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Our Care of  
God's Creation:  
Towards an  
Ecological  
Spirituality

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# Our Care of God's Creation: Towards an Ecological Spirituality

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In his 2015 Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (LS) on Care for Our Common Home Pope Francis speaks of an ecological spirituality and how it can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world (LS 216). In light of this papal statement it would seem clear that our immediate task is to try to develop such an ecological spirituality. In this article an effort will be made to begin to move in that direction. We may start with a brief reflection on spirituality itself, indicating what it is and involves in and for our daily lives. Then we will turn to ecology and an exposition of what have been called the contemplative and the active dimensions or aspects of an ecological spirituality. In that context we will focus at some length on what the Pope refers to as the damage done to our Common Home and also on what he calls an ecological *conversion*. We will conclude, then, with some brief remarks on the prospects we humans have of making this ecological spirituality a reality in our world.

## SPIRITUALITY TODAY

To begin, a quotation from my earlier article on spirituality will be appropriate.<sup>1</sup> A person's spirituality is simply how a person, as a spiritual being, as spirit in the world, believes, lives and acts in his/her personal life, in his/her relationships, in his/her communities, in God's creation and, of course, for the religious person in his/her relationship with God. How one believes, lives and acts will, naturally, be governed by the ideals, principles, values and virtues that one has adopted and committed oneself to and by means of which one seeks to develop a meaningful, productive and happy life in one's circumstances.

1 Bill Cosgrave, 'Understanding Spirituality Today', *The Furrow*, November 2017, pp 595-596. Later quoted as *Understanding*.

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We may express this in words closer to Rahner's reflections on our topic as follows.<sup>2</sup> One's spirituality, he says, will be the expression of the human spirit's effort or striving to develop oneself as a person by doing all possible to bring about authentic growth in knowledge, in freedom and in loving relationships. This will involve one in living by such values, principles and ideals as will serve to integrate one's life and make it meaningful. In other words, we can say that one's spirituality is one's way of consciously striving to integrate one's life and make it meaningful through pursuing knowledge, freedom and love in light of and governed by the highest and most important ideals, values and principles that one has discerned, chosen and endeavours to live out and realise in one's life as a person who is spirit, who is a spiritual being.<sup>3</sup> Finally, to put it very briefly, we may quote Macquarrie (p 40), who says, 'spirituality has to do with *becoming a person in the fullest sense* [his emphasis].<sup>4</sup> For us Christians, of course, this will take place in the context of our Christian faith, and within the Christian community, the Church.

With this understanding of spirituality in mind we can now move on to our main concern – spirituality and ecology.

### ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY – ITS CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION

In his teaching on ecology Pope Francis speaks of Christian spirituality as encouraging a contemplative lifestyle (LS, 222). This is an attitude to life which enables one to have deep enjoyment in and from one's experience of living so as to cherish each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality, he says, proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little ... and which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us to be spiritually detached from what we possess (LS, 222). This contemplative outlook contrasts with the activism that is so characteristic of most Western Christian spirituality and attitudes in Western society that seek a constant flood of new consumer goods and the accumulation of pleasures (LS,222).

2 As quoted in Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*. Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah, N.J., 1997, p 32-33.

3 See John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality*. SCM Press, London 1972, chapter IV, pp 40ff.

4 Some significant implications of this understanding of spirituality are set out in my article referred to above, pp 596-602.

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A *deeper* aspect of this contemplative dimension of our spirituality is the following. Spirituality gives meaning to our lives. One of the basic and crucial desires and necessities in the life of all of us as spiritual beings is to find meaning in life, to live a meaningful life. We all search for meaning in life and, if we find it, we will experience life as worthwhile and will be happy to continue the lifestyle we thus find rewarding. If we ask – as we seldom do – what makes our life meaningful and worthwhile?, then the answer, in a word, is our spirituality. This spirituality may be religious or non-religious, it may be complex or simple, communal or just personal, but it is the ideals, principles, values and virtues that inspire and energise us to pursue knowledge, freedom and love that give meaning to our lives as spiritual beings. In other words, it is our spirituality that gives meaning to our lives.<sup>5</sup>

Because we are here discussing ecology and the ecological dimension of spirituality, it is necessary to reflect on what this brings to the contemplative aspect of our spirituality in addition to what has been said above. Francis invites us to develop an intimate, loving and tender relationship with the creatures and the world around us, seeing them all as *gifts* from God to be cherished and appreciated so as to enrich them and enable them to contribute to life in a way that enhances God's creation, human and non-human (LS, 200,224, 227).

