconomic and Caste Census (SECC) earlier this month, I am pained to see that few prominent Hindu religious leaders have deemed it their duty to comment on it. Even though poor Hindus constitute the majority among the Indian poor, Hindu religious leaders are not very vocal about poverty in India, much less about global poverty. Have we ever heard the Ashok Singhal and Praveen Togadias of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) speak about poverty and the egregious wealth divide as evidence of unacceptable economic injustice that is against the basic teachings of Hinduism? No. Their priority, it seems, is to make India a ‘Hindu rashtra’, pursuing a divisive agenda that actually seeks to de-emphasise any anti-poverty agenda”.

From all accounts it is obvious that *Laudato Si* (hence forth referred to as LS) is very timely and challenging piece of

¹ (‘Outlook’ Aug 03, 2015; .
<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?294917>)

Papal teaching. It is a game-changer in many ways. The fact that Pope Francis chose to write on the most vexing and challenging issue of our time is itself a powerful theological statement. Let us highlight some of the features that are significant from South Asian perspective; however this is no substitute to reading the text in full and relish ‘Francis Effect’.

1) LS qualify this planet earth as our **‘common home.’** This is unusual. Rather than talking about ‘valley of tears of the banished children of Eve wandering on this earth’ in search of the other world, LS makes bold to call this earth as our ‘home’. It is God’s creation, it is common habitat, and it is our home. A new respectful relationship is proposed with earth as our home. This is good news to all the indigenous people; it is an indictment of the powerful who plunder ‘our home’.

2) Created by a loving Father, this world is a graced entity in every particle. There is the presence of the divine in every tiny element of this earth. Everything and everyone is interconnected and inter-dependent; everything is suffused with the divine. Moving away from the Greco-Roman dualistic thinking which had influenced Christian thought far too long, *Laudato Si* sings a different tune: the divine is present in the earthly; **‘that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation**, in the last speck of dust of our planet’.

3) Concern for earth is essentially linked with **concern for the poor**. Eco-sensitivity is not leisure time activity of the elite, but a significant commitment towards the poor. When earth is plundered by the rich and the powerful, the poor, the women and children are the most affected. They live on the peripheries where the pollution and waste are dumped. Soon after becoming Pope in March 2013, he said, “Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education.” He was addressing a gathering of students from Albania, the

poorest country in Europe. “I tell all you young persons: don’t let yourselves be robbed of hope. Please, don’t let it be stolen from you. The worldly spirit, wealth, the spirit of vanity, arrogance, and pride...all these things steal hope. Poverty calls us to sow hope.”

5) *Laudato Si* respects **the wisdom traditions** of the world and invites a new spiritual bonding with the entire humanity and the planet. The humankind journeys with the planet earth to the destined fulfillment of the creation and we are part of that journey.

6) *Laudato Si* talks about ‘**gospel of creation**’; creation is a gospel; it is good news for all and of all. The Encyclical is thus attempting to retrieve this patristic notion (creation as the first testament) for today through Francis of Assisi! To imbibe the spirit of *Laudato Si* means learning to walk humbly and gently on the face of the earth.

7) LS deals with several “**aspects of the present ecological crisis**”: pollution, waste and the throw-away culture; climate as a common good; displacement and migration caused by environmental degradation; access to safe drinking water as a basic and universal human right; loss of bio-diversity; decline in the quality of human life and break-down of society; global inequality etc. LS has also denounced pesticides and genetically engineered (GE) crops, declaring “*the spread of these crops destroys the complex web of eco-systems, decreases diversity in production and affects the present and the future of regional economies*”. Bio-tech companies across the world will surely not be happy with this statement! Human crisis: Pope Francis warns us: ‘Time, my brothers and sisters, seems to be running out; we are not yet tearing one another apart, but we are tearing apart our common home. Today, the scientific community realizes what the poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem. The earth,

entire peoples and individual persons are being brutally punished. And behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea – one of the first theologians of the Church – called “the dung of the devil”. An unfettered pursuit of money rules. This is the “dung of the devil”. The service of the common good is left behind. Once capital becomes an idol and guides people’s decisions, once greed for money presides over the entire socioeconomic system, it ruins society, it condemns and enslaves men and women, it destroys human fraternity, it sets people against one another and, as we clearly see, it even puts at risk our common home, sister and mother earth.’

LS delineates the various causes of the ecological crisis. It interrogates **the ‘autonomy of the marketplace’ as a new form of tyranny**, in which whirlwind of needless buying and spending resulting in compulsive consumerism, widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion” are taken on. Pope Francis challenges the existing dogma that consumerism is god for growth. The fact that what is called ‘growth and development’ today is a morally, socially and ecologically cancerous growth. He is inviting the global community to take a pro-poor and low-carbon reorientation of the global economy. Thus LS has set the agenda for the crucial United Nations climate talks due in Paris this December, when world leaders will try to reach a new agreement aimed at reducing greenhouse gases. One of the specific anti-poverty measures Pope Francis has been demanding these days is that governments must accept the three Ls—labour, lodging, land—as the fundamental rights of the poor. (Cf. *Sudheendra Kulkarni*).

9) LS argues that ecological crisis is not merely a political, economic or scientific question. Religious or **spiritual perspective** has to be brought in for an integral approach to view creation as a holy gift from God and therefore to care for the earth. LS decries the model of development that is dominating our world today and proposes an outlook that is not

technocratic and controlled by market economy of extreme consumerism. Leonardo Boff's celebrated phrase that 'poverty is the antidote to poverty' seems to be validated by LS when it says 'less is more'.

Everything is related, we need one another. If politics is dominated by financial speculation, or if the economy is ruled solely by a technocratic and utilitarian paradigm concerned with maximum production, we will not grasp, much less resolve, the great problems of humanity. Cultural life has an important role to play in this regard, for it has to do not only with the development of the mind through the sciences and the creation of beauty through the arts, but also esteem for the local traditions of a people – this is also culture – which are so expressive of the milieu in which they arose and emerged, and the milieu which gives them meaning.(143) There is also need for an ethical and moral education which can cultivate solidarity and shared responsibility between individuals. We should acknowledge the specific role of the religions in the development of culture and the benefits which they can bring to society.

'Laudato Si' proposes a **new spirituality** in which saving water, maintaining eco-garden, caring for the poor of this world and manual labour, denouncing consumerism and the tyranny of the market forces are spiritual activities that the believers are urged to take on. It elicits a devotion to everything. LS lauds the sacramentality of everything. Reverence is to be practiced towards everything because it is suffused with the divine. LS implies an every-day spirituality that impinges on our everyday choices. It is based on the social teaching of the church on **Universal destination of goods**. The eco-habitat like the Amazon rain forests and the western ghats (**India**) are to be protected for the sustenance of the planet earth. LS corroborates

the Gandhian approach of Swadeshi of being rooted in the here and now and expanding in ever-widening circle.

