

Conclusion

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* is not a mere source of information, rather a call to conversion, to take a 'U' turn to 'the common home' – to nurture nature, to accept our identity as one of the interdependent creatures. Although it elaborates on the ecological crisis, the thrust is on conversion at all levels of life - personal, business, employment and the choices that we make to be proactive "to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS 49). It enormously contributes to renewing and refashioning the broken planet for future generations as the Creator has designed it. The encyclical summons us to have a global consensus to adapt new models to 'care for the common home'. Let my country, the world at large, arise into that freedom where humanity and nature travel in the same vehicle, with same speed, caring for one another.

Notes

1. Jacob Naluparayil, "Francis and Environment", *Smart Companion*, Vol.6, No.6, (June 2015), 3.
2. Joe Mannath, "Refugees", *The New Leader*, Vol. 130, No.23, (December 2017), 7.
3. Ibid. 7.
4. "Thousand Words", *Jivan*, (December 2017- January 2018), 15.
5. Sallie Mcfague, *A New Climate for Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 144.
6. Mohan Dass, "Promoting an Eco-Just Humanity: An Interfaith Exploration", *Ishvani Documentation and Mission*, Vol. 33, No.3, (September-December 2015), 243-274.
7. Cedric Prakash, "Environment Matters", *Smart Companion* Vol.6, No.6, (January 2015), 30-31.
8. Joyce Sebastian, "Hunger Games: A Different Kind", *Indian Currents*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 43 (October 2016), 32-35.
9. Felix Wilfred, "Eco-Justice: Expanding the Horizons for a Common Future", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XL, No. 235, (January 2010), 5-17.
10. Joseph Peruma, *The Motherly Earth*, (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2002), 177.

A New Vision of Humanity: Contribution of *Laudato Si'*

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Darśana: Introduction

Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad has a beautiful story of Prajapati (Creator Lord) and his offspring (gods, men, and demons) practicing the vow of brahmacārins. When the offspring asked the Lord to instruct them, he uttered "da". The Lord speaks to us in "da's"; like the heavenly thunder 'da', 'da', 'da' I will be using this analogy to explicate the new vision of the Pontiff in a series of da's, one leading to the other, beginning with the first 'da' Darśana (glimpses in Sanskrit).

1. Dúrdṛṣṭi: Vision, Foresight (Sanskrit)

Dúrdṛṣṭi is our second 'da'. The mighty green wave has swept the Vatican up leaving it green in her social and ecclesial endeavours. Sooner or later it had to come about, as the famous dictum goes 'the mills of Rome grind you slowly but they grind you for sure'. The Church too has plunged into the Greens, which made the scientific community grin at the Vatican, saying "*Laudato Si', mi' Signore et Laudato Si', mi' Vatican*" (Praise be to You, my Lord, and praise be to you, My Vatican).

Does Humanity have a vision? Of course, it does. For ages humanitarian visions in the West were the extensions of religious beliefs and Greco-Roman philosophies, same is true

with the East except for the fact that there was no distinction between the religion and the philosophies. Scientific and philosophical advances have, time and again, questioned these age-old visions for humanity. Not that the visions of bygone era were faulty, they were relevant then. For our troubled times they just need to be corrected, upgraded and revised. In other words, we need a New Vision of Humanity. Visions are dynamic, they are never static; they evolve as the time passes by. Historical development of this vision of Humanity could be comprehended and traced through the development of 'human rights', because the world need to "speak of *being* over that of *being useful*" (LS 69).

Human Rights: Humans are the precious gifts of Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. In a world of '*unequals*', human rights restore the dignity of the poor and the powerless. Human rights have developed in five stages. At the very first stage political and civil rights were given to select citizens, then come the economic and social rights. The third stage is marked with the cultural, ethnic and, communitarian rights. The devastating world wars shuddered humanity and enlightened people about the worth of 'life', so, the fourth stage is marked with '*right to life*'. The recent addition to the human rights family is the '*right to environment*'. The Pontiff in his encyclical writes about the environmental crises and calls for a radical change, ecological conversion. The contribution of *Laudato Si'* towards a new vision of humanity is "*Ecological-Social-Justice*".

Cenozoic Age to Ecozoic Age: The cultural historian Thomas Berry claims that "we are at the end of Cenozoic age, the era of geological history that began some 65 million years ago and are moving into the Ecozoic age". The

Ecozoic age envisioned by Berry would be an era of mutually enhancing *human-earth* relationships. The *human-earth* relationship calls for a revolution in our understanding of our existence. We get to see the same flavour in the Papal encyclical, methodically elaborating and driving the point home of a new vision of Humanity. It has a starting point in joining St Francis of Assisi in calling the Earth, Sister/Mother earth.

2. *Demeter: Mother Earth/Sister Earth, Eco-Feminism?*

The third '*da*', '*Demeter*' is a Greek goddess of harvest, agriculture, and the life cycle. Even *Zeus* had to bow down to her. When she was angry about her daughter's abduction, everything came to standstill. Symbolically she sustains the life on earth.