What has been said here about the relationship of God's creatures, human and non-human, is expressed by the Pope in his oft-quoted statement, 'everything is connected' (LS,91, 117, etc.) We humans are 'an integral part of the web of life and of the cosmos'.<sup>6</sup> We are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion (LS,220). We are here speaking of an attitude of the heart, which approaches life with serene attentiveness and which Jesus taught us, when he invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (LS, 226). This attitude tends to generate a capacity for wonder that deepens and enriches our spirituality and can result in the ability to experience God in his gifts and in all things (LS,225, 233).<sup>7</sup>

### THE DAMAGE ALREADY DONE TO OUR COMMON HOME

The Pope highlights the sinful way we are despoiling and neglecting our world. Pollution, he tells us, takes a variety of

5 Understanding, p 597.

6 Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth – From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*. Revised Edition. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, 2016, p 420. Hereafter referred to as Dorr, *Option*.

7 Dorr, *Option*, 420, 421.

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forms, many of which are part of people's experience (LS, 20). Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths (LS, 20). There is also pollution that impacts everyone caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilisers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrottoxins in general.<sup>8</sup> The Pope also highlights the 'hundreds of millions of tons of waste generated each year, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive'. This is a problem not only because of the pollution it causes but also because we are using up the precious resources of the Earth at an unsustainable rate.<sup>9</sup> The Pope adds, then, in a much quoted sentence, 'The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth' (LS, 21).

Another form of waste is characterised in the Encyclical as being linked to our 'throwaway culture' (LS, 22). Approximately one third of the food produced is discarded and whenever food is thrown out, it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor (LS, 50).<sup>10</sup> The rise in world temperatures is giving rise to further negative developments in relation to human living and the welfare of the planet. There is now a constant rise in sea levels, acidification of the oceans, melting of the glaciers at the poles and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods (LS, 23). As in other cases, it is the poor who suffer most from these problems (LS, 48), even though they are the ones who have done the least to cause the problems.<sup>11</sup> Most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases released mainly as a result of human activity. The Pope tells us also that this problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels and also such practices as deforestation for agricultural purposes (LS, 23). There is an urgent need to develop policies so that the emission of carbon dioxide and other polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, by substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy (LS, 26).

The Pope notes also that there is today a problem about water and its scarcity in some areas. Francis asserts that access to safe, drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights (LS, 30 & 185). Further, he tells us that water poverty especially affects Africa, where large sections

8 Seán McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth – A Call to a New Theology*. Bear & Company, Sante Fe, New Mexico 1986, chapters 2 & 3.

9 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

10 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

11 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

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of the population have no access to drinking water or experience droughts which impede agricultural production LS, 27-31).

### LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Under the heading 'Loss of Biodiversity' the Pope reminds us that each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species. Because of this, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence (LS, 33). Often human intervention to resolve the problem further aggravates the situation (LS, 34). One example the Pope cites is the Amazon region (LS, 38). He points out that when forests are burned down or levelled for purposes of cultivation, within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands. This has a greater significance than might at first appear, since 'The equilibrium of our planet ... depends on the health of the Amazon region ... It serves as a great filter of carbon dioxide, which helps avoid the warming of the earth.'<sup>12</sup> He notes that '... marine life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans ... is affected by uncontrolled fishing, leading to a drastic depletion of certain species. Selective forms of fishing which discard much of what they collect continues unabated (LS, 40)'. In relation to coral reefs Francis teaches that many of these reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline. This phenomenon is due largely to pollution which reaches the sea as a result of deforestation, agricultural monocultures, industrial waste and destructive fishing methods, especially those using cyanide and dynamite (LS, 41).<sup>13</sup>