10) Pope's encyclical is a wake-up call to all religions to discover the common ground on which they are standing and search for common solutions to the ecological crisis. The creation theology of Abrahamic faith and the deep empathy visible in the Eastern religions with the natural world could form a common platform to search for solutions to ecological crisis in spite of the alienation caused by the developmental agenda in the last 200 years. Francis' encyclical rightly draws our attention to the connection between the degradation of the planet – largely by rich over-consuming nations – and the effects of this on the poor. The secular world only has more economics, unsustainable consumption and quantitative easing to offer. Spiritual perspective of LS provides an integral approach. Let us embrace with tenderness all that exists! 🌱

Quotes from *Laudato Si'*

- “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.” (160)
- “Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life.” (189)



Love for the Poor and Concern for the Earth A Biblical Appraisal of *Laudato Si'*

Sr Johncy SMI
Jnana-Deepa Vidaypeeth, Pune

We live in a century when science and technology is making rapid growth and at the same time it is characterized by the misuse and abuse causing great concern for the ecosystem. The long history of exploitation of creation is a reason for the irreversible climate change. Taking care of nature thus has become a vital issue for the political as well as the intellectual world today. At this juncture Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si - Praise be to you*, is a **beacon of light** for everyone. Therefore the encyclical is a worldwide wake-up call to protect the earth "**our common home**" from the impending ecological crisis and destruction.

Laudato Si: Chapter II The Gospel of Creation, is the most spiritual part of the encyclical showing how faith oriented response brings incentive and requirements needed in the society for the healing of the ecosystem at the brink of this ecological collapse. The Pope here says that "environment is

God's self-revelation and it is something through which God is speaking to us." It presents a comprehensive view of creation and preservation of creation that comes from biblical perspective, and calls for a '*conversion of heart*' in taking care of the nature and the poor while we make scientific and technological progress. The following is a summary of the chapter offering headings with a critical commentary.

The entire creation of God is good

"God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was *very good*" (*Gen* 1:31). What has happened to this creation that was good? - it is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (21). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (*Gen* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive her life and refreshment from her waters (2).

The uniqueness of human being

Every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone". The uniqueness is not meant to show our superiority over the other, but to live in harmony with everyone and the entire universe. Responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate relationship existing between the creatures of this world" (*Ps* 148:5b-6). This uniqueness places great responsibility on humans that is, to take care of the earth entrusted to them (cf. 65).

Need of a correct understanding of *Gen* 2:15.

Christianity is not an anthropocentric religion at the expense of the other creation as wrongly understood and accused of. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. *Gen* 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means

caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. These two verbs indicate the responsibility of human species to work in the creation and also to protect it lets it is deprived of its divine beauty. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature (cf. 67).

Ours is a related existence

The creation story (Gen 1:27-28; 2:4) suggests that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with neighbour, with self and with the earth itself. Yet these four vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. (Gen 3:1-23). As a result there arose conflicts and enmity between each other and much sufferings and sorrows. The earth was no longer a paradise to live in.

The earth gets polluted under its inhabitants

Prosperity means also fraternal love (Gen 4:9-11. In the story of Cain and Abel, the relationship between God and Cain and between Cain and the earth is seen estranged because of the injustice done to his brother. The consequences were: (1) Land crying out to God for justice (2) Constant fear and restlessness (Gen 4:9-11); (3) Alienation from God and neighbor (4) and bareness of the land. As in the words of Prophet Isaiah, “The earth is polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (Is 24:5ff) (cf. 71-72). The earth suffers under the sin of its inhabitants.

Love of God Demands Love of Neighbor and Nature

The Deuteronomic covenant was a call to worship only Yahweh (Deut 6:4-5); this then overflowed into all areas of life, e.g., concern for the poor (Deut 15:1-18), and justice in the legal

system (Deut 16:18–20) as well as in the economic sphere (Deut 25:13–16). It extends even to caring for the natural environment (Deut 20:19–20). Israel’s very life and existence depend on this; covenant fidelity will lead to blessing; infidelity, to curse that would affect all the areas of life (Deut 28). The prophet Isaiah again shows the consequence of transgressing the law and the covenantal rules:

“The windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, and the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again” (Is 24:18-20).

Sabbath Regulations for Love and Justice.

1. Seventh day was a day of rest, a *Sabbath*, (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Ex 16:23; 20:10).
2. Every seven year, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, and a complete rest for the land (cf. Lev 25:1-4): when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one’s household (cf. Lev 25:4-6).
3. The forty-ninth year, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and “liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (cf. Lev 25:10).

Land is healed when human returns to God

God calls for a healing: he says that if the people who are called by his name

1. humble themselves
2. pray seek his face,
3. and turn from their wicked ways

then God will :

1. hear from heaven,

2. forgive their sin
3. and *heal their land*. (2Ch 7: 14) we see this in the story of Noah.

Land is healed when people return to the demands of the covenantal relationship with God: a need very much felt today as we hear the cry of the poor and cry of the earth.

Call to worship God is a call for all creation

The Psalms frequently exhort us to praise God the Creator (Ps 136:60). They also invite other creatures to praise God with us (Ps 148:3-5). So all creation belongs to God, and is oriented towards him (cf. 72). This shows the value and sacredness of all creation, and they are to be respected and cared for.

Moments of crisis seen as a call to return to God

Prophets invite the people to find renewed strength in times of trial by contemplating the all-powerful God. “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless” (Is 40:28b-29). This is the need of the hour – a complete turning to God in humility and trust - as the prophet Isaiah tells, ‘Your salvation lay in conversion and tranquility, your strength in serenity and trust (Is 30:15) (cf. 73-75).

Love for creation is not nature worship

The creation of the world by god is not a by chance creation. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things (cf. Wis 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. The Bible never sees nature as the object of our worship but emphasizes our responsibility towards caring for them. God reveals himself in creation but creation is not God. A fragile world, entrusted by

God to human care, challenges us *to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power*. The work of the Church is to care for the nature, but at the same time she should protect humankind from destruction (cf. 76 - 79).

Uniqueness of humans along with the other beings

The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object. We are capable of entering into a relationship to the other, and with oneself, with our reason and other capacities which can never be explained by any evolutionary theory. There is something beyond the evolution in humans. Yet the other beings are not mere objects subjected to human domination. God wills the interdependence of creatures. We should see God reflected in all that exists (cf. 84-87).

The world a universal family and it belongs to God

God has joined the humans to the world as a universal family. It is our duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. “The earth is the Lord’s” (*Ps* 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (*Dt* 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (*Lev* 25:23). The Church is not against the legitimate right to private property but it must be in accordance with Gods regulations being mindful of the have-nots (cf. 93). So we have our great worth and tremendous responsibility which equals no other creatures.

Our passion for the protection of the universe is not to be at the expense of humankind. When there is great compassion and love for our brothers and sisters automatically that will flow to the other beings too (cf. 89-92). The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. Apart from the ownership of property, rural people must have access to means of technical education, credit, insurance, and markets.”

