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**VIDYAJYOTI JOURNAL OF
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Contextual Theology

Swami Abhishiktananda's Final Days

Animal Ethics

Priestly Formation in Safeguarding

Journeying with Pope Francis

Statement of NITSC 2023

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Editorial

COMMITTING OURSELVES TO “A FUNDAMENTALLY CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY”

1. Introduction

“Theological reflection is ... called to a turning point, to a paradigm shift, to a ‘courageous cultural revolution’ ... that commits itself, first and foremost, to be a fundamentally contextual theology.” With this statement in the Apostolic Letter issued “*Motu Proprio*” *Ad theologiam promovendam* (ATP), art. 4, Pope Francis strongly advocates contextual theologizing.

In the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2018), Pope Francis had lucidly expressed what the Catholic Church desires, dreams, and demands from ecclesiastical universities and faculties. Written on November 01, 2023, the Solemnity of All Saints, in order to update the Statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, in *Ad theologiam promovendam* (ATP), Francis reaffirms some of the key aspects in *Veritatis Gaudium* and promotes the version of theology initiated by the Second Vatican Council.

2. Major Highlights of *Ad theologiam promovendam*

This brief (about 1500 words in unofficial English translations) and highly motivating *Motu Proprio* of Pope Francis consists of

10 articles. The document challenges theologians not to limit themselves “to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes of the past” (art. 1), but to do “prophetic” and “outgoing” theology, which is open to the world and to the concrete existential situation of people (art. 3). Francis expects theological reflection to undergo “a ‘courageous cultural revolution’” (art. 4). Except for three articles (art. 2, 9, 10) which are particularly concerned with the Pontifical Academy of Theology, remaining seven articles are universal in nature and have a great potential to ignite theologians all over the world. *Ad theologiam promovendam* is a logical progression and to a large extent repetition and deepening of *Veritatis Gaudium*.

i) “Outgoing” Theology

In *Veritatis Gaudium*, Francis refers to a Church that is “outgoing” (VG Proem, art. 3). In ATP, he adds: “A synodal, missionary and ‘outgoing’ Church can only be matched by an ‘outgoing’ theology” (ATP 3). Francis has always preferred “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 49). It is obvious that the Pope discourages “desk-bound theology” (EG 133) and encourages frontier theology with “smell of the people and the street” (ATP 3). The Pope silences his conservative critics by stating that this outgoing theology is “transcendent knowledge and, at the same time, attentive to the voice of the people” and “at the service of the Church’s evangelization and transmission of faith” (ATP 8). It is both rooted in Christian faith and relevant to people as it reads the signs of the time and responds with Christian praxis. Thus it is both scientific and sapiential.

ii) Courageous Cultural Revolution

The word culture/cultural occurs seven times in ATP, showing the great value Francis places on cultural dimensions. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphatically denounces economy of

exclusion with its “throw away” culture (EG 53) and deadening “culture of prosperity” (EG 54). In *Laudato Si’*, he decries “culture of relativism” (LS 123), “culture of instant gratification” (LS 162), and “culture of consumerism” (LS 184); all these aspects are expressed in “culture of death” (LS 213). In *Fratelli Tutti*, he condemns “culture of walls” (FT 27) and “the modern culture of developed peoples” (FT 220). Quoting LS 53 in VG, Francis laments that “we still lack the culture necessary to confront this crisis” and desires “the formation of a Christian culture” and promotion of “a culture of encounter” (Proem 3). Culture of death needs to be replaced by “culture of life” (LS 213), which is “a genuine culture of care” (LS 229). In the situation of “a change of epoch,” Francis looks with hope towards theologians and expects theology “to confront profound cultural transformations” (ATP 1) and undergo a “courageous cultural revolution” within itself through “a culture of dialogue and encounter” (ATP 4).

iii) Relationality and Transdisciplinarity

In order to grow in “a culture of dialogue and encounter” Francis assigns to the theologians the two-fold task of advancing relationality and transdisciplinarity, i.e., interdisciplinarity in a strong sense (ATP 4-5). These tasks are drawn from *Veritatis Gaudium*, Proem, 4a and 4c. Right in the beginning of his papacy, Francis had mentioned: “The Church, in her commitment to evangelization, appreciates and encourages the charism of theologians and their scholarly efforts to advance dialogue with the world of cultures and sciences” (EG 133). For Pope Francis: “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240; cf. FT 85). It follows that theologians today have to be relational persons to the core, who are experts in communion, dialogue, and encounter. Inspired by the example of Word-made-flesh, they should have the courage to move out of their comfort zones, transcend boundaries, build bridges, and immerse

themselves in the arduous task of dialoguing, learning, and making use of “new categories elaborated by other knowledges, in order to penetrate and communicate the truths of faith and transmit the teaching of Jesus in today’s languages, with originality and critical awareness” (ATP 5).

vi) Emphasis on Synodality

Veritatis Gaudium does not explicitly refer to synodality, but Francis devotes one article of the *Motu Proprio* to elaborate on the need for doing theology in a synodal form (ATP 6). Charity begins at home. How can we reach out to people belonging to other traditions, cultures, denominations, and religions, if we are incapable of having a heart-to-heart dialogue among ourselves and find ways of communion and fraternity? In ATP 6, Francis speaks twice about “doing” theology. This doing theology in a synodal spirit is possible when theologians “live and experience theological collegiality and fraternity.” Francis stresses on lived experience, and not on mere intellectual assent. It is paramount that theologians belonging to different persuasions, conservative as well as liberal, have mature dialogue, listen to each other in a synodal spirit, and prophetically contribute towards cultural revolution.

v) Sapiential Dimension

Biblical wisdom teaches us to discern God’s presence in all sciences and disciplines. Sirach mentions: “Honour physicians for their service, for the Lord created them; for their gift of healing comes from the Most High” (38:1-2). This encourages us to strive for trans-disciplinarity, which is “situating and stimulating all disciplines against the backdrop of the Light and Life offered by the Wisdom streaming from God’s Revelation” (VG, Proem 4c; ATP 5). The concept of wisdom/sapiential occurs six times in the letter. Art. 7 exclusively deals with the sapiential dimension. Here Francis bases his arguments on the enlightening teaching of Blessed Antonio

Rosmini, who was also referred to in *Veritatis Gaudium*. For Rosmini, theology is a sublime expression of “intellectual clarity” and it should be deeply sapiential, i.e., the one which “holds Truth and Charity together in a ‘solid circle.’” Inspired by Rosmini’s insights, Francis speaks about developing sapiential knowledge which is spiritual and incarnational, and which saves critical scientific reason from dehumanization and impoverishment as well as from ideological abstraction.

vi) Pastoral “Stamp”

In *Veritatis Gaudium*, Francis states: “one of the main contributions of the Second Vatican Council was precisely seeking a way to overcome this divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life. I dare say that the Council has revolutionized to some extent the status of theology – the believer’s way of doing and thinking” (VG, Proem, 2). Vatican II adopted a new theological methodology promoted by the likes of Marie-Dominique Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac. Council Fathers used inductive approach which gave prominence to the role of history in the life of the Church. They acknowledged that the Church is a historical reality and that changing circumstances call for new pastoral approaches. Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, is the fruit of this approach, which bridged the gap between the world and the Church (Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World*, 2021, p. 239). This pastoral “stamp” which was evident in the theology of Vatican II is what Francis desires to see in our theologizing.

3. Contextual Theologizing in India

Samuel Rayan, a bold proponent of contextual theology writes: “The theology we do in India is Indian, local, and contextual. It takes our Christian faith and our concrete historical situation seriously” (*Theologizing in Context*, 2002, p. 11). Every genuine theology has to be a contextual theology. Jacob Parappally rightly

states: “Theologizing, as a transformative process of systematic reflection and articulation of one’s dialogical encounter with one’s life-situation in the light of faith experience, can never be done independent of one’s context. Therefore, every theologizing process is contextual” (*Theologizing in Context*, 2002, p. 24). Several theologians like D.S. Amalorpavadass, Aloysius Pieris, George Soares-Prabhu, Kancheria Pathil, Michael Amaladoss, Felix Wilfred, have been trailblazers in the field Contextual theologizing. The theologizing done in Vidyajyoti and other institutes of theology in India strive to follow the pastoral circle of immersion in the context, socio-cultural analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral praxis, aiming at transformation. That is why fieldwork among the marginalized is an intrinsic part of our theological curriculum.

4. Conclusion

Contextual theologians all over the world, especially in Asia and India are vindicated by Francis’ *Motu Proprio*. Pope Francis wants theologians to carry out the pro-active role of organic intellectuals and become catalysts of courageous cultural revolution. Unfortunately theologizing in India is mostly limited to clergy with an exception of a few women religious. Contextual theologizing by lay as well as women theologians is a need of the hour. Spurred and energized by this enlightening document, with renewed vigour and zeal, theologians should launch out into the deep (Lk 5:4), carry out the two-fold task of advancing relationality and transdisciplinarity, and in a synodal spirit promote “outgoing” frontier theology marked by sapiential knowledge and bearing the pastoral “stamp.”

Dr. Edwin RODRIGUES SJ

SWAMIJI'S FINAL DAYS

**Mother THÉOPHANE and
Dr. Yann VAGNEUX MEP**

Dr. Yann Vagneux <arunachalaji@yahoo.com> is a French priest of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). He has a doctorate in Dogmatic Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, where his research was on the Trinitarian theology of Jules Monchanin, founder of the Shantivanam Ashram. Since 2012 he lives in Varanasi where he carries on his studies in Sanskrit and works in the field of Interreligious Dialogue with Hindu Pandits on behalf of the diocese.

Abstract: 25 years ago, Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) breathed his last at Indore. To remember the death anniversary of the Benedictine monk who had a great influence for the development of the Christian ashram movement, we reproduce here a letter written by Mother Théophane, the nun who took care of Swamiji during the last weeks of this earthly life. It is introduced and edited with footnotes by Fr. Yann Vagneux MEP, a French priest living in Varanasi since 2010 where he follows the footsteps of Abhishiktananda and the other pioneers of Hindu-Christian dialogue in India.