### OTHER DAMAGING DEVELOPMENTS

The Pope moves on in his Encyclical to emphasise the link between environmental degradation and human and social degradation (LS, 48ff). This is to be seen in the negative aspects of city life in many places where many neighbourhoods are congested, chaotic and lacking sufficient green space (LS, 44). There are many examples of social exclusion, social breakdown, increased violence, drug use and drug trafficking and the loss of identity (LS, 46). This degradation or deterioration of the environment affects the poorest people more than others with significant negative effects (LS, 48). Here it is important to hear the cry of the poor as well as the cry of the earth (LS, 49). The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest

12 Pope Francis in Beloved Amazon *Querida Amazonia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, 2020, para. 48.

13 See Seán McDonagh, 'The Fate of the Oceans', *Messenger*, May 2021, pp 44-5.

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areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. Often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals, which, as they withdraw from these developing countries, leave behind great human and environmental liabilities, e.g., unemployment, the depletion of natural resources, deforestation and the impoverishment of agriculture. These forms of damage suffered by developing countries at the hands of developed countries are often referred to as ‘ecological debt’ owed to the countries of the South. At the same time developing countries are often burdened by what is called foreign debt incurred by buying policies and programmes for development from countries in the North.<sup>14</sup>

## THE NEED FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

What has been said so far makes it clear that most human beings are far from committed to undoing the damage already inflicted on the environment by human activity. The result is a crisis of no mean proportions that will not be diffused easily or soon. So it is in this context that Pope Francis declares that ‘the ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior *conversion* (LS, 217)’.

## UNDERSTANDING CONVERSION

While we are familiar with the word conversion in both secular and religious contexts, it turns out, however, that coming to understand its full meaning in any adequate way is no easy task.<sup>15</sup> It will be helpful to begin by quoting how one writer presents the issue. Mark Miller says that ‘its fundamental meaning rests in that personal transformation whereby a person lives by a profound new assessment of what is important and valuable’.<sup>16</sup> Scholars speak of *three* aspects or kinds of conversion.<sup>17</sup>

a) *Affective Conversion*: here one is referring to how one feels about things, indeed about everything, including people, rather

14 On this foreign debt see Seán McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, 1990, chapter 1, pp 9 -37. On page 15 he says: ‘The debt can only be paid by taking food out of the mouths of the poor, especially women and children, and by irreversibly damaging the environment.’

15 *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Editor Michael Downey. A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, p 230. Hereafter referred to as *Dictionary*.

16 *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. General Editor, Richard P. McBrien. HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY, 10022, p 366. Hereafter referred to as *Encyclopedia*.

17 *Dictionary*, p 234. Donal Dorr, ‘Ecological Conversion’, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, pp 10-13; *Encyclopedia*, p 366.

than how one thinks about them. And of course, we know that how you feel about someone or something can have a notable influence on how you think and indeed act in relation to that person or thing or situation. Clearly then, our feelings or lack of them can make a big difference in what we consider important or valuable in any area of life including in regard to nature and God's creation. (Some writers refer to this affective aspect of conversion as its psychic aspect.)<sup>18</sup>

So in relation to the beauty of nature and the marvels of God's creation many of us just take them for granted. In such a case it is obvious that an affective conversion is needed, if we are to appreciate the wonders of nature and God's creation and to take urgent action to work towards undoing the damage we human beings have already done. These are the efforts that we must attempt, if we are to work towards what Thomas Berry has called 'a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world' and again 'a spirituality for justice for the devastated Earth community'.<sup>19</sup> All this makes it clear that bringing our affections or feelings to appreciate and love the beauty of God's creation will involve for all of us a significant struggle. But this will be essential if we are to be converted ecologically or to achieve in our life the ecological conversion we know to be necessary.