God has written a precious book, “whose letters is the multitude of created things present in the universe” (cf. 93-95).

Ecology in the life and teachings of Jesus

Jesus looked at the lilies of the field, the sparrow of sky, the corns in the fields, the mountains, vineyards, the poor and needy, the children and the widows, the rich and the learned and found in them all the God who created them and this God is Father, for he says “your heavenly Father feeds them.” It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to the works of his hands in a simple life style which awakened no admiration at all (cf. 96 -100).

The destiny of all creation

The destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ. Through him all things were made, all things exist and through him all things are reconciled to God. God so loved the world and sanctified it once again when the Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He was born in the manger surrounded by animals and the most natural realities. Today the whole cosmos is permeated by his glorious presence risen and dwelling with us even to the ends of time. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now (Rom 8:21-22). We have only one origin, one home, and one destiny that of Christ (cf. 99-100). So, a spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. No development is a development worth its name ignoring the poor and needy and the destruction of the universe.

Conclusion

Nature cannot be destroyed without humankind ultimately being destroyed itself. Centuries of exploitation of the environment has finally caught up with us. This earth, so touchingly looked upon as our sister and mother lies in ruin has become a dust bin where we throw things which neither we can use nor the earth can take in; the result of our lack of prudence in progress.

The current deplorable environmental crisis demands a spiritual response too. A fundamental reorientation of human relatedness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner conversion and commitment, is very much needed. One of the measures that could help a great deal to fulfill this need is to regenerate and rejuvenate the basic values of biblical teachings. We have a long way to go to live up to the expectation of the encyclical. 🌱

The Alumni of Papal Seminary and Jnana-Deepa Vidaypeeth are invited for an International Conference on “Befriending the Other” on the occasion of sixty years of their existence in Pune, on November 24-28, 2015. Please mark these dates on your calendar.

For details, please visit: www.papalseminary.in



***Laudato Si'* Harkens to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor**

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Personally I am happy that Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune is one of the pioneers in the country to organise a comprehensive seminar on *Laudato Si* and thanks to the organisers for asking me to note down the highlights of my own sharing during the Seminar. In spite of my personal involvement in social forestry by raising nurseries and propagating each one and plant one scheme through our educational mission and social action programmes I had developed an antipathy towards the term, “environmental protection” as the enthusiasts had been overemphasising the theme while excluding the poorest sections who have been the main victims of the process and consequence of the same environmental pollution. The call of *Laudato Si'* to harken to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” has transformed my attitude drastically with my participation in the recently held high level International Conference at the Vatican, Rome by the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace and CIDSE on “People and Planet First: The Imperative to change Course”.

Cardinal Peter KA Turkson, President of the Commission in his keynote address emphasised that it was not people or planet or one over the other as both are equally imperative. Pope Francis through his prophetic Encyclical which I wish to call as the Magna Carta of the Church's Social Teachings, “*Laudato Si*” (Praise be to you)

quoting St. Francis of Assisi has reconnected the bond between the concern for nature and justice for the poor - to promote human dignity, to eradicate poverty and counter environmental decay. Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin as the Chief Guest of the Conference called the world community to re-direct our steps and to cultivate a culture of care. CIDSE calls for a “Change for the Planet and Care for the People”. The Encyclical calls the earth as our common home which is a shared inheritance and the fruits must benefit everyone.

The timing of the Encyclical is apparently meant to influence major global decision making Conferences on environment: July 2015 Addis Ababa Conference on Financing for Development, September 2015 UN General Assembly on setting new Sustainable Development Goals and December 2015 Paris Conference of the Heads of all the Member Nations on Global Climate Change. However, the Encyclical that remains a course changing document for all for a long time to come to make the Climate Change an “Integral Ecology” – environmental, social, economic and political for distribution of goods that really belong to all and are meant for all. Efforts for Global Climate change must address the denial of basic needs like drinking water and food which is a human right to a life with dignity; decline in quality of human life and breakdown of society and the loss of bio-diversity. Questioning the tendency for impressive dominance over the whole humanity and the entire world investing to gain and for enriching a few, the Pope says that market forces should not be allowed to decide for all.

Calling for a preferential option for the poor the Encyclical states that Integral Ecology can no longer separate social and environmental issues. Action for change should include all and ideologies should not replace common good. The Encyclical expects intense and continued education and for developing a new spirituality and life-style with the principles emphasised in the Encyclical. While there is a need for technology and science the Encyclical says that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on

the environment, so as to hear both the **“cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”**.

Laudato Si has immediate implications for India: The Church and Christian Organisations and Institutions in India must give topmost priority and agenda to the understanding and implementation of the Encyclical. Special Assemblies of the CBCI, National CRI and other Bodies must be held at the earliest to deliberate upon the ways and means of reaching the essential message of the Encyclical every level of political, social, educational and economic system in the Country. The Christian educational institutions that have been in forefront of propagating single dimensional aspect of climate change now must unlearn the old technological understanding and relearn Integral Ecology in the background of *Laudato Si*'.

Further, the Encyclical must be included in the main syllabi of the educational institutions, seminaries, formation study houses, Parish study circles, etc. To hold national and regional level seminars and workshops on the Encyclical. To translate the Encyclical into regional languages and create awareness among people at all levels. To hold interdenominational and interfaith dialogues on the teachings of the Encyclical which may be acceptable to them. To initiate movements and to join the national and regional efforts to impress upon Central and State Governments to reframe policies on integral ecology in the best spirit of the Encyclical and the Government to take proactive stand in the context of the Encyclical at the forthcoming UN General Assembly to set new Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Global Summit in December 2015. 🌱



Learning to Care for Creation

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The Holy Father Francis in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi has expressed his grave concerns for the care of our common home, the earth or the ‘earthy community’ in this encyclical. He is not telling us something radically new, but has mirrored and amplified the feeble voices that were unheard: the concerns from the earth, the ecology and the place of humanity in all creation. He talks at a time when we today are trapped in our human-made urban technological complex, built on a reductive science that narrows life to a materialistic and consumeristic way of life.

Pope Francis reminds us that this whole creation existed before us and will continue to exist after us and yet creation acted as womb to birth humanity and consciousness. He asks the very primal question that each generation asks: Why does creation exist in this first place? Why do we exist at all? Does our urban technological complex have the answers? Stephen Hawking in his studies of the Big-Bang, was perplexed by these same questions. He even asked: “Why do we exist in the first place?” Then he added: “What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?” We today have very many equations for life but have quenched the fire of our souls to breathe back life into them. It is time now to rediscover the moral foundations of our world, creation and humanity.