Keywords: Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), Christian Ashram Movement, Interreligious Dialogue, Spirituality.

Introduction

On July 14, 1973, the Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux / Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) suffered a heart attack that led to a spiritual experience beyond the bodily states of life and death. He awoke to the dazzling fullness of Presence. Severely weakened, he was first treated at the Tourist Bungalow in Rishikesh. On August 21 he arrived at Roberts' Nursing Home in Indore, taken there by his disciple Marc Chaduc (Swami Ajatananda), who on June 30 had received his *sannyasa diksha* (ritual initiation into

the life of a renunciant). Abhishiktananda was familiar with the Nursing Home, having gone there regularly since 1957 to be treated by Mother Théophane (1903-1982), a French nun from the Franciscan congregation of Sainte-Marie-des-Anges. Mother Théophane was a contemplative soul to whom Swamiji felt very close.

Over the following months, Mother Théophane did all she could to help Abhishiktananda recover. Over the weeks his condition remained unstable, fluctuating between recovery and decline. He had to cancel his many plans for the future, such as returning to the river banks of the Ganges at Rishikesh, where Ajatananda was staying; moving to the Soso Carmel in Jharkhand to become the sisters' chaplain; and finally, travelling incognito to the South to enjoy the warmer climate of Pondicherry, a trip that ultimately had to be cancelled because the airline was grounded by a strike.

During the month of October various friends came to visit: Odette Baumer and her son Christophe, whose photograph captures the penetrating light in Swamiji's eyes; Sister Ivane de Feydeau; Ajit Muricker, a young seminarian from Poona; and Father Dominique Van Rollegheem, a fellow Benedictine who was a long-time confidant.¹ To the very eve of his death, Abhishiktananda was busy proofreading *Saccidānanda*, the revised English translation of his 1965 work *Sagesse hindoue, mystique chrétienne*.² He also used his remaining strength to write

¹ Odette Baumer-Despeigne (1913-2002) contacted Henri Le Saux in the 1960s, but they did not meet until October 1973. After Swamiji's death, she worked tirelessly to make him better known in Europe. Ivane de Feydeau (1919-2012) was a former Sister of the Sacred Heart whom Henri Le Saux had met in Trivandrum. She later settled in Akola, Maharashtra. Dominique Van Rollegheem (1904-1995), was a Benedictine monk from the monastery of Saint André in Bruges. After years in China and the Congo, he went to India in 1951 and was one of the founders of Asirvanam, a monastery near Bangalore. He later lived as a hermit in Gujarat.

² Henri Le Saux, *Sagesse hindoue, mystique chrétienne* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1965); Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974).

a few missives in which he tried to convey what he had experienced: "Sometimes I feel so low that I want to let go of this 'old garment', as the Gita says. But still I must tell the secret of the awakening, which is so simple."³

Henri Le Saux died in Indore on December 7, 1973, the vigil of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. A few weeks later, Mother Théophane recounted her patient's death in a letter to his sister Marie-Thérèse, who was a Benedictine nun.⁴ The simplicity with which Mother Théophane describes Swamiji's extreme physical fragility makes all the more striking the spiritual depth to which Abhishiktananda had arrived during his final days on earth.

For my part, I need this punishing blow to make me realize that the awakening to the I is beyond all that marvellous poetry with which again and again we naturally clothe it. The awakening is what lies in the depth of what is utterly ordinary! What a purification . . . is this mental helplessness in which I now live. . . .⁵

Yann VAGNEUX MEP

Roberts' Nursing Home,
January 18, 1974

My dear Sister Marie-Thérèse,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

At last! Forgive me for this long delay, which has bothered me as much as it has you. I can't tell you how often I thought of

³ Letter from Henri Le Saux to Marc Chaduc, October 9, 1973. In James Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 315.

⁴ Marie-Thérèse Le Saux (1930-2002) was a Benedictine nun at Saint Michel de Kergonan Abbey, next door to Sainte Anne de Kergonan Abbey, where Henri Le Saux had lived until his departure for India in 1948. Twenty years separated the brother and sister, who had hardly known each other. Yet a common monastic vocation united them and gave rise to a regular correspondence, published in *Vers l'expérience spirituelle: Lettres (1952-1973)* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2018).

⁵ Letter from Henri Le Saux to Marc Chaduc, October 20-21, 1973. In Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 317.

you when “our Father” was ill and then after he died. Immediately after his death I wrote a long and detailed letter to Father Dominique in French, telling him to forward it to you. I’m sure the reason he didn’t do so was that he was busy informing others. So it goes.

As you know, Father got much better, thanks to a rich diet that I am sure was not easy for him to accept but that quickly restored his strength. At, at the beginning of December, he told me, “I think I’ve gone through the worst of it now, and with the warm weather in the South, I’ll recover more quickly.” We waited for a plane, but in vain because the airlines still hadn’t settled with the strikers. On the morning of the fifth, he was quite tired because he hadn’t slept. The doctor came and found that his condition was pretty much unchanged, though he was still having trouble breathing. He celebrated Mass around 11:30 a.m. and was pretty much the same for the rest of the day. December 6 was not much better. The doctor returned on the 7th and gave him some medicine, but he still had a hard time breathing. It’s as if there was a weight on his chest. Oxygen was made available to him, but he didn’t like it. All he wanted was a little soup and cooked fruit. Most of the time he remained in bed resting.

At around five o’clock in the afternoon, I was standing at Father’s side when he suddenly started choking. I called for help, but the choking stopped and he felt better, though he was sweating. A visiting doctor looked in on him and said, “He’s fine.” Seeing several of us standing around him, Swamiji said, “What’s going on?” I replied, “Father, you were tired and had a hard time breathing, but now you’re fine.” He lay down on his bed. Then the doctor came back and prescribed a special medication for him if he again had trouble breathing.

We had adoration of the Blessed Sacrament after dinner for an hour. I then came back to his bedside. At 8:30 that evening he had the same kind of attack! I phoned the doctor, and he told me that he should get an injection. That that seemed to calm him down

and make him sleepy. He told me, "You're still here; you need to go and get some rest."

"The sisters are in the chapel," I replied; "I'll say my rosary here, and then we'll see." (I had no intention of leaving him alone.) These past few nights, our night nurse had stayed close to his room to keep an eye on him.

All at once, at about ten minutes to eleven, he had the same choking fit. The nurses came immediately and gave him another injection. I called the priests (the parish house is next door to the Nursing Home), and they came immediately. He was quiet but he didn't seem to be breathing, though he still had a pulse. He received the anointing of the sick and gently departed for the Lord on December 7 at about 11 PM. The whole thing couldn't have lasted more than seven minutes. The Blessed Virgin had come to fetch him because she wanted him in heaven for the feast of her Immaculate Conception (the patronal feast of our little convent here!!!).

The priests then left, but one of them remained to clothe him and help lay him on the bed. Meanwhile, the room was immediately tidied up and made to look like a chapel. The sisters took turns all night, and in the morning, before mass, flowers were placed over his body, as you can see in the photo. He wore an orange tunic and a white stole. He looked marvelous, beautiful in an otherworldly way. He looked like he was just resting and ready to look at you and smile. As early as 7 a.m., people started coming to see him and pray near him (his death had been announced at the parish mass at 6:30). I telephoned all the convents in Indore, and all morning long there was a line of nuns coming to his bedside.

At around 7:30, our Bishop and the Father Superior of the Society of the Divine Word arrived. "What are we going to do?" I asked myself. "Where should he be buried?" The Divine Word Fathers have a cemetery at their formation house in Palda four kilometers from Indore. But perhaps he should be buried at Mihow twelve kilometers from here where other priests and sisters are

buried?” When the Bishop asked me, “Where is he going to be buried?” I said, “I don’t know; maybe in Mihow...” The Bishop replied, “That’s very far away!” Then the Father Superior said, “I have no objection to burying him in our cemetery in Palda.”⁶ The Bishop said, “That would be better,” and I replied, “I am so grateful, because there he will always be prayed for.” Father Superior said, “I’ll go to Palda and ask the local superior; I’ll phone you as soon as I find out.” A quarter hour later, he gave me an affirmative answer. The novices were already preparing the grave!

The parish priest came, and everything was arranged. There would be a funeral mass at the cathedral at 4 p.m., followed by the burial in Palda. It was a splendid funeral: a Latin high mass concelebrated with the Bishop; wonderful music; a cathedral that was almost full; a homily by Father Gratian,⁷ the parish priest, who spoke admirably (in English) of our dear Father, whom he had known for a long time. Then to Palda for the burial, which was attended by all the men and women religious from Indore. Another talk was given to inform the young postulants about Swamiji’s special vocation. Immediately afterwards, I asked the priest who spoke if we could have a copy of his talk. The Bishop said, “There should be an article in all the newspapers.” That was done, but because Christmas was not far off, it came out a little late.

I didn’t have any addresses, not even Marc’s.⁸ I found Father Dominique’s in the *Catholic Directory* and sent him a detailed

⁶ In 1995, part of Swami Abhishiktananda’s remains were transferred to the Shantivanam Ashram.

⁷ Father Gratian Aroojis was close to Abhishiktananda and understood his spiritual approach. It was he who chose the readings for the funeral mass: Rom 8:14-17; Ps 139 (138); John 17:24-26.

⁸ After Swamiji’s death, Marc Chaduc-Swami Ajatananda (1944-1977) established a hermitage at Kaudiyala, on the banks of the Ganges, upstream from Rishikesh. He mysteriously disappeared in April 1977. Cf. Yann Vagneux, “The Ultimate Conqueror of Death,” *Indian Portraits: Eight Christian Encounters with Hinduism* (New Delhi: Nirala, 2021), 123-166.

telegram on the morning of the 8th. I waited for a response, but nothing came. He later wrote to me from Bombay, where he was preaching a retreat, to let me know that he had received the message I had sent to Bangalore, but it had been badly translated by his superior. When he wrote, he was under the impression that Father had died in the South. Finally, a few days after he returned home from Bombay, he found my telegram along with a long letter I had written and all of Swamiji's mail, which I had also sent him. Everything was now clear, but there still no address for Marc. I received a telegram from him, but the return address was illegible.