b) *Intellectual Conversion*: It is accepted today that our feelings or emotions don't just give rise to a state of emotionalism that has no objective reality or basis. Rather in our affective life there is an intellectual element that can point us in a direction that can enable us to arrive at a realistic understanding of the ecological area and what we are called to do to negate the harm already done to God's creation, and, positively, to take the necessary steps to realise what Pope Francis refers to as an integral ecology (LS, chapter 4).<sup>20</sup>

Here, then we discern clearly the major task ahead of us in relation to ecology, viz., reversing the destruction already inflicted on our environment, a destruction that still continues today, and working towards the goal of integral ecology. In addition, this intellectual dimension of our conversion will bring a new understanding of how and why we are called to the ecological task or vocation just mentioned and also a general picture at least of what will be the practicalities required to meet the demands of

18 Encyclopedia, p 366; Neil Ormerod & Cristina Vanin, Ecological Conversion: What does it Mean? *Theological Studies*, 77 (2) 2016, pp 328-352 at pp 332, 346-349.

19 As quoted in Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 10.

20 See my book *The Challenge of Christian Discipleship*. The Columba Press, Dublin 2012. Chapter 1: 'The Emotions in the Moral Life'; and Chapter 2: 'Emotional Intelligence: Its Meaning and Practical Implications.' Also Michael G. Lawler & Todd A. Salzman, 'The Jesus we Believe in was Right-Brained: "Go and Do Likewise"'. *The Furrow*, March 2021, pp 168-175.



that vocation. In the process of our intellectual conversion we will become clearer on the values involved in ecological integrity and will deepen our commitment to them. Thus, as one article puts it,<sup>21</sup> ‘intellectual conversion helps support moral conversion by allowing us to understand and affirm the full reality of values’. This it does especially by its openness to and its concern to consult and take on board the insights and findings of science, since ‘science is particularly significant in uncovering the causes of climate change (LS, 23).<sup>22</sup> In particular it can and does make us aware of and heighten our understanding of the process of evolution, which has been operating in our universe from the very beginning and which is moving that universe towards ever greater interconnected complexity.<sup>23</sup>

c) *Moral Conversion*: ‘The present environmental destruction is the end product of generations of decisions based on a failure to attend to the ecological impact of those decisions, either initially through ignorance or ... wilfully and maliciously’.<sup>24</sup>

In the present context what is needed by all of us is, simply, a moral conversion. This will involve and require actions aimed at undoing the damage already done to nature and activity to enhance the welfare of the environment. To work to promote this moral conversion we will need to have made an *affective* and an *intellectual* conversion.

What is involved in this moral conversion may be spelled out in the following manner. Scholars today usually draw relevant insights and teaching from the Bible. We may summarise their findings in the words of Pope Francis’ ecological Encyclical. ‘Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognising that they tell us to ‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf Gen 2.15). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.’ (LS, 67). The Pope then adds (LS, 82): ‘... it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination.’ He continues (LS, 116): ‘Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism .... An inadequate presentation

21 Ormerod & Vanin, p 344.

22 Ormerod & Vanin, p 345.

23 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, pp 11-12.

24 Ormerod & Vanin, p 336.

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of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world ... our 'dominion' over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.<sup>25</sup>

Having earlier spelled out the damage already done to God's creation by human activity, it will be appropriate now in a more positive vein to highlight the *values* that must be respected, appreciated and promoted so that we can be said to be truly dedicated to realising the integral ecology that the Pope stresses so strongly.

### BASIC VALUES<sup>26</sup>

These values are being neglected and undermined by the damage being done to the ecosphere in recent decades. These values include especially human health and strength. These are being impacted by the negative effects on global food production and by health problems arising from contamination of water supplies by various forms of pollution. These are damaging the poor in a special way but everyone has been and is at risk. Thus, our global patterns of production and consumption impinge on us all. Individuals can take action to prevent such effects in their own lives, e.g., being careful about what they consume, having health checks, etc. but the global problems still persist and continue to inflict damage on great numbers of people.