The Pope describes our contemporary reality and its human condition. He talks about poverty and gross inequalities which wastes human potential, weakens the entire community and puts

the whole family at risk, diminishing their hopes for better lives, and make them insignificant throughout the world. This world today has great technology that has created the possibilities of globalization, but what we are, in fact, globalizing is the free market, structural unfreedom, greed, competition, poverty and inequality. It has no space for the poor, marginalized, the vulnerable. What exists is the addictive consumeristic market and the few rich. Today we have the technology for a global positioning system which helps us to find our way in time and space, but in other ways it has made us unable to find our ethical coordinates and the spiritual vision that would help us find a place in human solidarity. The Pope has summoned us to this commitment, to generate the “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity” (216). He holds that “the external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become vast. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (272), a change in our lifestyle in which we learn to care, love and befriend each other and the whole creation as brothers and sisters. The figure of St. Francis of Assisi makes us realize that a healthy relationship with creation can bring about healing to our wounded civilization (219). It is a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works. It entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion” (220).

Early in the 1960’s Lewis Mumford voiced the same concerns as the present Pope when he said that for an effective salvation, humankind will need to undergo a spontaneous religious conversion: one that will replace the mechanical pictures of the world with an organic world picture and the human personality as the highest known manifestation of life. Such a view will respect a thinking which is ecological and organic and which adopts the needs for not only humans nor of any one generation, but of all organic partners and all of their habitat. Such a new

organic mode of ecological associating and self-organisation, is what the Pope calls for.

As the world has become less organic and more dependent on techno-fixes for problems created by early technologies, humans have substituted new world-views for the earlier one, which was filled with clean streams, animals, the sky, the stars. This was the world-view of people working together with a sacred purpose. Now we need a collective psychological and spiritual process to heal us, technological people, who through a mechanical culture have lost touch with their essential humanity.

Finally, the Pope in this encyclical resonates with the sentiments of the Tamil Siddha poet: “The rich build temples, but the poor sadhaka turns his body into a temple.”¹⁴

Quotes from *Laudato Si'*

- “Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.” (230)
- “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” (14).



Moral Basis for Collective Living

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Laudato si' (Praise Be to You") the second circular letter (encyclical) of Pope Francis, has the subtitle: "On the care for our common home." In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, and calls for "swift and unified global action" to combat environmental degradation. Published on June 18, the letter focuses on the "urgent challenge to protect our common home to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change".

He adds: "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic and political. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades."

The letter is all about interconnectedness and relationships with fellow-human beings, with mother nature and with god. In the introductory section, Francis, following St Francis of Assisi, calls the earth our "common home," which is like our sister and our mother. But we are damaging this familial relationship as we harm the environment. In so doing, we are damaging our relationship with other humans, particularly those least equipped to defend themselves: the poor and future generations. We are forgetting our interconnectedness with the earth and with those around and ahead of us who depend on our good stewardship of the gift of creation.

Given the universal nature of our common home, Francis makes it clear that the encyclical is addressed not only to Christians but a means to "enter into

dialogue” with all people who are “united by the same concern”. Chapter 5 of the letter calls for dialogue between different religions and sciences.

Pope Francis holds that “caring for ecosystems demands farsightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation.” He denounces indifference, resignation and obstructionism and announces a more positive vision deeply rooted in his spirituality and helps him to re-locate our place in god’s greater plan for creation. He encourages cooperation, leaving room for the genius of individual “cultures, experience, involvements and talents.”

It is essentially a hopeful letter. “Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful.”

An editorial in the prestigious scientific journal Nature praised the letter. “The papal calls to end poverty and share the world’s ecological space in a fair way are objectives that mirror the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, to be released in September. The pope’s letter adds an important facet to the discussion.”

Taking this as an example, can religious, scientific and civil leaders come together, draw from our collective wisdom and cooperate to battle the grave threats that humanity faces? Can we really recognise the moral and spiritual basis for the technological and social problems we face? Can our spirituality lead to a more authentic common living? 🌱

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Pope Francis's Call for '*Gharvapati*'

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“**O**ur common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” This introductory sentence in Pope Francis’s encyclical ‘*Laudato Si*’ (Latin, meaning, ‘Praised be, You!’)¹ sets the tone for reflections on our common home, the earth, and our relationship to Her. What strikes me as the core of this popular papal encyclical is the call for conversion, a so-called ‘*gharvapati*’, literally, a ‘home-coming’ that stands out as Pope Francis’s call and challenge to every Christian; indeed, to everyone whom our Mother Earth embraces, nurses and houses.

Pope Francis laments, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth”² due to many reasons: pollution, wastage, a throwaway culture, selfish exploitation of the earth’s resources and lack of concern for the poor, who are worst affected and least equipped to cope with ecological crises. Given this pathetic state of affairs, let’s ask ourselves: How can I-We respond to the Pope’s plea to clean this widespread global filth and respond to “both the cry of the earth and cry of the poor?”³

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places,” says Jesus to his disciples (Jn 14:2-3). Our ultimate destiny according to

Christian eschatology and cosmology is union with God—picturesquely seen as “Our Father’s Home: Heaven!” Indeed, the ‘good news’ that Jesus Christ came to give can basically be condensed in three simple propositions:

- 1) Our God of Love (1 Jn 4:8) is *Amma-Abba*-Parent of us all;
- 2) Jesus Christ, God’s Son, became flesh and ‘pitched his home-tent’ in our midst (Jn 1:14) so that all of us can become His sisters-brothers, and children of God;
- 3) God’s Spirit “who blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8) supports and sanctifies all of creation till Jesus will hand over everything and everyone “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

This is a beautiful cosmic vision, which, unfortunately, has been reduced to a myopic, anthropocentric idea that brings destruction and death to everyone and everything.

It is beyond the scope of this short reflection to reflect upon the many nuances that the Biblical image of ‘house’ and ‘home’ brings.⁴ However, we must remember that the English words ecology, economics and ecumenism all have their etymological roots in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning, ‘home’. The Pope tells us to do some ‘homework’; and, since ‘charity begins at home’, what better way is there to keep our house clean than to begin with the singular “I-me”?

As a first step, the Pope calls us to an “ecological conversion”. He writes:⁵

[T]he ecological crisis is a summons to *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.

With this pointed, personal focus, we must all beat our breasts with a ‘*mea culpa*’ for engendering the devastation that we’ve brought upon God’s created cosmos. So, let’s first return to the ‘home of our hearts’ and truly be sorry for what we’ve done as individuals. Let’s also take simple but concrete ecofriendly measures to make this world a more habitable and hospitable home for all.

Beyond the purely personal level, we have sinned against God and Nature as community. As a Christian faith-community, Pope Francis invites us to contemplate the “gaze of Jesus”.⁶ This penetrative, incisive, insightful, comprehensive and compassionate gaze of Jesus loved all of creation in a way that was “far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, have left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel.”⁷ We must admit that the hegemonic, triumphalist periods of Christian history and so-called ‘Christendom’ have brought Christianity to disrepute and ruin to many parts of our world.