In the meantime, I wrote to Father Dominique, "If only Marc could come here and have a look at all his things." Marc finally did arrive on January 7 and stayed for three full days. He took everything with him except for a few things I kept for you and the family. As for the rest, Marc had to work things out with Father Dominique. Marc has since written to me, saying that Father Dominique requests that everything come to him, except for official documents and materials related to books that are in the process of being published in Dehra-Dun or Delhi. That's what I was hoping for, because there should be a single place where one will be able to find the necessary documents for a biography that will surely have to be written,⁹ as well as all the testimonies that will arrive after his departure to the Lord!

Marc has returned to complete solitude in the North (I gave him your letter); his visa has been renewed for one year. I have an address in case he needs be contacted, but he doesn't want to be asked to write anything—for this year at least. Yes, our Father loved him very much. Marc believes that now he will help him even more, and so do we, don't we?

Our Mother General is returning to France at the end of the month; I'll see if she can take something for you.

⁹ Cf. James Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989); *Le bénédictin et le grand éveil* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1999).

Over the last few months, our Swamiji has been constantly praised for his simplicity and complete docility regarding everything that had been suggested to him for his own good and his health. I already asked him last year, when he was already quite worn out, to think about living a less isolated, less austere life. He confessed that this past year was a difficult one for him, that he almost couldn't pull it off!!!

The prospect that he would now be limited as to what he could do was hard on him. He wanted to remain in a Hindi-speaking region and wondered where he might be able to do that. He did not want to be too isolated since it would be necessary to have someone with him to take care of his material needs. At the same time, he wanted to be independent enough to receive all those who come to him from all castes and creeds. So that was the problem. As I said to him, "The Good Lord will arrange everything for the best, if that be his will. He is the one who has directed everything so far; He will continue to do so." On that we were in complete agreement.

By the beginning of October, he was very weak. He simply couldn't stand any more of the boiled, unpalatable food he'd been given. He was also looking forward to leaving for the South, where he would be by himself and freer to vary his menu without scandalizing those around him. However, the doctor made him put off his departure for a month and allowed us to vary his diet a little. That very same day he was served fish at noon. I arrived after he had eaten, and his plate was clean. I couldn't believe it—nor could he—and from that time on he began regaining his strength and putting on weight. He still felt bad about having better food and more of it, but none of his Hindu servants gave it a second thought. The new diet was continued and everything was perfect. As you can see in the photo,¹⁰ he looks like he was in very good

¹⁰ In October, Christophe Baumer took a series of photos of Swamiji, including the particularly moving one that shows his "eyes of light."

physical condition, and he was really looking forward to boarding a plane!

It was in October, when he was very weak, that people came to visit. Even though he liked them a lot, these visits exhausted him. He felt bad that he was not able to be more fully engaged with everyone who came to see him, sometimes from very far away. For me, that was when he became a symbol of the suffering Christ! It was as if he had been smitten by the Lord, unable to read, pray, or do anything. It was a time of total spiritual nakedness and complete physical collapse. A “necessary experience” we both said. We are here and that’s it; everything else comes from Him. It was at this point that, to distract him, I said, “Father, you’re bogged down.” “Oh yes, absolutely” he said. “Father, that’s perfect,” I replied. There are many bogged down people on earth and they have no saints who understand them. You’ll be the first saint who’s bogged down. How wonderful!” This amused him greatly, and the next day he recited a litany for bogged down saints. “From getting up early, deliver us, O Lord. From taking a cold bath, deliver us, O Lord. From making an effort, deliver us, O Lord. From eating tasteless food, deliver us, O Lord.” And he couldn’t help laughing.

When some sisters talked to him about taking an airplane to the South, he would picture himself in a wire crate or a chariot of fire as portrayed in the beautiful icon depicting Elijah being taken up into heaven.¹¹ During the day, I’d often drop in for a quick word with him, and sometimes he was quite amusing! In the evenings, after Compline, I’d stay with him for half an hour, chatting quietly. He’d talk about his favorite topics, or we’d read texts from the Upanishads that were as profound as those of Saint John

¹¹ Odette Baumer had given Abhishiktananda an icon of Elijah’s being taken up to heaven, which he contemplated for a long time until his death, as it reminded him of the deeply moving events he had experienced with Marc at the Ranagal temple from July 10 to 14, 1973. Cf. Yann Vagneux, “The Ultimate Conqueror of Death,” *Indian Portraits*, 143-148.

of the Cross. While taking the medication he was given after his second attack, he said to me, “I think it will always be like this now. Who could have imagined it! As God wills!” He said this with a beautiful smile and a hand gesture that meant “It’s all over, nothing matters anymore.” And then he added, “I’m ready. As God wills.” He also murmured something about Elijah’s chariot. It was as if he knew he was about to leave us.

Father was so perfectly human—so charming and gentle in his manner. Several of our doctors got very close to him during his long weeks here, and they remain very impressed. Priests came to see him. Father Gratian, the pastor of the parish, understood him perfectly. He, the Divine Word Father Superior, and the Bishop are all young and outstanding Indian priests. I knew them as postulants and at the minor seminary. There were also some European priests who came to see him as they passed through Indore. I’ll try to have Father Gratian’s articles duplicated and will send you copies. Father Dominique asks that everything be sent to him. Everyone regrets that he left us so early (we would have liked him to remain with us for another 15 years). We can’t be sad, because we feel that he is still with us, all the more so now that perpetual light shines upon him!

He had almost finished reviewing the final proofs of his books that had been translated into English and will be published shortly. At first, he was not very well understood. He was, after all, twenty years ahead of the Second Vatican Council. Now he is not only accepted and appreciated, he has become the driving force behind this awakening to God and to the spiritual riches of India. He was in demand everywhere but very rarely agreed to go, especially this last year. Travelling made him very tired, and he didn’t want to take the plane.

His mission was to be what he taught. He wanted his life to demonstrate what is essential, namely, that which is taught by true Hindu spirituality—and by Saint John of the Cross (especially the poems) or Saint John the Apostle! Indianization means nothing if

it is not first and foremost “awakening to oneself, awakening to God.” Christians in general are too attached to the letter that kills and not to the spirit. This is what repels Hindus, and it is precisely this that our bishops, meeting in Calcutta these days, said: The most urgent thing, the most important thing, is to live God, to live the life that comes from God. If the Hindu senses that we are doing this, he will come to us. Nothing else will attract him. Living the life that comes from God in real poverty and devotion and service and love of neighbor is exactly what our poor world needs, so let’s help it live that kind of life, each in our own way.

Forgive me for writing this letter in such haste; I could hardly make it out when I looked at it this morning. I wrote whatever came to mind without any order and without thinking it through. Please forgive me. You can improve it by excerpting and rewriting what you think would be of interest to your family. Your sisters have written to me, but it’s been very difficult for me to find the time these past weeks to answer them.

With all my heart, I remain united with you in Him, close to heaven, and I count on your spiritual support. I’ll send you the articles as soon as I can.

Your poor “old” sister in the Lord, seventy years old but with a heart of twenty.

Sister Marie-Théophane.

(Translated from the French by William Skudlarek OSB).

**PRESERVATION OF
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND
ETHICAL CONSIDERABILITY
OF ALL LIVING BEINGS
A Philosophical and Theological Approach**

Dr. Savio VAZ SAC

The author <saviovaz@gmx.de> is a Pallottine Priest. He has done his doctorate in Moral theology in the University of Bonn and the postdoctoral thesis in the University of Freiburg, Germany. Presently he is teaching Moral Theology in Vinzenz Pallotti University in Vallendar, Germany.

Abstract: The loss of biodiversity is a serious threat to the life on Earth. Human progress has put unprecedented pressure on plants and animals. In this article, we want to explore the various principles of animal ethics, which examine human relationship to the non-human animals. Their miseries should conscientise humans about their responsibility as stewards of creation in preserving the iconic biodiversity.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Animal Ethics, Anthropocentrism, Anthropocene, Theological Anthropology.

1. COP-27 and Endangered Biodiversity

The 27th Conference of the Partners (COP-27) to the United Nations framework Convention on climate change was held from 6-20 November 2022 in the Egyptian city Sharm-El-Sheikh. Nearly 200 Nations of the World negotiated over the future of Global action on climate change. The humankind has to act now in order to protect the Mother Earth from further extinction of vulnerable species and to prevent natural calamities caused by climate change. Then, no country, region, or national economy is immune to consequences of environmental calamities. Protection

of the biodiversity is indispensable; it encompasses every living entity from fungi, bacteria, microorganisms to plants and animals, the entire ecosystem.¹ The climate change is primarily caused through global warming which is again through fossil fuels, which are the largest contributor to the greenhouse gas emission. It threatens our natural world, the faunal regions, forests (Rain forests), grasslands (Prairie, Savannah), tundra, deserts, ice sheet, Glacier, etc. Climate change destroys the biodiversity, which is essential for humans and non-human animals. “*Laudato Si*” mentions “Biodiversity” eleven times and speaks about its immeasurable value for the sustainability of our common home.

2. Growing Interest in Animal Affairs

The past decades have experienced an exponential increase in literature concerning animal ethics. This has been fuelled by factors like discoveries into the complexities of animal minds and emotions. The various findings of the scientific research on animals have blurred the traditional pattern of thinking, human subject and animal object, or between culture and nature. Philosophical ethical theories are holding humans responsible for the heartless exploitation and devastation of the environment and are proposing innovative ethical guidelines for the betterment of the world. Most of these ethical theories reject anthropocentrism, which considers humans to be superior and masters of the universe, neglecting other nonhuman beings and the whole ecosystem.