### SOCIAL VALUES (LS, 138-142)<sup>27</sup>

In relation to these values in moral conversion and the common good of society Pope Francis has some very relevant and strong points to make in his Encyclical. He highlights the level of social decline as a result of our failures to attend to the environment (LS, 46). Clearly then, moral conversion as it fosters and promotes

25 On anthropocentrism see Dermot A. Lane, *Theology and Ecology – The Wisdom of Laudato Si'*. Messenger Publications, Dublin, 2020, Chapter 2. It is important to note here also that Fr Lane quotes theologians and scholars who question, not just the dominion model of creation, but also the stewardship model, which the Pope accepts (LS, 116). They assert that the stewardship model ends up promoting anthropocentrism and is dualistic and hierarchical (page 123). The new model they promote is called the Community of Creation or kinship model. It is, they say, a theocentric model that places us humans within creation, not at the centre or above nature. This involves a significant shift in our understanding of the human, so that the difference between humans and non-humans is a matter of degree and not of kind, though human uniqueness must still be affirmed (pp 124 -132).

26 Ormered & Vanin, pp 336-338.

27 Ormered & Vanin, pp 338-340.

social values must include concern for ecological values. The Pope points the finger of blame at our technological, economic and political systems, in particular at the fact that the political order is dominated by the other two. Thus technological systems and new technological developments are deployed in disregard of their environmental and human impact (LS, 54). Some companies and businesses are moving away from this approach and taking steps to protect the environment but much damage to God's creation is still being done in relation to social values. In this regard the Pope speaks about the chaos in many modern cities and how the world's poor are still mired in dreadful social conditions, while the rich live a life of hyper-consumption and luxury (LS, 44-46).<sup>28</sup> Another damaging factor here is fossil fuels. 'Current political policies globally provide massive subsidies to fossil fuel companies to continue their exploration for new sources of fuels. This goes on despite the fact that 'the production of current reserves of fossil fuels already threatens the planet with unsustainable levels of greenhouse gas emissions.'<sup>29</sup> And of course, fossil fuels tend to heat the atmosphere and so promote climate change and its usual negative impact on social values and our society and ourselves.

It will be important here to emphasise one common feature of business life in our world that is seen as contributing notably to the damage being done to the environment. Salzman & Lawler express it as follows:<sup>30</sup> "The prioritization of profit and those who benefit from profit over the vital and social values realised by promoting the common good and protecting the environment demands moral conversion. Such conversion itself demands "profound changes in 'lifestyles, models of production and consumption and the established structures of power which today govern societies'" (LS, 5, quoting John Paul II, 1991). This links closely with what Dorr says about models of development:<sup>31</sup> 'There is no way we can live up effectively to these commitments [our ecological obligations], unless we challenge the model of development that has by now been adopted in almost every country in the world. It has become very evident that this type of so-called development is unsustainable and immoral; it involves despoiling the Earth and it brings about an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the vulnerable.'

28 Ormered & Vanin, p 340.

29 Ormered & Vanin, p 339.

30 Todd A. Salzman & Michael G. Lawler, *Introduction to Catholic Theological Ethics – Foundations and Applications*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 10545, 2019, p 174.

31 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 14.

*Cultural Values:* Pope Francis tells us that 'Ecology involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. ... Culture ... cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment' (LS, 143). He points out immediately where the problem is: 'a consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalised economy, has a levelling effect on cultures.' There is here, he says, 'a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures' (LS, 144). In opposition to the dominant anthropocentric culture the Pope proposes a new ecological culture as 'a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm' (LS, 111). Signs of this 'cultural revolution' are already to be discerned as, he says, 'An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed' (LS, 112), putting us on the way 'to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur' (LS, 114).

