

Care of Creation

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'God is love,' says Evangelist St. John (1 John 4:16). Love by its nature is creative. The universe is the outpouring of God's abundant love. In the first book of the Holy Bible, the creative activity of God is described in a very dramatic way. In the work of creation, God makes the earth his partner. He says, "Let the earth bring forth the vegetation, seed bearing plants and trees on the land. And it was so" (Gen 1: 11). So creation is a joint venture in a wonderful partnership between God and the earth.

Environment is God's gift, it is in a sense the self revelation of God. The rain and sky, seas and rivers, beasts and birds, trees and flowers are the concrete expression of God's love. He has bestowed basic goodness to all created things. The author of the book of Genesis, says "and God saw that it was good." 'Omne ens in bono' goes the Latin dictum, which means whatever is in existence bears the mark of goodness. The Indian philosophy calls God as '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*' (The true, the Holy and the beautiful.) The universe, the tangible expression of God, bears the mark of His goodness and beauty.

Man – the steward of creation

The genesis account speaks about the creation of constellations, the flora and fauna, birds and animals. He found them to be good. Last of all God created man and found him to be very good, because man was made 'in his image.' Man or human being was the crown and climax of God's progressive creative activity. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created," (Gen 1:27).

God trusted man; He found that with the gift of wisdom, man is the only being who could be entrusted with the care of creation. So he told the first couple, "Be fruitful and multiply, till the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that move upon the earth" (Gen 1: 28).

In the common parlance, the word 'dominion' denotes to be so over, to subjugate, to manipulate and to exploit. Did God intend it? To properly understand the meaning of the word 'dominate,' we need to have recourse to the original biblical language. The Hebrew word for DOMINION is *RADAH* which means to take care of, to nurture,

to foster, to bring up, to rear. A king is expected to 'dominate' his subjects, which according to Hebrew understanding means to give humane treatment to the subjects, to make them grow, to activate their potentiality, and in a special way to have preferential concern for the least, the lost, the needy, the weak, the marginalized, the defenseless and the powerless. In this sense man was commissioned 'to rule' the creatures of God. He was called to protect Nature both animate as well as the inanimate.

There is a second account of Creation in the book of Genesis which is very interesting. It says, "When the Lord God made the earth, there was neither shrub nor plant growing on the earth because the Lord God had sent no rain, nor was there anyone to till the ground... the Lord God planted a garden in Eden... The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and to look after it." (Gen 2: 4-15). The Hebrew word for 'looking after' is *SHAMAR* which means to guard, to watch over and to take care of it. Man is supposed to be the caretaker, steward of Creation. He was given the noble vocation of guarding God's creation. He was to be the high Priest, giving glory to God, in behalf of his creation.

The verb *SHAMAR* appears second time in chapter 3 of Genesis. After the killing of Abel, God asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain answered, "I do not know. Am I supposed to *SHAMAR* (to take care of) my brother?" (Gen 3: 9). The answer is 'yes'. Man is expected to care of his Kith and Kin as well as rest of the creation. The holy Bible teaches that all life is sacred and needs to be respected. Nature, like a loving mother, nourishes man, provides for his bodily needs. It is man's responsibility to protect her.

Speaking on the occasion of World Environment Day, Pope Francis said, "God gave humans the earth so they can take care of it and protect it and not to exploit and neglect it." He further said that people are often driven by pride of domination, of possessions, manipulation, of exploitation. We do not care for it (earth), we do not respect it, we do not consider it as a free gift that we must care for. We are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, listening to creation." 'Man is the measure of everything,' said the Greek Philosopher Protagoras. According to him not the superior power, nor the moral law but man is the ultimate source of values. This has led man to utilitarianism which has caused a lot of harm to nature.

Present-day Scenario

God created the World and found it to be good. Can we say now that “God is in high heaven and everything is well on earth?” Certainly not. The present scenario regarding the health of the globe is alarming.

While interviewing Pope (Emeritus) Benedict XVI on the frightening global situation, Peter Seewald says, “Because of climate change, the tropics are expanding, the sea level is rising. The poles are melting; holes in the Ozone layer are no longer closing up. We are experiencing oil disasters in the Gulf of Mexico, gigantic wild fires, unprecedented catastrophic floods, unexpected heat waves and periods of drought.” [*Peter Seewald in Light of the World*, P 42.) Responding to him Pope Benedict says, “Sacred Scripture tells us, and experience too tells us, that we do not remain here forever. But surely we are doing something wrong.”

We have responsibility towards the future generation. By depleting the natural resources, we are robbing from the future generation and depriving them of what legitimately belong to them. Pope Benedict reminds us, that “... we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit in it and continue to cultivate it.” (*Caritas in Veritate*, P 81.)

Flora and fauna, birds and animals add to the wealth of the world. The blessing of God to ‘increase and multiply’ is also applicable to them. Instead of multiplying, we are witnessing the gradual loss of the species. It is difficult to exactly record the loss of species, but some scientists claim that 200 to 2000 species get extinct every year, while others suggest a much higher number. It is estimated that by the close of the last century more than 20 % of all species have disappeared. The world has become poorer.

Drought is a regular feature in our country. Deforestation is one of the major causes of reduction in rainfall. While the West has been taking necessary measures to preserve their forests, the situation in developing countries is very grim. Secondly, resources like land, water, air and fisheries are being exploited. There is a struggle for the control of these resources, primarily by the multinational agencies and so-called super powers. With the introduction of the new economic Policy-LPG- (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) the market forces are let loose, whose only guiding principle is PROFIT.

Not religion but profit has become the opium of the People. As Pope Francis remarked, “Man is not in charge today, money is in charge, money rules.” The free market system and a global culture of money are exploiting the poor.

A group of more than a thousand scientists, on behalf of the UN’s intergovernmental Panel on Climate Control, said that 2 more degrees centigrade increase in temperature, will lead the planet to disaster and destruction. Global warming should be considered a global warming.

Pope Emeritus Benedict speaks about human environment. Because of the adverse climatic changes, there has emerged the growing phenomena of ‘environmental refugees’. In the name of public utility and progress, specially the tribals are displaced. They too have the right to life, food, healthcare and development. Usually the poor and the marginalized are made to pay heavy price for progress and the rich and the powerful enjoy the fruits of development.

A Moral Problem

There is enough, they say, for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed. The root cause of the degradation of environment is greed, one of the seven capital sins. Lord Buddha speaks about ‘*trishna*’ which is insatiable. The advances in science and technology are employed to increase production and thereby depleting the natural resources.

Man has to learn to curb and control his desire (*trishna*) which leads to accumulation, which in turn leads to exploitation of earth. All of

us are, well acquainted with the story, *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* by Leo Tolstoy. The moral of the story is clear. The lust for gaining, if not controlled, can have dire consequences for the greedy man himself and for the globe as well.

The world community has realized the consequences of indiscriminate exploitation of the resources of the earth. The alarm bells were rung in the environmental conference held in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro. The next climate conference was held in Copenhagen in December 2009. The nations are aware of the problem but are reluctant to arrive at a solution. What comes in the way is the greed of the nations and specially of the developed countries.

All people of good will must come together and agree upon a code of conduct to save the earth. Only by cultivating a sense of profound respect for life in all its

forms, and controlling the instinct for greed can we find a solution to the ecological crisis.

We speak of the world as one family – '*VasundharaKutumbkam*. The planet belongs to all, and even to the future generations, hence its resources should be responsibly used and equitably shared by all the members of the one family of God, making preferential option for the poor and the powerless.

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