The existence of palpable and persuasive miseries of animals have made some to grapple with the problem of evil itself. Some come to quick explanations with a rejection of the existence of a benevolent Creator. The intensity and duration of animal suffering is for them a compelling evidence for the non-existence of God. In his provocative book, Michael Murray cites Charles Darwin’s poignant explanation for the deplorable state of animals and the

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si*, on Care for our common home, 2015, nos. 25, 32-33.

goodness of a creator. “The suffering of millions of lower animals throughout almost endless time are apparently irreconcilable with the existence of a creator of ‘unbounded goodness’.”²

For agnostics and atheists, the human and natural calamities are clear signs of the non-existence of a loving and all-knowing God. They ask, “How could you believe in an all loving and powerful God who allows such a tragedy?” The contemporary philosophy of religion discusses the problem of theodicy, focusing on the incompatibility of animal suffering and the divine goodness. Why does God permit preventable misery to animals who lack moral responsibility? Murray rejects the fact that God’s existence is logically compatible with the existence of evil in the world. However, these defences are unconvincing when evidential arguments are concerned because “they do not aim to provide explanation that undercut the evidential value of evil.”³

3. Human Aggression into Animal Kingdom

Non-human animals live in ecosystems that are increasingly intruded by growing human population, who grab their terrains, resulting in loss for non-human animals at an unprecedented rate. The protection of the biodiversity as the natural defense against climate change cannot be secured through political agendas and treaties alone. All these developments call for radical responsibility and commitment from each individual person towards the non-human animals and the entire environment. Radical responsibility is a form of moral responsibility that extends our moral obligations to the point where we feel responsible “for the unintended (and often unnoticed) consequences of our actions and our failures to act.”⁴ Besides philosophical arguments⁵ and ethical theories, we

² M.J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2008), 2.

³ Ibid., 37.

⁴ N. Dower (ed.), *Ethics and Environmental Responsibility* (Aldershot: Gower, 1989), 18.

⁵ Cf. A. Taylor, *Animals and Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate*, 3rd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009).

also require solid religious and theological basis for the protection of our sensitive ecosystem. That could be our greatest argument for the biodiversity and against Climate change.

4. Ethical Reflection over All Animals

Animals are finally receiving a little more attention about their wellbeing. Vegetation and animals contribute significantly to the ecosystem and hence to human wellbeing. But then, how do we treat them? What is their moral status and what is the relation of human towards animals?⁶ Animal ethics is a branch of philosophical ethics, which examines human-animal relationship. It explores the ethical approach of human in their dealing with the animals, how animals ought to be treated. This branch of ethics includes vast related topics like wildlife conservation, animal suffering, animal law, welfare, their rights, biomedical research, flesh industry, pharmacology, cosmetics, animal transport, use of animals for religious purposes, entertainment industry, etc.⁷ Animals undergo inhumane injuries and destruction of life and their bodily integrity is disrespected. Every year tens of billions are killed in slaughterhouses and trillions are fished out of the seas. About 100 million Animals killed for experimentation.⁸

The bond between human and animals include all animals. Humane treatment to animals impacts our character and it reflects our moral attitude. Religions have special duty to safeguard all non-human animals. God is the Creator of human as well as the non-human-beings.⁹ We require a new and consequent ethical reawakening to render justice to animals. Martha Nussbaum writes

⁶ Cf. L. Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷ Cf. T.L. Beauchamp et al. (eds.), *The Human Use of Animals: Case Studies in Ethical Choice* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press: 2008).

⁸ This includes environmental experimentation, cosmetic and household products, military experimentation, biomedical and experimentation with new materials, etc.

⁹ Cf. A. Linzey and C. Linzey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics* (London, New York: Routledge –Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 1-20.

in her book, “Animals are in trouble all over the world. Our world is dominated by human everywhere: on land, in the seas, and in the air. No non-human animal escapes human domination.”¹⁰

Human cruelty has a long history. However, human domination and insatiability have increased exponentially in the last decades in all the cultures. The increase in meat-eating and poaching as well as the indifference of humans to the environment, towards biodiversity, which threaten extinction of many species, have become ethical concerns today.¹¹ Unfortunately, there are no consistent moral world values regarding animal treatment. In Western countries, people are more emotionally upset over the abuse and neglect of house animals like dogs, cats, or horses, and less over the plight of farm animals like chickens or mink. In India, the cow is treated as sacred whereas pigs (not boars) are considered filthy.

5. Animal Ethics and Excessive Anthropocentrism

With the rapid development in natural sciences, the traditional teleological thinking is losing its validity. Natural sciences promised humans solutions for all their problems, but at a very heavy price. Humans themselves became a problem and not a remedy. Anthropocentric ethical theories are being replaced or supplemented through ecocentric (*oikos* = house), pathocentric (*pathos* = pain), biocentric (*bio* = life), or physiocentric (*physis* = Nature) theories.¹² Philosophical thinking on the moral standing of non-human animals is gaining ground. The stoical philosophical outlook grasped the whole Cosmos as a mammoth organism or a huge house with well-equipped Anthropocentrism.¹³ All other

¹⁰ M.C. Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (New York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2022), xi.

¹¹ Ibid., xiii-xiv.

¹² Cf. E. Schockenhoff, *Ethik des Lebens: Grundlagen und neue Herausforderungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 63-83.

¹³ Cf. T. Rasimus and I. Dundenberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010); A.S. Rosenthal-Pubul, *The Theoretic life*

creatures are to help the human beings to reach their supreme culmination. The whole creation and creatures are with each other united and help towards the fulfilment of the final purpose. The teleology, a study of ends, goals or purpose, was well defined. The *finis ultimus* of everything was the participation in God, as its final object.¹⁴ Most modern non-human animal ethics are against ethical anthropocentrism or some are even misanthropic. They fight against male-centeredness, male chauvinism, and androcentrism, ethnicism or racism. All these anthropological tendencies have abused nature and animals.

The English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) argued in his monumental book “*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*” (1789) that the very fact that animals have the capacity to suffer should be the main criterion in granting them their rights. He argued that the aspect of pain or suffering on human and non-human sentient beings cannot be dealt with different standards. Bentham’s ethical theory is a hedonistic Utilitarianism, which judges pleasure as morally good and the pain as something bad. What causes greatest balance of pleasure over pain should be desired for all sentient non-human animals. His position sounded radical in his time. He denounced the rampant practice of slavery and sexism, which denied equal status to slaves and women. These words were written in the time, when the French had given freedom to slaves and equality of rights, whereas in England and in the colonies, they were still considered and treated like non-human animals. His sharp and unforgettable words echo even today.

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a

– *A Classical Ideal and Its Modern Fate: Reflections on the Liberal Arts* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 37-46, 61-91.

¹⁴ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2415-2418.

human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?¹⁵

This last sentence is described as “the great Sentence” for the struggle against animal cruelty and for animal liberation.

6. Reverence for Life

Ludwig Philipp Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) a Protestant theologian, author, musician, physician, and environmentalist in Lambaréné, Gabon, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952, acknowledging his dedication for the tireless humanitarian work in the jungles of Africa and his love for the mother Earth. Schweitzer’s maxim “reverence for life” is a translation of the German maxim “*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*.” He made this axiom the basic tenet of his ethical theory, then ethics is nothing but about reverence for life.¹⁶ His bio-centric worldview affirms the sacredness of life in its diversity and unity. The innovative moral perspective is centred on self-realisation, nature-centred spirituality, and ethical idealism. “Reverence for life emerges from the will to live present in each of us, widens by affirming our kinship with other life, and unfolds in a moral optimism of self-realization through

¹⁵ J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Vol. II (London: W. Pickering and E. Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1823), 236.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Schweitzer, *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. M. Meyer and K. Bergel (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002).

service to others and the pursuit of excellence.”¹⁷ All life should be protected because it is sacred. Reverence for life is both respect and awe, ethics and spirituality. Schweitzer considers life as human, animals, and plants. They are individuals and interconnected beings.¹⁸

7. Kantian Ethics and Animal Welfare

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German Philosopher had enormous influence on the later Philosophy. Kantian ethics differentiates humans from non-human animals with rationality as its hallmark. Animals receive in Kantian ethics moral considerability only indirectly. C. Korsgaard explains, “moral laws may be viewed as the laws legislated by all rational beings in the kingdom of Ends.”¹⁹ Kant grants animals moral consideration through indirect duties, but not equal moral considerability. Then animals lack the rational capacity and self-consciousness. According to the Kantian categorical imperative, we have to respect other human beings and never use them as mere tools for our selfish interests.²⁰ Animals do not come under the categorical imperative.

Many modern animal ethicists have not explored Kant’s ethics and his stand on animals fully, but they swiftly come to conclusion that the famous enlightenment philosopher denied the existence of rights of animals. However, the recent Kantian literature shows that Kant’s ethical theory offers much more, than just appealing against the cruelty towards the non-human beings. Kant argues like other philosophers and theologians that ill-treatment of animals could gradually develop cruel character in humans towards their fellow beings. That such abhorrent behaviour might “demean”

¹⁷ M.W. Martin, *Albert Schweitzer’s Reverence for Life: Ethical Idealism and Self-Realization* (London, New York: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

¹⁹ C.M. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligation to the Other Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

²⁰ I. Kant, *Metaphysics of Moral*, ed. L. Denis, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 210-233.

ourselves and make us eventually desensitised to human suffering. Cruel treatment towards animals is a crime against oneself and against one's own humanity. Then, such ill-treatment dulls "shared feeling of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other human beings."²¹

Kant does not accept the rights of animals, but his concern is more for the duties of humans. He distinguishes between different types of duties: perfect and imperfect, direct and indirect, to self and to others. These duties are typical to humans because they are ends in themselves and merit moral concern for their own sake. As rational beings, who autonomously impose the moral law on themselves,²² it is our duty to treat animals with sympathy and gratitude.²³ For the exponents of transcendental idealism, it is important more than just to repeat the old things. They change the aspect of the duties to animals towards the self and not towards others or God. The consideration of sympathy and gratitude towards animals has to do with duties to self and to promote our own moral perfection.