For the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, a Pontiff has called the earth *Sister/Mother Earth*; something unheard of in Christian spheres. Be that as it may, the feminine terminology to address the earth and the environmental issues will be ground-breaking when it comes to changing the western-world view, that has done irreparable damage to the common home.

The Pontiff quotes **the canticle of St Francis** "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs", and calls the earth, *Sister and Mother*. "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" (LS 2). The mandate in the Genesis '*to have dominion*' over the earth had distorted the Judaeo-Christian worldview, it is St Francis who "healed that rupture" (LS 66) through the universal

reconciliation with every creature by calling the creatures of the world sisters and brothers.

Why are these feminine attributions so important?

Because they embody profound meaning and significance for the world that is in need of healing. Seeing environmental crises in general and climate change in particular with feminine eyes, there is a shift in Church's attitude from one that of *Conquistador to Caring*; for women are better endowed with caring faculties. Ursula King thinks that "Women's respect for life and their potential for motherhood give them a special sensitivity to ecological and environmental issues, and suggest the possibility of a special female contribution in this area". Women share with nature the ability and the experience of bringing forth and sustaining life. The acute sense of the patriarchal hegemony and exploitation of this women-nature bond necessitates a new vision. The new liberative vision considers women-nature not as 'the Other', nor 'the Alienated' but that which completes, the complementary. We cannot see nature devoid of feminine energy, the feminine dimension is an important dimension to understand the ecological reality. Everything is interconnected, so is the femininity with nature.

3. Dharma: Theory of Everything

Dharma (the fourth 'da') is the principle that keeps the cosmic order (ṛta) intact, a little ruffle in the practice of dharma (towards nature, neighbour) can cause havoc. The Theory of Everything is all that unifies the big and the small, a single theory that explains everything and links all physical aspects together. Finding a theory of everything is one of the major unsolved problems in physics. Stephen Hawking called it "Knowing the Mind of God", to know how things

are connected is to know the mind of God. The Chaos Theory speaks of the "Butterfly Effect"; a flap of a butterfly in Pune can cause a cyclone in Pentagon. Which goes to say that everything is intricately connected and linked. In Christian tradition we speak of one incarnation, that is of Jesus; but in Vedic tradition God incarnates Himself in various forms of nature. Here, God is the common thread that weaves and build the ecology, the earth: our common home. *Laudato Si'* is that theory today which says everything is connected. "Everything that has happened in the whole course of the universe is present in each one of us, just like every atom is in contact with and affects every other atom of the universe." Genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. Everything is interconnected : progress, degradation of environment, scientific advances, economy, and social justice.

The ancient scriptures of the East tell us that there is a covenant relation between nature and humanity. It is said and believed in India that when a woman is pregnant, no tree is cut in the village or in the vicinity to mark the respect for life. They deeply believe that everything is connected. If this was true then in India, we would never face any environmental crises; but in reality, we do have serious problems. This tells us that somewhere the common good is sacrificed over the personal/individual good. Thus, they end-up messing with the integrity and cosmic-equilibrium that exist in the universe. When we see the common thread, which unites all different expressions of human culture and heritage, we have a full sense of human welfare. It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a *dharma* of splendid universal communion.

Unjust development has disrupted *dharmic* principle causing *adharma*. So we need to strive towards the progress of all.

4. Development and Dike: Progress and Justice (*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*)

Ecological Conversion: *Development* and *Dike* (Justice in Greek) are taken together, they are the fifth and the sixth “*da’s*”. In the new vision of humanity, the *development* and *dike* go together. Where there is justice there is development. *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*’ (Collective efforts, inclusive growth) captured Indians and Modi rose to power in 2014. Heavily loaded slogan but its actualisation is far from reality in the BJP led government of India. The Pontiff, in 2015, also called for collective efforts from both the rich and the poor to strive towards a sustainable/integral development (*Sandhāarit Vikas*, and not just *Vikaas*). The social analysis tells us that 80% of the world resources are consumed by the developed nations who amount to just the 20% of the world population. Developed nations have developed at the expense of the poor, now that there are crises from the fact that these nations want everybody to plunge into the task of saving the planet. Environmental crisis is a by-product of the exclusive non-sustainable development of the powerful (nations). There is a profound relation between the poor and the fragility of the planet. The more fragile the planet more vulnerable are the poor to natural calamities. The poor are always caught off guard with meagre means to cope with the ecological crises. This is where the ‘*ecological debt*’ exist that the rich owe to the poor. The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest. This calls for a deeper reflection to save the planet earth from man-made disasters; the ecological crisis is also a summons

to profound interior conversion, an ecological conversion.

Environmental Social Justice (*Dike*): For ages the poor were excluded from the so called ‘economic growth’, ‘development’, ‘scientific advances’, that have turned out to be detrimental to the environment. The poor are poor because they are lazy, the famous argument of the rich against the poor. Does the poor, even, have the opportunities to work hard, come up in life? Even if they do, their labour has no claim over the profit. It is the structure that helps the rich become richer; because it is designed by the rich. The unjust system vehemently leads to social injustice. The social injustice towards the poor has its repercussions on the environment. The environmental crises have ripped the poor apart from the little that they had; nature can be cruel to the poor. The ‘*throwaway culture of the rich*’ abuses the natural resources and deprives the poor of their resources; the resources of the earth belong to the poor too. This is the *ecological debt* that the rich owe to the poor. The day the rich realize this debt and start paying the poor what belongs to them, there will be environmental social justice; justice done to the poor is justice done to the environment.