Western thought, at large, has developed a fragmentary, dualistic and anthropocentric view of reality. Pope Francis unearths the so-called “human roots of the ecological crisis”⁸ that undermine a harmonious, holistic and healthy view of our cosmic home. While accepting that: “Technoscience, when well directed, can produce important means of improving the quality of life,”⁹ he offers a critique of its underside—its lopsided development “according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional [technocratic] paradigm”¹⁰ brought about by “modern anthropocentrism” that has resulted in “prizing technical thought over reality,” thereby compromising the “integral dignity” of the cosmos.¹¹

Asians, in general, and we Indians, in particular, are fortunate to inherit and innately imbibe an Indic-Mystic-Cosmic religious

consciousness that is holistic and fosters the welfare of all God's creatures—and not only that of human beings. Indian thinker Raimundo Panikkar calls this the '*cosmotheandric consciousness*' that becomes aware of, and responds to, all of reality in the dynamic intertwining of God-Wo/man-Cosmos.¹² With this deep awareness of the divine-human-nature interplay in all of reality, we become better equipped to respond the ecological crises.

As noted earlier, economics and ecumenism are intimately related to ecology. Many of the earth's rich and powerful—especially in the so-called 'First World'—are critical of Pope Francis's exhortation to adopt "new lifestyles" and "to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start."¹³ This "change in lifestyle," the Pope explains, "could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power."¹⁴ How can, we, in India, respond to this clarion call?

The inclusive and universal tone of Pope Francis is heartening in addressing "all people of goodwill,"¹⁵ saying: "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."¹⁶ He adds, "It's good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our faith convictions."¹⁷ As one of his aims, Pope Francis writes, "In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home;"¹⁸ and, in his "lines of approach and action," he speaks of many "dialogues".¹⁹ In India, inter-religious dialogue is always a fruitful avenue of responding to crises that affect us all.

The religions of Mother India can collaboratively inspire us to care for mother earth. The adivasi-tribal religions celebrate Mother Nature and foster an all-embracing sense of the sacred in their myths, culture, festivals and lifestyles. The Vedas look at all beings—living and nonliving—as subsisting by the same spiritual power. The whole universe becomes "one home" (*ekaneedam*; Yajur V. 32:8) and one must transcend one's ego (*ahamkara*) to enter into transcendental consciousness of the Ground of all beings.

The Koranic concepts of ‘*khalifa*’ (trusteeship) and ‘*tawheed*’ (the unity of all creatures) instruct Muslims to shoulder their responsibilities as guardians of Allah’s creation, so as to bequeath a green earth for future generations. Buddha preached an ethic of universal harmony (*dhamma*), embracing not only human beings but also all creatures. This engenders universal love with compassion (*karuna*), friendliness (*metta*), gentleness (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekha*) towards all beings.

The Pope writes: “As Christians, we are also called to accept the world as *a sacrament of communion*, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.”²⁰ Do we really “see God in everything and everything in God” as mystics like Ignatius of Loyola and Francis of Assisi saw?

Pope Francis’s ecological are deeply Trinitarian. He writes:

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. ... The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that s/he enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.

It's clear that to care for our earthly home, we need 'gharvapasi' and creative, committed and collaborative 'homework' among entrepreneurs, economists, ecumenists, scientists, politicians and policymakers, worldwide. If we concertedly commit ourselves to what Pope Francis calls "integral ecology,"²¹ then all of creation will joyously sing, "*Laudato Si*! Praised be God!" as we journey along green pastures towards Our Father's House. 🌱

Notes

¹ This article reflects upon the recently released Encyclical Letter '*Laudato Si*' [Praise be to You] of the Holy Father Francis on the Care for our Common Home (Vatican: St. Peter's, 2015). The Letter was aptly given on May 24, 2015, the Solemnity of Pentecost. This document will hereafter be abbreviated as 'LS' with a number appearing thereafter referring to the number in the encyclical.

² See LS 21.

³ See LS 49.

⁴ See Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Illinois and Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 393-395, s.v. 'Home, House' for further details.

⁵ See LS 216-217. The direct quote is from LS 217.

⁶ See LS chapter 2, section 7, nn. 96-100.

⁷ See LS 98.

⁸ Chapter 3 of LS is entitled: "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis".

⁹ See LS 103.

¹⁰ See LS 106.

¹¹ Chapter 3, section III of LS is more specifically entitled: "The Crisis and Effects of Modern Anthropocentrism." Quoted phrases from LS 115.

¹² The works of Panikkar are numerous. This idea appears in many of his writings—most notably in his final three works towards the end of his life: (a) *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, trans. a. DiLascia (New York: Orbis Books, 2004); (b) *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*, trans. J. Cunneen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); and (c) *The Rhythm of Being* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010).

¹³ See LS 207.

¹⁴ See LS 206.

¹⁵ See LS 62.

¹⁶ See LS 14.

¹⁷ See LS 64.

¹⁸ See *LS* 3.

¹⁹ See Chapter 5 entitled “Lines of Approach and Action,” *LS* 163-201.

²⁰ See *LS* 9. Italics added.

²¹ See *LS* 62, 124, and chapter 4, nn.137ff.

Quotes from *Laudato Si'*

- The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life.” (235)
- Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (42)
- We can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. (112)
- There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology. When the human person is considered as simply one being among others, the product of chance or physical determinism, then our overall sense of responsibility wanes.(118)



Homily Notes

Sept 6, 2015: XXIII Sunday of the Year

Is 35: 4-7; Jas 2: 1-5; Mk 7: 31-37

He has done everything fine

We are very grateful to God, because with our eyes, we are able to see the world around us, with our ears, we can hear the sounds around us and we can walk because of our strong feet. But imagine, if we are dumb or deaf or blind or paralyzed, how would we feel? We are very thankful to God, because He has done everything fine for us (Mk. 7:37).

Today all the three readings focus on God who revealed himself in Jesus as God of the weak and the oppressed. Prior to Jesus, many prophets had come into the world. Through them, miraculous wonders were seen. But, some Messianic signs were being reserved to Jesus. These signs are, "The blind can see, the deaf can hear, the mute can speak, and the lame can walk" (Is. 35: 5, 6). By healing the deaf and dumb man, Jesus fulfills the Messianic signs that Isaiah says in the first reading.

The story of the deaf and dumb gives us two insights of today's gospel. First, the question arises: Why should Jesus heal the deaf and dumb man? The answer is, the deaf people are often embarrassed by their situation. They can't understand the simplest questions that we ask them. They always feel embarrassed and out of place. They feel that they are not part of any community. That's why they stand outside or sit at our feet (Jas 2:3). Being the Messiah, Jesus shows real compassion for him. Besides pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the healing of the man points to Jesus as a compassionate person. For the first time in his life, the deaf and dumb man feels that he is also a part of the human community.

Second, why did Jesus take the deaf man away from the crowd to heal him? He could have healed him in front of the people, who are still not able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. I think that in his healing story, Mark is

probably saying something to us. That is, in order to be healed of one's deafness and dumbness, one needs distance from the noisy crowd and comes closer to the heart of Jesus (Mk. 7:33).