8. Are People More Important than Animals?

No ethical theory is complete if it does not include all animals. Animals, according to some ethicists, have moral standing. Among the well-known Kantian ethicists is Christine Korsgaard. Being Kantian, she accepts the Utilitarian viewpoint, that the capacity to feel pleasure and pain as basic criterion for moral standing. Sentience is the adequate reason for moral consideration of both human and non-human animals.²⁴ She agrees with Kant and his understanding of "end-in-themselves,"²⁵ and disagrees with him,

²¹ Ibid., 6:433.

²² Cf. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, 77-78.

²³ Cf. N.D. Müller, *Kantianism for Animals: A Radical Kantian Animal Ethic* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2022), 60-65.

²⁴ Cf. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, xii.

²⁵ Cf. Ibid., 77-171.

that animals are means to an end. Sentient beings have the same value and are valuable because they are selves. For her, some of the properties, that confer moral standing and make one an appropriate object of intrinsic moral concern, are sentience, consciousness, rationality, self-consciousness, personhood, being the subject of life, and having interests.²⁶ She takes a big leap and departs from her mentor by extending and applying the formula of humanity to all sentient beings. “When we consider the reason why Kant thinks we must claim the standing of ‘end-in-itself’ for ourselves, we will see that we must claim that standing for the other animals as well.”²⁷ They are our fellow creatures and creatures like us. Korsgaard criticises the species-argument. She is aware of the human-caused misery on animal kingdom and reflects, how “nothing has been as bad for the biotic community as unhindered human reproduction. Shouldn’t it follow that it is wrong for humans to reproduce, and right for us to stop reproducing and let ourselves go extinct?”²⁸

9. Animal Liberation and Rights

Two influential philosophers who worked on animal ethics are Peter Singer and Tom Regan (1938-2017). Although their philosophical viewpoints differ from each other, they pursue a common goal. They advocate the moral status of every non-human animal.²⁹ “*Animal Liberation*” the influential and powerful book of Peter Singer, a renowned Australian Philosopher and preference utilitarian, was a philosophical bombshell as it appeared in 1975.³⁰ His ethical norm is “principle of equal consideration of interests.” The principle of equality defines our concern for others and “our readiness to consider their interests ought not to depend on what

²⁶ Cf. Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁸ Ibid., 213.

²⁹ Cf. R.E. Otto, *Animal Liberation and the Bible: Christianity and the Question of “speciesism”* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 15-52.

³⁰ Cf. Ibid., 23-35.

they are like or on what abilities they may possess.”³¹ Singer calls for the liberation of animals who are enslaved by humans and are exploited for their selfish motives. All animals are equal. Like Jeremy Bentham, who incorporated the essential basis of moral equality into his ethical theory, Singer proposes the principle of equal consideration of interests. Humans violate the principle of equality by applying unethical criteria. Racists grant more privileges and rights to the members of their own race. Sexists violate the principle of human equality by favouring the interests of their own sex. Just like that, speciesists consider the interests only of their species and override the legitimate interests of other species.

“Speciesism” is a word coined by British psychologist Richard Ryder in 1970 to contest the unique moral status of humans. Peter Singer popularised it in his book “*Animal Liberation*” to debunk the argument of Anthropocentrism. Speciesism is “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those members of other species.”³² Just like racism and sexism violate the principle of equality among the humans, that is, they unjustly favour the “interests of those of another race or their own sex,”³³ speciesism discriminates the principle of equality as it favours “the interests of his [/her] own species that override the greater interests of other species.”³⁴ The possession of higher degree of intelligence or reason does in no way entitle humans to exploit and use the animals. Singer traces the roots of speciesism in the West, especially in the Western Religion and Theology, the elevation and nobility of human soul over the other creatures.³⁵

In his seminal philosophical work “*The Case for Animal Rights*,” Tom Regan takes a Kantian approach and demands that

³¹ P. Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York et al.: HarperCollins, 2009), 5.

³² Ibid., 277.

³³ Ibid., 278.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 185-212.

animals should be treated like humans as “ends-in-themselves” and never means to an end.³⁶ Regan contended that all animals possess the inherent value and central to his philosophical argument is his subject-of-a-life criterion. Most animals have a subject of a life, which he sees as prerequisite to base his case for the basic rights of the animals. Non-human animals, Tom Regan asserts, are not commodities or properties, but beings having moral rights.

A theocentric and an anthropocentric worldview indicate that humans are superior to animals. Western Philosophers have further developed this presumptuous pre-eminence of humans over the animals. Anthropocentric arguments have long exercised their influence on thinking about animals in the history of Western Philosophy. These Arguments have their roots in Aristotle’s natural philosophy,³⁷ and particularly in the thought of the Stoics, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and Kant. These Philosophers’ views about animals are linked by an underlying logic:

That all and only human beings are worthy of moral consideration, because all and only human beings are rational and endowed with language. Only such beings are capable of genuine self-determination and moral responsibility, and are moral beings in the most complete and authentic sense. As non-rational beings, animals are due less moral consideration than human beings, and on some accounts, animals are due no moral consideration whatsoever.³⁸

There is a difference between, what we understand under the term “anthropocentrism” and “anthropocentric” (humanism and post-humanism) ethical theories. Etymologically anthropocentrism

³⁶ Cf. Otto, *Animal Liberation and the Bible*, 42-51.

³⁷ Cf. M. Woods, “Aristotle’s Anthropocentrism,” in *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 16 (1993), 18-35.

³⁸ G. Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 4.

is derived from two Greek words “*Anthropos*” human being and “*kentron*” centre. Anthropocentrism is a worldview that privileges human race over other beings of the nature. It acknowledges human beings as its most significant element of existence. Some environmental ethical theories discard anthropocentrism because of its presupposition that only humans are worthy of ethical consideration, stressing on their superiority and all other non-human creation are means to human ends. Especially in the “Industri-centrism” of the modern age, where maintaining economic growth and social equality, and human interests and environmental protection is not possible. Economic growth is one of the chief causes for the extinction of habitats – Biodiversity and species. Here lies the very root cause of ecological crisis.³⁹

However, other environmental ethical theories perceive anthropocentrism as inevitable and necessary for the environmental protection.⁴⁰ The modern anthropocentrism is a result of industrial neoliberalism, which exploits human and natural resources. A non-genuine or one-sided anthropocentrism is a fatal ethical theory, which is like sawing off the branch you’re sitting. Ethically false anthropocentrism has been implicated in view of many environmental crises including the suffering of non-human animals and destruction of wild habitants. In order to further relativise the anthropocentrism and to widen the ethical consideration, new ethical theories are proposed.

10. Deep Ecology – Land Ethic

Deep ecology is a worldview that propagates a non-dominating attitude towards the non-human world. All life is valuable in itself and have inherent value. Humans should take this truth seriously and alter their destructive behaviour towards the nature. The

³⁹ Cf. S.M. Gardiner and A. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 77-90.

⁴⁰ Cf. H. Kopnina, H. Washington, B. Taylor, and J. J. Piccolo, “Anthropocentrism: More than just a Misunderstood Problem,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31 (2018): 109-127.

Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess began a philosophical shift in thinking pattern in 1972, which demanded that humans stop viewing the non-human world as a potential resource and consider it something that has value in itself.⁴¹ Deep ecology counters the biblical mandate to subdue the earth and have dominion over it (Gen 1:28). Deep ecology aims at supporting diversity and symbiosis and to make the Earth more sustainable.

Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival, the chances of new modes of life, the richness of forms. And the so-called struggle of life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of ability to co-exist and co-operate in complex relationships, rather than ability to kill, exploit, and suppress. 'Live and let live' is a more powerful ecological principle than 'either you or me'.⁴²

Ecocentric philosophy or ecophilosophy takes notice of every part of the ecosystem as united to the whole system, as a complex web of interrelations.

The philosophical endeavours for the protection of non-human animals have taken various directions: from sentientism, biocentrism, ecocentrism to land ethic. All these ethical theories make anthropocentrism responsible for the environmental crisis. Humanity is not separate entity from nature, but the apex of a hierarchy of species. They are entrusted with responsibility for the whole universe. The biblical accounts of creation and the creation of humans delineate in a wonderful way about the nature, role, and relationship of humans to the creation itself.

11. The Great Biblical Witness

Any serious exegesis will show that the consideration of all creatures of God is an important element of a genuine reading of the Holy

⁴¹ G. Sesssion, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston, London: Shambhala, 1995), 151-213.

⁴² A. Drengson and Y. Inoue (eds.), *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 4.

Scriptures. Both the New and the Old Testament teach that animals have intrinsic value and enjoy the favour of God. The false interpretation of the dominion mandate entrusted to humans has created false accusations against the biblical creation account. The Holy Scriptures remain important sources of understanding between the relationship of humans and the entire creation. Then, God's creative act was to establish a covenant with the whole creation.⁴³ The founder and director of the Oxford Centre for Animal ethics, Andrew Linzey says, "Christian theology, when creatively and critically handled, can provide a strong basis for animal rights."⁴⁴ However, the ecological crisis is a new context for theology. The world has never observed such an environmental crisis before. We cannot get readymade solutions from the religious traditions. "To expect abundant ecological resources from religious traditions in their current form is mistaken."⁴⁵ What insights can we win from theological anthropology to respond to the current predicament caused by Anthropocene?⁴⁶ The insights and wisdom of theological anthropology must be employed to deal with the unparalleled ecological challenges posed by Anthropocene.

11.1 "What Is Human that You Are Mindful of Him?" Ps 8:4a

The question again is, can religion or theological anthropology contribute to a better ecological treatment of the environment? In this connection, the question arises about the relation of Christians

⁴³ Cf. C. Steck, *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 1-7.

⁴⁴ A. Linzey, *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press: 2009), xii.

⁴⁵ H. Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London, New York: T&T International, 2005), 68.