We think that we are making progress, but our progress is like that of the *deer* in the desert, who

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chases after a mirage. The poor *deer* runs deep into the desert until it can go no further, led on by its burning thirst, trapped in its blindness and misjudgement, it eventually lies down to die in the wilderness. The further we progress along this path, the deeper our disillusionment becomes. If present trends

continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us (LS 24). Our technological progress is to be re-looked at. How could anyone, even, claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded? Pope Francis' encyclical has been "promoting what some perceive to be new understandings- such as of progress being integral to ecological concerns" and the "call to establish a dialogue involving all of Humanity." Therefore, 'vikaas' can never be 'vikaas' if it is not 'sabka vikaas', environment included.

5. Dialogue: An Essential Element of Coexistence

The seventh 'da' is the *dialogue*, the fullness of "da's". For our troubled and tumultuous times when the world politics is governed by the right-wing forces, it is all the more difficult to shift the focus of the people in power to environmental issues which are not on their priority list. Structuro-attitudinal change is required for a green revolution and make the earth, a heaven again. Dialogue will make it possible to work for the common good of our common home. It's a must for co-existence of humans and nature. Nature may flourish without humans but humans need nature; it is a *sine qua non*. It is in best interest of humanity to take care of environment, that sustains life here on earth. Dialogue between:

1. **Nature and Humans:** Hypothetically humans need to strike a dialogue with nature and know what significant role it plays in human existence.
2. **Nations:** Dialoguing to bring all the nations to combat environmental crises, and making it mandatory for the developed nations to have stringent policies against violators. The poor countries also need to

caution people to curb pollution; because they still use the age-old methods/machineries in the industries.

3. **Science and Religion:** Science and Religions do not have the same objective, here one is not opposite to the other, but when they are brought together science can rip religion of its superstitions and religion can rip science of idolatry.
4. **Disciplines (Interdisciplinary):** dialoguing with disciplines like, philosophy, sociology, psychology, Science and technology etc can shed light on the gravity of the crises. This approach nearly exhausts the multiple dimensions of the problem and helps us to come up with an integral response.
5. **Humans:** Humans are yet to know the importance of the ecological balance. Dialoguing and carefronting the other in matters of ecology is essential; for it concerns the entire planet.

Dialogue has the power of reconciliation, reconciliation with the other, with the excluded, with the environment, with the ecology and with the creation. The Pontiff knows it very well that ecological concern, detached from a social justice perspective would be far away from the reality and sound elitist. So, the Pope makes the new vision down-to-earth and achievable.

6. Conclusion: Re-interpreting our Destiny

The eighth 'da' *destiny* is the summary of the seven da's; the observance of the first seven da's decide our planet's destiny. Theological rupture needs immediate attention of humans before it is too late. The Pontiff is inviting the global

community to respond collectively to the gravest of the grave problem that haunts us today. The immediacy with which humans need to respond to the crises is seen in the secular and undogmatic tone of the encyclical in appealing to world populace. Pope uses the word ‘today’ 29 times which stresses the urgency with which we need to act now.

We have umpteen number of scientific studies done on the subject of environmental crises to go to the basis of the problem. What lies down under was looked and searched before, but from the centre taking a popular world-view. The Church is the last to speak about the environmental issues. There are scholars who have spoken about this but in vain. Nobody is serious about it. The Pontiff re-interprets them from ‘below’— a bottom-up approach, from the periphery, from the perspective of the poor, from the perspective of women, and for us in India from the perspective of the Dalits and the Tribals. The focus is not on the centre but the margins, reading between the lines, re-interpreting the narratives for our times to bring about green revolution through ecological conversion, and building an environmentally just society.

This should not be another article/research findings/paper/papal document to refer to later to write research papers but ought to act as an action plan. The action plan is the synthesis of five da’s:

1. ‘**Dama**’ (discipline): Humans need to discipline their greed, share the resources. This also entails change in life-style, production, and consumption.
2. ‘**Dāna**’ (Give): Humans need to give back to nature, and nurture nature. Give to the distressed.
3. ‘**Dakṣa**’ (Vigilant): Humans need to be alive and

vigilant to the environmental degradation.

4. ‘**Diśā**’ (Direction): Social justice ethics has to be the guiding principle; direction.
5. ‘**Dayā**’ (Compassion): Being kind to others includes being kind to nature. Nature’s welfare and human welfare cannot be separated from each other. If we are kind to nature, we will naturally be kind to one another.

The action plan proposed is *destined to develop a dike* that is in *dharma* achieved through *dialogue* inclusive of *Demeter* because of the *dúrdṛṣṭi* of the Supreme Pontiff in *Laudato Si*’. Thus, the creation shall sing exultantly, “**Praise be to You, my Lord!**”

Notes

1. Reid, Barbara. Paul for the Ecozoic Age. *The Ecological Challenge*, 1994: 16.
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