The healing of the deaf-mute demands two values from us. The first value is, as Jesus is compassionate towards the needy, we too need to grow with love and compassion. The second value is, our Lord Jesus asks us for a change of heart towards the oppressed and the weak. Are we open to God's request?

-Gnanam J.

Sept 13, 2015: XXIV Sunday

Is 50:5-9a; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

In Search of Christian Identity

Today's Gospel of Mark chapter 8 verses 27-35 invites us to ponder over the theme 'in search of Christian identity'. Jesus encounters his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, Peter is declaring Jesus as messiah and Jesus is teaching about his passion, death and resurrection. The gospel scene is coming in the exact middle part of Markan gospel, which itself shows the divine author wants to emphasize one of the most important points of his objectives of gospel writing. According to Bible scholars this is the passage, including this particular scene and the transfiguration (chap 9), which contains the theophany or revelation of God. But in the beginning of Mark gospel chapter 1: 1 we read 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God'. Here in the first chapter itself St. Mark emphasizes that the revelation of God is in Jesus Christ, as the son of God. Then the question arises why this passage of divine revelation of Jesus acquires so much importance in Markan gospel? Because if we read the Markan gospel as a spiritual journey, we will be in search of a divine revelation, that is fulfilled in Jesus which is narrated in this scene and the coming passages. That is Jesus is the revelation of God, the fulfillment of the messianic expectation of Jewish people, He is not a royal, imperial powerful king, but a suffering messiah according to the words of Isaiah.

Further, we can make some reflections on the basis of this bible passage. 1. In the context of religious plurality, the question Jesus asked 'who do people say that I am?' and 'who do you say that I am?' have specific significance. People may have different opinions regarding Jesus Christ as prophet, avatar, and guru ...etc., but as a Christian we should have a conviction about Jesus as the Messiah, a universal Saviour, through him all universe will be saved. 2. In the realm of personal spirituality, these questions play a major role to find our

personal basis on which we rely our life as Christians. “Who do you say that I am?” The answer of this question determines our Christian identity. Why are we Christians? Why do we keep Christian morality? Why do we keep an attitude against injustice, corruption and violence? Why are we doing many acts of charity? All these fundamental existential questions are founded upon our response to this inevitable question, ‘who do you say that I am?’ **-Bro. Joseph Pallattil**

September 20, 2015: XXV Sunday in Ordinary Times

Wisdom 2:2,17-20, Jas 3:16-4:3, Mk 9:30-37

Be truly wise and make the right choice

Every day in our life we find ourselves at cross roads and have to choose between two ways: the way most people seem to follow and the way along which few people seem to walk. The first reading of today shows a group of renegade Jews threatening the life of a faithful one: “Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man...condemn him to a shameful death....” Wis 12:20 on listening to these words, we seem to be listening to the Jewish leaders mocking Jesus nailed to the cross: “He saved others; he cannot save himself....” (Mt 27, 42).

The faithful Jew about whom the book of Wisdom speaks was faced with a choice just as we all are, a choice between “the pagan way” which tells us that there is only one life, i.e. this earthly life and “the way of God” which tells us that this life is a preparation for the next. The faithful Jew is a symbol of Jesus, the really innocent and faithful Jew put to death by the Jewish leaders for opposing their sinful way of life.

In the gospel we read that Jesus announcing his passion and death for the second time, again in clear terms but the disciples fail to understand him because they did not want to renounce their dream that Jesus would become a king. Therefore, Jesus consistently teaches them to change their present attitude and to overcome their ambition of becoming great in his kingdom (Mk 9:13).

Against the ambitions of the disciples, Jesus called a child and with much patience once more he teaches a lesson for the disciples that if anyone wanted to be first, he must make himself last. Mk 9:35) it took time for the apostles to learn that hard lesson which ran so counter to their ideas of glorious Messiah. Yet under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they went on learning well. Peter calls himself “servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2Pet 1:1). Paul in his letters calls himself innumerable times “servant of Jesus Christ”, “servant of Gospel”, “your servant” (Rom 1:1; 2Cor 4:5). This is the lesson which takes a whole life time to learn; we must ask the Spirit within us to help us grasp it better. **-Vikas Jason**

Sept 27, 2015: XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Times
Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43.45.47-48

Need for Metanoia

The Gospel of today addresses one very relevant topic in today's world which is highly materialistic: "*Jealousy*". It touches the very core of our relationships with one another. We live in a world where everything is measured according to the output. Therefore, everything is quantified. The value of a person is rarely valued. People who have values to contribute to the morally degrading society are considered a threat to the world which is highly consumeristic. We see a similar typical depiction in the Gospel. The disciples of Jesus were unable to see the good in the other. The good that the other portrays is a threat to their popularity. This is where Jesus entered and said; "*anyone who is not against us is for us*". The first reading of today portrays something similar. To this Moses responded; "*Are you jealous on my account? If only all Yahweh's people were prophets, and Yahweh had given them his spirit!*" human beings have no right to limit the working of God. God can work through anybody and anything.

At the end of our earthly pilgrimage, we will not be judged for our popularity but the small little act that we can do for the other which is beautifully portrayed in the judgment scene in *Matthew 25*. The kingdom of God opens to people who are able to read the signs of the time and act accordingly. God is at work everywhere and the mysteries of the divine do not operate within the categories of human. We cannot hide God in our pockets because God is an inexhaustible mystery. God has no favourites but the people who are oppressed and cry to him, He does not abandon. The Spirit of God manifests itself to people who are disposed to the working of the spirit in the here and now.

The second reading of today beautifully portrays the fate of the rich people who hoard what does not belong to them. Such unjust people will be judged without mercy. Disasters will befall them because God is a God of justice. Unfortunately, many consecrated people are also victims to this. There is a need for *Metanoia* to make the Gospel more relevant and effective without which, the church will be a mediocre in the eyes of the world. Let us pray for a true and contrite heart to oust jealousy and hoarding attitude, not only the material possessions but also setting boundaries for the working of God as well.

-Vekupa Rhakho George

Oct 4, 2015: XXVII Sunday of the Year

Gn 2: 18-24; Heb 2:9-11; Mk 10:2-16

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce

On the 50th wedding anniversary of the great Henry Ford, someone asked him what his secret for marital success and happiness was. Ford replied, "Just the same as in the automobile industry, stick to one model." Jesus taught the same 2000 years ago as we read in today's gospel.

"Some Pharisees came [to Jesus], and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (Mark 10:2). What is going on here? Why is it a temptation? Well, to start with, the Pharisee never had any doubts about the dissolubility of marriage. The Old Testament Law took the lawfulness of divorce and remarriage for granted and all the Pharisees accepted that. It says: "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house ..." (Deuteronomy 24:1).