⁴⁶ J.-O. Henrikson, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene: Reconsidering human agency and its limits* (Cham: Palgrave – Macmillan, 2022), 25-34. Anthropocene is defined as the period of time during which human activities have had an environmental impact on the Earth regarded as constituting a distinct geological age.

to environment. Many philosophers and non-Christians rely on a basic misunderstanding of biblical and Christian Anthropology. Lynn White has exposed the dominant anthropological emphasis in biblical reading of the creation account and its cosmology, which has led to the devastation of nature.⁴⁷ His allegation is focused on the idea of humans to whose benefit the physical world exists. “God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: No item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.”⁴⁸ Seeing the causal relationship between Christianity and the environmental crisis, he suggests that the remedy for the ecological crisis should be also religious. “Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be religious, whether we call it that or not.”⁴⁹ Christians should read the Holy Scripture and interpret it in such a way, that it benefits the environment and rectifies the misinterpretations.⁵⁰ There is wide generalisation. Not all have contempt for the world (*contemptus mundi*). Many safeguard the Earth being God’s representatives.⁵¹

11.2 Stewardship versus Dominion or Tyrant Argument

Interestingly, the biblical creation account is fundamentally not about anthropocentrism but about theocentrism. Humans occupy a prominent place in the creation of God, but they are not alone the beneficiaries of God’s goodness. All beings belong to God and they depend on God.⁵² Just like the psalm says, “All the animals

⁴⁷ L. White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1205.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1207.

⁵⁰ Cf. E. Colgan, “Reading the Bible as Waters Rise: Ecological Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Science, Faith and the Climate Crisis*, eds. Myers, S. et al. (Bingley: Emerald Publishing limited, 2020), 115-134.

⁵¹ Cf. T. LeVasseur and A. Peterson, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The “Lynn White Thesis” at Fifty* (New York, London: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 1-17.

⁵² Cf. R.A. Simkins, “The Bible and Anthropocentrism: Putting Humans in Their Place,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 38 (2014): 397-413.

in the forest are mine and the cattle on thousands of hills. All the wild birds are mine and all living in the fields” (Ps 50:10-11). The biblical preference of humans is nuanced and qualified, and not arbitrary. It stays in relation to God, the Creator.

Theological anthropology seeks to understand the nature of humans and their relationship to nature in light of divine revelation. We find two creation accounts of humans in the book of Genesis. Both contain fundamental truths on God, human nature and purpose. These narratives are not separate or contradictory, but interconnected and complementary.⁵³ One is in prose and the other is in poetic form. The first creation account speaks about the same dignity of man and woman. There is no difference between man and woman concerning their status and purpose. They both possess the same equality and dignity as the image-bearers of God. Together they represent the image of God.⁵⁴

Pope John Paul II affirmed in his Wednesday Audience that by the communion of persons (*Communio personarum*) human becomes the image of God (14 November 1979). Gen 1:26-28 states:

Let us make humankind (Heb. *Adam*) in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish ... and over the wild animals of the earth. ... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The second creation account (Gen 2:4b-25) stresses the fact of genuine and true relationship between man and woman. Both belong to each other existentially. It implies in no way a gender hierarchy or subservience of woman. It describes the harmonic existence between humans and non-human world. Everything that

⁵³ Some describe them- first as Cosmocentric and the second as Anthropocentric.

⁵⁴ Cf. S. Vaz, “God the Creator: Man as the Statue of God: Biblical and Theological Reflections on the Preservation of Creation,” in *Creation: Living Together in Our Common House: One World Theology*, Vol. II, eds. K. Kraemer and K. Vellguth (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, 2017), 26-27.

exists is good (Gen 1:31) and he loves everything that exists. “You love everything that exists; you do not despise anything that you have made. If you hated it, you wouldn’t have created it.” (Wis 11:24).

The ecological crisis turns out to be a religious crisis, where increasing secularisation has destroyed religious roots. The scientific and philosophical approach to nature, where God the Creator and Owner of the Garden (Earth) plays no role and relevance. It is a faith crisis as Pope Benedict XVI mentioned in his book. He urged Christians to recognise the primacy of God over everything, then for “where He is not, nothing can be good. Where God is not seen, both man and the world fall into decay.”⁵⁵ Prophet Jeremiah uses similar words, when he says, “How long will the land be parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished” (12:4). Biblical anthropology advocates the stewardship of human and their responsibility towards whole creation. Humans are not the owners of the Garden (Earth),⁵⁶ but its stewards. Animals know their Creator and Provider, what humans often forget (Isa 1:2-3).

Biblical worldview rejects all forms of domination or tyrannical anthropology.⁵⁷ “*Imago Dei*” is a covenantal anthropology that represents God in safeguarding his creation. In this regard Gen 2:28 and the Hebrew verb “*radah*” have been matter of discussions. In its variation of meanings “*radah*” can mean subduing, controlling, tread down, reign. Given the biblical context of life-loving God and the Garden, these verbs do not fit in. “*Radah*” in this context means leading, guiding, and sustaining. For the philosophical and atheistic theories, which do not speak about God, as the Owner and Maker of the Garden (Earth), verbs

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Vol. I (Freiburg-Br.: Herder, 2006), 179.

⁵⁶ Cf. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1); Ps 50:10-11.

⁵⁷ A.A.R. Aseneta, “Laudato Si on Non-Human Animals,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 6 (2017): 236.

like subduing or having dominion meant contributing to the exploitation of the nature.

12. Animal Ethics and Ecological Spirituality

There are many conflict-themes surrounding animal ethics or rights. It is a complex subject. Animal welfare underpins all our decisions and actions involving the use of animals and how we treat them. What affects the wellbeing of animals especially with regard to animal farming, transport, using animals for experiment, research, hunting, entertainment, pets, etc. These all are vast topics, which require profound ethical consideration. Animal welfare cannot be achieved through verbal and physical bellicosity of some extremists,⁵⁸ through prohibitions or strict measures against animal meat consumption or lofty ethical theories. Helpful to animal welfare is the ethical awareness of the need to feel with their wellbeing. We need to realise what we “owe” to them as fellow creatures. It is not only about not inflicting sufferings, but positively having a heart for them.

Nobody has the right to forbid someone to eat, what he or she may eat. No one can impose on someone that they become vegan or vegetarian. Such radicalisation of animal welfare leads to fundamentalism, which in turn can have negative repercussions on animal wellbeing. In 1965, the Brambell report recommended the British Parliament to grant basic freedoms to animals in intensive husbandry. The basic freedoms for the animal are to stand up, lie down, turn around, groom themselves, and stretch their limbs. They were later codified as five freedoms to Animals: Freedom from hunger, thirst, and malnutrition, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury, and disease, freedom to express normal behaviour, and freedom from fear and distress.⁵⁹ Oppression and

⁵⁸ For example, calling the slaughter of animals as “animal holocaust” and calling the meat-eaters as “murderers.”

⁵⁹ Cf. C. McCausland, “The Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare and Rights,” *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* 27 (2014): 649-662.

ill-treatment of animals must be emphatically rejected as moral evil contrary to the human dignity. Humans should minimise the harm to animals and respect the standards of animal welfare.⁶⁰ In all fields of animal interaction the 3R principle should be applied: Replace, Reduce, and Refine. Especially when animals are used in bio-medical researches.

13. Conclusion

Growing awareness of the animal ethics and welfare have strengthened the theological and ethical understanding of the creature “Animal” among the Christians. Religious understanding of biodiversity can help people to deal with the non-human animals differently and with compassion, knowing that God is also their Creator and Provider. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis rectifies the false understanding of biblical human dignity. Human dignity has always to be seen in the light of relationship with the rest of Creation.⁶¹ The whole Creation of God is interconnected and enjoys the goodness of God. Pope Francis accentuates the universal communion of everyone and everything.

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.⁶²

The Pontiff suggests an ecological spirituality for a communal or ecological conversion of heart.⁶³ “The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast.”⁶⁴ A true altruistic concern for the biodiversity could lead to the betterment of our vulnerable common home.

⁶⁰ Cf. R. Harisson, *Animal Machines: The New Factory Farming Industry* (Oxfordshire, Boston: CABI, 2013).

⁶¹ Aseneta, “*Laudato Si* on Non-Human Animals,” 236-241.

⁶² Francis, *Laudato Si*, no. 92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, nos. 216-221.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 217.

PRIESTLY FORMATION IN SAFEGUARDING Advancements and Planning

Dr. Konrad NORONHA SJ

The author <kjnoronha@loyola.edu> is the Director of the Center for Safeguarding and Human Formation (CSHF) at De Nobili College, Pune, India. He is the co-convenor of the Safeguarding Team of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA) and the convenor of the Jesuit Counsellors and Psychologists Forum (JCPF). He is on the faculty of Jnana Deepa Pontifical Athenium of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, India.

Abstract: Priestly formation prepares seminarians for the priesthood. It includes human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. Various norms and procedures have to be followed during the course of formation. Formation in safeguarding involves training individuals to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm. This training helps them with the knowledge and skills to create safe environments for children and vulnerable adults. Clergy and religious need to be trained in the various dimensions of safeguarding throughout formation and ongoing formation.

Keywords: Formation, Safeguarding, Training, Clergy and Religious, Ongoing Formation.

1. Introduction

The issue of clergy sexual abuse is real and relevant today. Priestly formation in safeguarding is an important aspect of training for the priesthood. Priestly formation should focus as much on relationships and formation around sexuality, as it does on the intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral aspects of priesthood. Some church documents in which these are clearly defined and explained

are *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* (30 April 2001),¹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992),² *Ministorum Institutio* (16 January 2013),³ and *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December 2016),⁴ which provide guidelines on the formation of seminarians to be followed by seminaries throughout the world. Some recent documents dealing with safeguarding are *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (7 May 2019),⁵ the *Vademecum* (16 July 2020)⁶ and the *Rescriptum* of the Holy Father Francis to promulgate the Instruction on the confidentiality of legal proceedings (17 December 2019).⁷

Formators need to pay more attention to the needs and challenges that priests face, particularly in terms of human

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*, 30 April 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_20020110_sacramentorum-sanctitatis-tutela.html (accessed on 05.08.2023).

² Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 15 March 1992, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html (accessed on 05.08.2023).

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Ministorum Institutio*, 16 January 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20130116_ministorum-institutio.html (accessed on 05.08.2023).

⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (RFIS)*, L'Osservatore Romano, Vatican City, 8 December 2016, <https://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Ratio%20Fundamentalis/The%20Gift%20of%20the%20Priestly%20Vocation.pdf> (accessed on 05.08.2023).

⁵ Pope Francis, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, 7 May 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html (accessed on 05.08.2023).

⁶ Pope Francis, *Vademecum: On Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics*, 16 July 2020, <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/knowledgebase/vademecum/> (accessed on 05.08.2023).

⁷ Pope Francis, *Rescriptum Ex Audientia Ss.Mi: Rescriptum* of the Holy Father Francis to promulgate the Instruction on the confidentiality of legal proceedings, 17 December 2019, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/12/17/191217b.html> (accessed on 05.08.2023).

relationships and sexuality. It is possible that seminarians and priests in formation may not trust formators enough to come forward with their anxieties and problems in these areas because they're worried about being sent away. This fear can lead to a lack of transparency and honesty during the formation and ongoing formation process.

Safeguarding should be addressed from the very start of a seminarian's studies. This can help ensure that future priests are well-equipped to handle the complexities of their roles and responsibilities.

There are some centres run in India that work for safeguarding and human formation. One such center is the "The Center for Safeguarding and Human Formation (CSHF)" started by the Jesuit Conference of South-Asia, located at De Nobili College, Pune, India. The Saint Joseph's Safeguarding Center started by the Archdiocese of Bombay too works in safeguarding. Drawing from experiences over the years as a formator, the author of this article focuses on various aspects of formation, especially with regard to safeguarding.

2. Formative Perspectives

In 2002, Pope John Paul II in his address to the American Cardinals stated, "there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young."⁸ General Congregation 31 of the Jesuits, stated that a healthy human and spiritual formation of candidates to the priesthood is essential.⁹ Candidates should be formed in an appreciation of chastity, celibacy, and the responsibility for religious life. Therefore, in early and ongoing formation the

⁸ Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Cardinals of The United States," 23 April 2002, no. 3, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/april/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20020423_usa-cardinals.html#:~:text=To%20the%20Cardinals%20of%20the,%2C%202002\)%20%7C%20John%20Paul%20II&text=Dear%20Brothers%2C,your%20country%20in%20recent%20months](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/april/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20020423_usa-cardinals.html#:~:text=To%20the%20Cardinals%20of%20the,%2C%202002)%20%7C%20John%20Paul%20II&text=Dear%20Brothers%2C,your%20country%20in%20recent%20months) (accessed on 05.08.2023).

⁹ J. W. Padberg (ed.), *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009).

candidates should have an awareness of the Church's discipline in these matters.¹⁰ Because of the many challenges of formation in today's post-modern world, formation would have to be adapted to the present times.

2.1 Formation and Formators

Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV), nos. 43-44, focuses on elements in formation that include a formee's capacity to relate to others, the ability to form true friendships, affective maturity, and sexual education. Signs of maturity include having solid peer relationships, passionate living, flexible, clear boundaries, and empathy. Signs of arrest include isolation, lack of peer relationships, emotionally undeveloped behaviour, excessive intellectualization or reasoning, being controlling, judgmental, or rigid, and the use of sexual innuendos and sexualized speech.

2.2 Challenges

Challenges include difficulties that formees have in forming a stable Self (PDV, no. 51). They are unable to form close relationships. Some come from families with elements of dysfunction. Also, there is insufficient religious knowledge and practice, and they often lack the intellectual capacity to go through a rigorous formation. These issues need to be addressed at early stages of formation. Pope Francis in his address to the Congregation of Clergy on 30 May 2017¹¹ talked about the allure of the priestly vocation and the demanding path of priestly ministry.

2.3 The Digital World

The formees today are digital natives, who although adept with the world of the internet, cannot keep pace with its speed, since

¹⁰ M.A. Hansen, *Child Sexual Abuse Within the Catholic Church* (2015). *Culminating Projects in Criminal Justice*. 2, http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cjs_etds/2 (accessed on 10.08.2023).

¹¹ Deborah, "Pope Francis to Clergy Plenary: prayer key to mission," *Inside the Vatican*, 1 June 2017, <https://insidethevatican.com/magazine/vatican-watch/pope-francis-clergy-plenary-prayer-key-mission/> (accessed on 10.08.2023).

everything seems transient. This is reflected in their relationships which are fragile and floating. Resistance is seen in meeting standards equal to that of the secular world. There also is a strong sense of entitlement in those who join to be priests and religious.¹² If an individual exhibits inappropriate tendencies and behaviors during formation not appropriate to life as a priest; they need to be addressed early. The attitude has been to cover up or not effectively tackle ills at early stages of formation. Formation **for** priesthood (seminary) and formation **in** priesthood (ongoing formation) is a continuum, and not dichotomous. Ongoing formation is something that is lacking and needs to be taken more seriously.

2.4 Motivation for Clerical Life

One of the ways to check motivation for celibate and consecrated life is through screening at designated stages of formation. It should be noted that screening is for helping in the growth of the formee and not to screen out the formee.¹³ Screening helps in detecting and working with problems which might arise later in life. Screening out is only done if there are clear indicators of potential problems that might occur later in life. Screening to understand whether candidates who have been victims of abuse – as minors or adults, must be considered to see if they are ready for admission or not. This is because many survivors cope surprisingly well and difficulties in formation are not caused only by a history of abuse.

2.5 Guidelines in Formation

Guidelines should incorporate the following: identifying the presence of fundamental markers of human maturity; highlighting strengths and internal resources available for formation work and

¹² A.F. McGovern, "Entitlements and Catholic Social Teachings," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 11/2 (1997): 445-465.

¹³ James Gould, "Psychological Screening for Seminary Candidates - Consideration and Review of the Recent Vatican Statement on Homosexuals in the Seminary," *The Linacre Quarterly* 74/3 (2007): 230-247.

future pastoral ministry; identifying vulnerabilities that need to be addressed in the course of formation; confrontation with reliable information; noting factors that will influence how formation staff can most effectively work with formees, and offering the support needed.

During formation and at admission, perfection should not be expected but issues that could arise should be anticipated as far as is possible. The development of the candidate on all aspects of his personality should be expected. *Familiaris Consortio*,¹⁴ no. 9, para 2 says that people improve their relationship with God and grow in virtues gradually, and do not jump to perfection in a single step. The motivation for celibate and consecrated life must be considered and attention and screening to exclude as far as possible potential perpetrators should be done.

2.6 Initial and Ongoing Formation

Therefore, the practical needs for congregations and dioceses are for initial and ongoing formation. The importance of dealing with issues of the psycho-affective sphere throughout the formation process cannot be stressed enough. There should be sincere encounters between formee and formator. Workshops on personal integration should be conducted right through formation with a focus on the four pillars of human formation.¹⁵ Emphases should be laid on addressing emotional and spiritual blockages that might be evident.

3. Ways Forward

An aspect of governance is the selection and presentation of candidates for mission. Major superiors should be careful in the selection of their candidates, and all necessary measures should

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, no. 9, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html (accessed on 10.08.2023).

¹⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*.

be taken in their selection. The human development of scholastics, is something that needs a lot of focus. There should be a focus on awareness regarding sexuality and a clear and balanced education and training about boundaries in the seminaries and formation houses. Ongoing formation is also important with the focus on overall growth.¹⁶

A major question is the role of the priest today since most of what a priest does has nothing to do with priestly pastoral and spiritual ministry. They are involved in administration, bureaucracy, organization, etc., for which they don't receive specific training and supervision. This can impact the thinking of a formee. What is essential is an understanding of the Church in the world today, what can be learnt in relation to modern society, science, administration, mass communication, social media, transparency, and authenticity. What also needs to be reflected on is the faith life of formees and clerics in relationship with each other, laity, and God.

3.1 Strategic Management Viewpoints

The Church needs to update and create systems and practices that will promote action with regard to safeguarding. Prevention and risk management models can be utilized. The focus should be on the Church's mission to serve with integrity and justice. Reporting of abuse by survivors and the supervision of perpetrators needs to be taken seriously by those in authority. Reporting helps in protection, and supervision helps in preventing reoccurrence. Therefore, institutions should define their best practices and implement restorative justice, as well as ensure access to adequate help along with care and compassion, for the survivor and perpetrator.

¹⁶ J. McDermott, "Father Hans Zollner: Post abuse crisis, how can we get back to our Christian roots?" *America*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/09/17/father-hans-zollner-post-abuse-crisis-howcan-we-get-back-our-Christian-roots> (accessed on 10.08.2023).

3.2 Developmental Programs and Interventions

Prevention, developmental and early intervention programs are effective in the reduction of sexual crime. This can be achieved through training, as training creates awareness, and pre-empts any possibility of inappropriate behaviours later in life. Dealing with childhood problems that includes harsh parental discipline, parental rejection, marital conflict, and sexual abuse is essential so that the formee does not carry forward his baggage of earlier life.

3.3 Planning

There are three key points in the formation of clergy and religious, which should be looked at critically and from the vantage point of responses. They are early and ongoing training in managerial skills, addressing crises at points of transition that include psychological and spiritual crises, and careerism. This could help reduce cases because of situational stresses. There should be an emphasis on formation for mission that is other-oriented. In the formation of clergy and religious, at various levels and stages of life and transition phases, psychosexual integration needs to be addressed.

Prevention policies in Churches should consider situational and social factors that could influence future harmful behaviors. Therefore, strategies should incorporate a general framework that can be adapted to new situations. Socialization to the life of a priest especially with a focus on issues of intimacy and isolation is an imperative. These might better equip formees to adjust to the loneliness and realities of the life of celibate chastity.