*Personal Values:* It is obvious that, if moral conversion in this ecological context is to become a reality, all of us must play our part and make a conscious, determined and continuing effort to promote the welfare of the environment and thus enhance God's creation. If we don't, Pope Francis does not hesitate to say that there will be a need for us to *repent* of the ways we have harmed the planet and he challenges us to acknowledge our sins against creation (LS,8).<sup>32</sup> The Pope re-affirms this when he writes: 'A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal.'<sup>33</sup>

As we pursue and promote the values we have been considering, we will develop and deepen the virtues required for our ecological conversion, or, as Francis names them, 'ecological virtues' (LS, 88). 'Only by cultivating sound virtues,' the Pope tells us, 'will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment' (LS, 211). Francis reminds us that there is a need for us Christians to practise the virtue of gratitude to God for the gift of his creation and to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works (LS, 220). The Pope also lists a number of simple ways of acting that can promote the ecological conversion in question here and improve the world around us. Examples are: avoiding the use of

32 See Jane Mellett, 'Ecological Sin', *Messenger*, December 2020, pp 32-33.

33 Beloved Amazon *Querida Amazonia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis. Veritas, Dublin, 2020, n. 58.

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plastics and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights (LS, 211).

### TOWARDS MAKING THIS ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY A REALITY

We have discussed ecological spirituality at length in both its contemplative and active dimensions. We have highlighted many of the values required in order that each of us may become ecologically committed and active in promoting the welfare of the environment, both in undoing the damage we have already done and in enhancing God's creation in a positive manner. Many people are already committed to this *twofold* task or vocation which we have as human beings and especially as Christians. Much good has already been done; much more is needed by individuals, groups, businesses and companies, national and international, and, of course, by Governments. In relation to these business and political groups, it seems, however, that the news is not so good. Donal Dorr says:<sup>34</sup> '...the dominant powers in our world are not willing to make the kind of changes that are required to deal with climate change.' And in the same context he quotes another writer who says: 'global inaction on climate change is by no means the result of confusion or denialism or a lack of planning; to the contrary, the maintenance of the status quo is the plan'.<sup>35</sup> The basic reason for this firm stance of the dominant powers in our world is that they subscribe to 'the dominant ideology of subordinating ecological concerns to the making of short-term profit'.<sup>36</sup> 'At the present time most politicians and governments are locked into the current exploitative system.'<sup>37</sup> Supporting this system is 'the present dysfunctional business ethos and model of development' that have been adopted by almost every country in the world.<sup>38</sup> We may add another quotation that makes the same point. Dermot Lane says, quoting Naomi Klein: 'The triumph of market logic, with its ethos of domination and fierce competition, is paralysing almost all serious efforts to respond to climate change.'<sup>39</sup>

34 *Doctrine & Life*, October, 2019, pp 22-23.

35 Same, p 23, footnote 1: from Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. 2016, University of Chicago Press, p 145.

36 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, September 2019, p 29.

37 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October 2019, p 22.

38 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October 2019, p 25 and *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 14.

39 Dermot Lane, 'Convincing the Public about the Urgency of Climate Change', *Doctrine & Life*, Nov. 2017, p 45-46.

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With these attitudes and practices dominant in society and in economies nowadays one has to admit that overcoming climate change and promoting the welfare of God's creation is at this time a very uphill task. And with the Catholic Church in urgent need of renewal in its spirituality and theology,<sup>40</sup> it is not hard to imagine that the world is set to see even more damage done to God's creation.

### CONCLUSION

Well known writer on ecological issues, Seán McDonagh, can provide us with some words to end our reflections. He writes:<sup>41</sup> 'As a species we need to educate ourselves about the impact of our wasteful industrial societies and, most of all, we need to devise urgently strategies and lifestyles that will allow us to live in a more sustainable way with the rest of creation. Every group of society, including politicians, economists, industrialists, farmers and religious people will need to be involved. It is a gigantic task but essential if we are to leave a beautiful vibrant and fruitful planet to future generations.' Jane Mellett adds: 'living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience (LS, 217). This requires a radical change of heart, a true ecological conversion.'<sup>42</sup>

40 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October, 2019, pp 27-35.

41 *Messenger*, Messenger Publications, Dublin, January 2021, p 50.

42 'Ecological Sin', *Messenger*, December 2020, p 34.