The only disagreement among the various schools of the Pharisees was: What is the meaning of this "something objectionable" that a husband would find in his wife to justify him divorcing her? The conservative school of Rabbi Shammai said it meant only a case of scandal like adultery. The liberal school of Rabbi Hillel said it meant any case of annoyance, "even if she has burned his supper." And the even more liberal school of Rabbi Aqiba said that the woman did not have to be guilty of anything; that the man simply no longer fancied her was enough reason for divorce. This was a trap because if Jesus took sides with one school of thought, he would antagonize himself to the others.

In reply Jesus went above the law as given in Deuteronomy to the mind of God as revealed in Genesis. He went from the Mosaic law to the divine plan in creation. From the beginning of creation, he said, God ordained husband and wife to live in unity. "**Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate**" (Mark 10:9). Jesus' reply underlines two important points. First point, Jesus treats the woman as a person. Earlier Jewish law treated her as property of the man to be disposed of at will. In fact, here for the first time in Hebrew literature (v. 12) we hear not just of the man divorcing the woman but also of the woman divorcing the man. Jesus treats the woman as a legal person equal to the man. Second point, Jesus is interested in teaching not legal statements but moral principles. They asked him whether divorce was lawful, his reply was that the mind of God is for husband and wife never to separate. They asked him about what was lawful, he told them what was best for them, what they should always strive for. For in Christ "**All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up**" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

With this ideal in mind Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic provision that a man could divorce his wife by giving her a letter of divorce. It was not a permission to divorce. It was rather Moses making allowance for the people's "hardness of heart." This implies that Moses knew the divine ideal for husband and wife and still did not enforce it but rather made room for the shortcomings of his people. In fact, viewed against its cultural background, the provision to divorce with a letter was not to facilitate separation of husband and wife but to protect the unity of marriage.

What form of divorce did the Hebrews practice before Moses gave them the law? It was probably the same "triple express" rule that obtained among their Semitic neighbours whereby a woman was considered divorced if her husband pronounced a divorce formula three times in the presence of witnesses. By oral statement alone a divorce could be concluded in an instant in a fit of anger. By requiring a letter of divorce in a culture where only the temple priests could read and write meant that a divorce process could take months to conclude. This would give the couple time to sleep over it, and friends and family members to mediate and resolve the conflict. The demand for a letter of divorce saved many marriages that would have ended in a hasty divorce in the old "triple express" system.

The Pharisees focussed on the law and overlooked the ideal. So do we. One of the most rigorous laws the missionaries brought to Africa was the ban on polygamy. They applied it strictly even in the case of those who were validly married before the arrival of Christianity. In Europe and America the thorn in the flesh is divorce and remarriage. Neither polygamy nor divorce and remarriage is the ideal. But maybe we should, like Moses, make some room for our own "hardness of heart." Are we any better than the people of Israel of old?

-Munachi E. Ezeogu CSSP (Web)

October 11, 2015: XXVIII Sunday of the Year

Wis 7:7-11; Heb 4:12-13; Mk 10:17-27

Looking at God

It is always wise to look ahead, but it is wiser to look further than we can see. though poverty is necessarily a recipe for contented life, wealth cannot be equated with happiness. Hence Jesus tells the rich man in the Gospel Mk10:21 that if he wants to become a perfect Christian on the way to eternal life, he must surrender all his riches to the poor. But we feel sorry for this man, because when it had pleased his father to give him his kingdom, he wanted only a little piece of toast and went away sad. Here is one of the most vivid stories in the gospels. We must note how the man came and how Jesus met him. He came running. He

flung himself at Jesus' feet. There is something amazing in the sight of this rich, young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth, who was on the way to being an outlaw. "Good teacher!" he began. And straight away Jesus answered back, don't call me good! It looks almost as if Jesus was trying to freeze him and to pour cold water on that young enthusiasm. It is clear that this man came to Jesus in a moment of overflowing emotion. It is also clear that Jesus exercised a personal attraction over him. Jesus did two things that every evangelist and every preacher and every teacher ought to remember. **First**, he said in effect, "**Stop and think!** You are all wrought up and palpitating with emotion! I don't want you swept to me by a moment of emotion. Think calmly what you are doing." Jesus was not freezing the man. He was telling him even at the very outset to count the cost. **Second**, he said in effect, "**You cannot become a Christian by a sentimental passion for me. You must look at God.**" Preaching and teaching always mean the conveying of truth through personality, and thereby lies the greatest danger of the greatest teachers. The danger is that the follower, the scholar, the young person may form a personal attachment to the teacher or the preacher and think that it is an attachment to God. The teacher and preacher must never point to himself. He must always point to God. There is in all true teaching a certain self-obliteration. True, we cannot keep personality and warm personal loyalty out of it altogether, and we would not if we could. But the matter must not stop there. The teacher and the preacher are in the last analysis only finger-posts to God.

Jesus quoted the commandments which were the basis of the decent life. Without hesitation the man said he had kept them all. Note one thing—with one exception they were all negative commandments, and that one exception operated only in the family circle. In effect the man was saying, "I never in my life did anyone any harm." That was perfectly true. But the real question is, "What good have you done?" And the question to this man was even more pointed, "With all your possessions, with your wealth, with all that you could give away, what positive good have you done to others? How much have you gone out of your way to help and comfort and strengthen others as you might have done?" Respectability, on the whole, consists in not doing things; Christianity consists in doing things. So Jesus confronted him with a challenge. In effect he said, "Get out of this moral respectability. Stop looking at goodness as consisting in not doing things. Take yourself and all that you have, and spend everything on others. Then you will find true happiness in time and in eternity." The man could not do it. He had great possessions, which it had never entered his head to give away and when it was suggested to him he could not. True, he had never stolen, and he had never defraud anyone—but neither had he ever been, nor could he compel himself to be, positively and sacrificially generous. It may be respectable never to take away from anyone. It is Christian to give to someone. In reality Jesus was confronting this man with a basic and essential

question—“How much do you want real Christianity? Do you want it enough to give your possessions away?” And the man had to answer in effect, “I want it— but I don’t want it as much as all that.”

Let us face it. The giving up of anything in any form, is going to hurt, as it hurt St. Paul when he had to give up his entire past to follow Christ and it hurt him so deeply that he groaned: God’s word is sharper than two edged sword, (Heb 4:12). But Jesus the wisdom of God, assures us that in return for what we give up, we will be repaid with eternal life namely, an inner peace, deep feeling of fulfilment. Hence if we are really wise, we will “prefer the wisdom of God to separate and throne, for all good things come to us in His company” (Wis 7:8).

Ravi Joseph. L

October 18, 2015: XXIV Sunday of the Year

Is 53:10-11; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10: 35-45

Living God’s dream

Alexander Woolcott, one of the most famous alumni of Hamilton College, New York, was asked to give a major address at the college’s centennial celebration. Woolcott gave a memorable speech which began with these words: “I send my greetings today to all my fellow alumni of Hamilton College, scattered all over the world. Some of you are successes, and some of you are failures – only God knows which are which!” This is a wonderful reminder to us that in our measurement of success and failure, “**God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways God’s ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God’s ways higher than our ways, and God’s thoughts than our thoughts**” (Isaiah 55:8-9 paraphrased). This is the lesson that the overambitious disciples, James and John, are about to learn in today’s gospel story.