3.4 Prevention

Prevention can be done at various stages of formation. It involves making the formators and formees more vigilant in picking up inappropriate behaviours during formation. Ongoing formation also is important, as problems also arise after priesthood. Some ways are by screening for potential high-risk behaviours, e.g., sexual

attraction to children, education and on-going education, reducing cognitive distortions through awareness and training, and creating specific codes of conduct that explain what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable.¹⁷

Commitment to the priestly life is a most important skill. This commitment is a continuous process and leads to a “continuous configuration with Christ.”¹⁸ Before the scholastic enters the major seminary, he is expected to complete developmental tasks of earlier stages, so that he can respond to the challenges of transcendent values and attitudes that will be proposed to him there. Otherwise, his attention and efforts will be directed at dealing with his struggles, addictions, and defenses. Having a motivating reason for choosing priesthood and then sustaining that motivation and the commitments to the evangelical counsels is essential. It is necessary to learn how to live that commitment well and how to navigate the challenges that it entails.

3.5 Skills for Celibate Living

Some necessary skills are a developed capacity for self-reflection; like honest introspection focused on personal encounters, relationships, and feelings; a capacity for prayerful imagination and a prayerful life review that links all activity with the abiding commitment to bring the Lord to his people. Also, an ability to establish personal-relational boundaries and parameters while, at the same time, allowing for genuine and generous closeness with others. A priest should have a capacity to maintain healthy balances between work and play, investment in ministry and detachment from results, self-care and care for others, and a learned ability to find necessary and helpful resources, especially in challenging

¹⁷ S. Rossetti, “Five misconceptions about child sexual abuse and the Catholic church,” *America: The Jesuit Review* (2002), <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics.society/2002/04/22/five-misconceptions-about-child-sexualabuse-and-catholic-church> (accessed on 10.08.2023).

¹⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of The Priestly Vocation*, p. 4.

situations. Ascetical skills of self-denial, moderation, and prudential control are also necessary.

4. Conclusion

Formation should be supported by human freedom and sound moral doctrine. Candidates for the priesthood and the religious life should be nurtured so that they grow in all dimensions of their personality. Their basic motivation should be a generous giving to the faith community in the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Formators and leaders must develop responses that go at least one level deeper than what is visible. Dealing with consequences of actions of a priest later on in life, invariably means that roots have grown badly and evident issues have not been addressed during the formative process. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to overall growth in early formation and through ongoing formation. Awareness building is essential for prevention.

Clergy and religious life call for an intense spiritual life, filled with many qualities and virtues of which integrity is probably the most important. Pope John Paul II stressed that priests need to be “men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behaviour.”¹⁹ The crisis in the Church is a call to today’s priests to live their vocations with a positive integrity. It is an issue that does not have simple solutions. This message needs to be reinforced by brother priests, the seminary, and major superiors. What is needed is a more informed understanding and a more reasoned response.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 43.

Journeying with Pope Francis

CONCLUDING OUR JOYFUL JOURNEY

Dr. James H. KROEGER MM

*The author <jhkroeger@gmail.com> has served mission in Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) for over five decades. He recently completed *Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language*, a synthesis-popularization of ten of Pope Francis' pivotal documents from 2013-2022; it is available from Orbis Books in New York and the Pauline Sisters in Manila and Nairobi.*

Abstract: Together with Pope Francis we have been sharing a fruitful pilgrimage, spanning all twelve months of 2023; the sojourn covered ten pivotal documents from the decade 2013-2022. Our voyage has been profoundly enriching, enabling us to appreciate the mind and heart of *Papa Francisco*. This writer notes that *six pivotal themes* have surfaced during our rewarding year-long journey.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Vatican II, Missionary, Common Home, Mercy, Holiness, Synodality.

1. Implementing the Second Vatican Council

Clearly Pope Francis has sought to bring the Council's vision of renewal to the heart of the Church. Celebrating the October 11, 2022 feast of Saint John XXIII, convoker of Vatican II, Francis said in his homily: "Let us return to the Council's pure sources of love. Let us rediscover the Council's passion and renew our own passion for the Council." The two popes of Vatican II saw it as a "contemporary Pentecost." John XXIII said: "O Holy Spirit, renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost." Pope Paul VI asserted: "The first need of the Church is always to live Pentecost."

2. Becoming a Missionary People

Repeatedly Pope Francis calls the entire Church to a new chapter of evangelization, inviting every Christian to a life of missionary discipleship. As those who have encountered Jesus, we are to share the joy of the Gospel and “go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 20). Our mission as disciples of Christ Jesus “is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” (EG 268). The joy of the Gospel is for all people; thus, we seek “to meet every challenge as a leaven of Gospel witness” (EG 75).

3. Caring for Our Common Home

Pope Francis is passionately concerned with environmental and ecological issues that profoundly affect the earth and all living beings. He has written two pivotal documents on this topic: *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Laudate Deum* (2023). The reality of climate change is undoubtedly a key pillar of his papacy. Francis asserts: “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (LS 21). “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years” (LS 53). “A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (LS 202).

4. Living Merciful Lives

Pope Francis, often called the “pope of mercy,” proclaimed an entire *year of mercy* in his 2015 *Misericordiae Vultus*, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II (1965-2015). Francis says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2). Our God is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4). “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught

up in the tenderness she makes present to believers” (MV 10). “The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel. . . . Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12). In a word, faith-filled existence means “living-in-mercy.”

5. Seeking Authentic Holiness

A constant theme permeating the thought of Pope Francis is the call to holiness in daily life; this clearly emerges in his 2018 apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad). We are to become saints, not simply settling for “a bland and mediocre existence” (GE 1). “We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves” (GE 14). Francis asserts that the Beatitudes provide us a pathway for holiness. We are always accompanied by our Mother Mary; “she teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side” (GE 176).

6. Living Community as Church

Pope Francis encourages Catholics to be active members of the Church, despite its failures and imperfections, because the Church is the place where one can find Jesus. In this 2023 Divine Mercy Sunday homily, Pope Francis noted that Jesus chose to appear to Saint Thomas when he was with the community of the other disciples, not when he was alone. Truly, the Church has her limitations, but “our Mother Church is the Body of Christ. . . . And it is there [that] the greatest signs of his love can be found.”

A Fruitful Journey

Our year-long journey with Pope Francis has been an enriching pilgrimage. We have received several helpful signposts, guiding our pathway. A new invitation now lies before us to continue walking with Pope Francis, following the synodal path, covering both 2023 and 2024. Come, joyfully join this beautiful excursion!

Document

**THE STATEMENT OF
THE 58TH NORTH INDIA
THEOLOGY STUDENTS' CONFERENCE**

Bishop's College, Kolkata, West Bengal
October 26 - 30, 2023

We, the 75 delegates representing 21 theological colleges and seminaries belonging to various churches, came together for the 58th North India Theology Students' Conference (NITSC) from 26-30 October 2023. It was hosted by Bishop's College and held at Seva Kendra, Kolkata. We deliberated on the theme: '**Justice, Peace and Reconciliation in India: Reimagining Ecclesia towards Praxis of Reign of God.**' The outcome of our paper presentations, responses, and discussions is articulated in the following statement:

In the post-COVID world, the entire humanity, especially the marginalized groups like Dalits, Adivasis, and women, along with the Mother Earth, are experiencing modern day slavery and are crying for Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation. The Hindutva ideology with its divisive agenda is adversely affecting India's socio-political fabric and is seriously threatening secular and democratic principles. The ethnic violence in Manipur is seeking an urgent response from the ecclesia. India is also facing significant economic inequalities and issues related to justice to diverse gender groups. The crony capitalism is exasperating the degradation of ecology. Although the all-pervasive Artificial Intelligence (AI), is positively contributing to various fields such as criminal justice, healthcare, environment, entertainment, it is also causing innumerable ethical challenges such as denial of proximity, effacement of the face, and reduction to traits.

Post-COVID theologizing needs to address the problems of economy, digital education, gender and racial discrimination, ecological crisis for effective ministry, etc. Our theological enterprise invites us to critically analyse historical, socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic aspects present in the conflict-torn parts of our country and the world, and scrutinize the tacit role played by the judiciary, government, and religions. We are increasingly becoming convinced that we can no longer neglect interfaith engagement; we need to embrace it to foster social harmony and shalom of the reign of God. It is also paramount that we address human rights violations faced by sexual minority and diverse gender groups. We need to approach the ecological concerns by deliberating on various ecological perspectives such as deep ecology, eco-feminism, social ecology, population ecology, shallow ecology, human ecology, etc.

The concepts of 'Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation' are grounded in Micah 6:8; Isaiah 9:6; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; etc. The understanding and appropriation of '*imago dei*,' incarnation, kenosis, and eschatological hope will help the humanity to attain these ideals. Biblical models of justice such as the Jubilee Year, the Reign of God principles, and early Christian communal sharing enlighten us. Biblical Justice is deeply grounded in moral principles such as fairness, equality, love, and compassion.

We the students of theology reimagine an ecclesia, a harbinger of the reign of God, which needs a sustained and multipronged theological praxis to respond to manifold challenges in our Indian context. A few proposed responses are as follows:

1. Building up the body of Christ through promoting communities which are sharing, witnessing, fellowshipping, inclusive, serving, empowering, and salvific.
2. Strengthening Indian Secularism which respects all religions equally and thus becomes an antidote to communalism, majoritarianism, and fascism.

3. Creating awareness regarding the secular nature of our Indian Constitution and reinforcing the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined within it.
4. Calling for collective efforts and committing ourselves through dialogue, alliances, and advocacy for human rights and dignity of all individuals. Collaborating with governmental and non-governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and faith-based groups.
5. Despite the challenges to interfaith engagements such as fears of syncretism, relativism, and apostasy, engaging in interreligious prayer meetings, interfaith celebrations, and constructive ventures to establish justice and peace such as non-violent protests, relief work, advocacy, etc.
6. Forming the members of ecclesia to be stewards, trustees, companions, and priests of sustainable ecology.
7. Becoming aware of the opportunities as well as threats of AI and lobbying for its ethical usage.

*Vidyajyoti Editorial Board
wishes God's abundant blessings
of Peace and Joy
to all our readers and Benefactors
on the Birthday of
Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!*

*Happy Christmas and
Blessed New Year 2024!*

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