If there is one thing we know for sure about predestination it is this: God created everyone for success. God did not create anyone for failure. But what do success and failure mean? For most people, as for James and John, success means to be head of the pack. To succeed means to excel. Success is measured by comparing one’s achievements against the achievements of one’s “competitors.” That is why James and John go to Jesus and ask not that they be granted a place in his kingdom but that they be granted “**to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory**” (Mark 10:37). “**You do not know what you are asking,**” Jesus says to them (v. 38), and then proceeds to teach them a new understanding of success.

For Jesus success means people realizing and fulfilling God’s dream for them. Jesus tells us, contrary to popular thinking, that anybody cannot be anything. Before people come into this world, divine providence has already

hatched a dream for each person to live out. We do not come into life to write our own job description, we come with a divine job description in our hands and with the physical and mental traits necessary to get the job done. That is what the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is all about. God needed a singular job to be done, that of being the mother of His incarnate Son, and He created a woman fully prepared and equipped specifically to do the job. No other woman before or after Mary could have become the mother of God out of her own personal effort or ambition. This is why Jesus tells James and John that, **“to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared”** (v. 40).

Does this mean that God has already determined, from the word go, the outcome of our earthly existence? No. God has an intended destination for which He created you and me. This is predestination. But whether you and I attain this destination or not depends on how we cooperate with God’s grace. To say that whatever people are or do in life is what God created them to be and do is determinism. The Bible teaches predestination (God has something in mind for creating you and me) but does not teach determinism (whatever we are or do is what God has predestined for us). God gives us free will to cooperate with divine grace or not. That is why, even though God predestined Mary to be the mother of our Saviour, when the time came for her to accomplish this mission, God sent an angel to seek her cooperation. She is a perfect example of success because she courageously said yes to the word of God detailing to her what Providence has in store for her.

James and John, on the other hand, represent the anyone-could-be-anything mentality characteristic of our times. This way of seeing things encourages unbridled ambition, rivalry and unhealthy competition among people, which we call the rat race. But the trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you are still a rat. The new vision of success that Jesus teaches, on the contrary, encourages mutual cooperation and the contentment of realizing that we can all be successful because God has created every one of us for something different. God has enough dreams to go round, a different dream for everyone, a different success for everyone. Our ambition in life should be to discover and live God’s dream for us. Herein lies our true success. But to vie and struggle with one another over the same dreams – that is failure. -**Munachi E. Ezeogu** CSSP (Web)

October 25, 2015: XXX Sunday of the Year

Jer 31: 7-9; Heb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52

Self-Realisation in Christ

There is an old African fable about how the duck learnt to swim. Duck and Hen lived together in a house by the seaside. Their food was the rotten fish that the

fishermen threw away. Everyday they saw Heron swimming up and down the sea, catching and eating fresh fish. This made Duck desire so much to have some fresh fish. But Hen said to Duck, “Why do you desire what you can’t have? The Heron is a sea-bird. Her body is light. We are land-birds and land-birds do not swim. If you enter the sea with this your heavy body you will sink like a stone and that will be the end of you.” Duck believed Hen. So they went on eating their rotten fish. But this did not stop Duck’s hunger and inborn desire for fresh fish.

One very hot and humid day, Duck could eat nothing at all because the rotten fish smelled so bad. She just went and sat by herself, quietly looking at the sea. In a moment Heron came sailing by and saw Duck in such a pitiable condition. Heron asked what the matter was and Duck told him everything: how she always longed to swim and eat fresh fish but, unfortunately, the Creator had made her a heavy land-bird. It was then that Heron explained to Duck that sometime in the past, even he himself was not a swimmer, but that he was forced by hunger to jump into the sea and then he discovered he could swim. Heron invited Duck to jump into the sea and give it a trial but Duck was afraid. With more encouragement from Heron, Duck overcame her fears and stepped into the sea. To her surprise Duck saw that she was not sinking; she was floating. With time Duck learnt to swim well and catch and eat as much fresh fish as she wanted.

You see, Duck was not just a land-bird. She was equally a sea-bird. But as long as she believed that she was only a land-bird, she remained on the land and suffered want and privation. So the story is really about how the duck came to discover and realise her God-given identity and potential as a swimmer. It is about how the flower bud blossoms into the beautiful flower that it is destined to be. Similarly the story of Bartimaeus in today’s gospel is about how a nobody begging by the roadside came to realise his God-given dignity as a human being and child of God; how he blossomed.

Mark’s story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus has aroused the curiosity of bible scholars because this is about the only place in the Synoptic Gospels where the name of a person who was healed by Jesus is given. Mark mentions the name not only once but twice: “**Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus,**” first in Aramaic, then in Greek. This very unusual emphasis on the name is a clue that the name is important for the reader to understand the point Mark is trying to make in the story.

In the ancient Semitic world, a name was not just a label to identify a person. A name expressed the personality or destiny of a person. So what does Bartimaeus mean? Literally, it comes from the Aramaic and means “son/person

of defilement (*tame*).” This could, therefore, be a nickname given to him because he was a blind beggar. Popular theology among the Hebrews held blindness to be a punishment from God for sin or defilement (John 9:34). But the Greek version of the name could also be understood as “son/person of honour” (*time*). This would indicate the man’s inner nature and destiny. By giving us the name Bartimaeus with its double meaning, Mark could be telling us that here is a man who is supposed to be a man of honour and dignity (*time*) living in a state of dishonour and shame (*tame*). What Jesus did for him, therefore, was not simply restoring his physical sight but, over and above that, restoring his God-given human dignity. We can liken it to what the Heron did for the Duck, enlightening and empowering someone to realize their God-given potentials and dignity.

Like Duck by the seaside or like Bartimaeus by the wayside, are we sometimes bored, feeling that there must be more to life than we are getting at the moment? Do we sometimes feel like we are born to be swimmers and yet here we are idly walking and eating rotten fish by the seaside? Do we sometimes feel, like Bartimaeus, that we should be following Jesus in his enthusiastic campaign to save the world and yet we find ourselves all day long doing nothing but the same boring routine of trying to find food? The good news is that Jesus is passing by. He can heal and take away whatever weakness or handicap that holds us down. Do not pay heed to friends who, like the Hen, will say that you are daydreaming. Bartimaeus did not heed those who tried to dissuade him. Jesus is here to heal the blindness that has immobilized us, to empower and transform us from passive bystanders to his active and enthusiastic followers in the otherwise boring journey of life.

-Munachi E. Ezeogu CSSP (Web)

(Due to lack of space,
the regular Book Review Section is regretfully omitted in this issue)