

booklets

**BELIEVING
IN SUSTAINABILITY**
**Religions Facing the
Environmental Challenge**



173

Jaime Tatay

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RELIGIONS FACING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

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Publisher: CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA - Roger de Llúria 13 - 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismeijusticia.net
Printed by: Ediciones Rondas S.L. - Legal deposit: B 24288-2019
ISBN: 978-84-9730-448-1 - ISSN: 2014-6566 - ISSN (virtual edition): 2014-6574
Editor: Santi Torres i Rocaginé - Translated by Joseph Owens
Cover drawing: Ignasi Flores - Layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas
Printed on recycled paper - October 2019

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1. THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda were the result of a long process of deliberation, and they reflect a broad international consensus with regard to the great economic, social, and environmental challenges that humanity will face in the 21st century. In order to reach the 17 SDGs that were identified, the 2030 Agenda defines specific indicators, diverse implementation tools, and several financing mechanisms.

It is evident that scientists, economists, engineers, politicians, sociologists, and even military officials have good reasons to be interested in the Sustainable Development Goals. Contamination of air and water, disruption of climatic patterns, destruction of the ozone layer, degradation of soils, erosion, acidification of the oceans, loss of biodiversity, exhaustion of non-renewable resources, and imbalance in the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles –these are only some of the major problems and “planetary limits” pointed out by the scientific community, but they provide more than sufficient reasons for mobilizing the principal actors that make up society.¹

Many questions that are vital for the future of our civilization may appear to be disparate: availability of water, protection from ultraviolet radiation, food security, spread of diseases, agricultural productivity, public health, financial risk, political stability, national security, and migratory flows. But they are all directly or indirectly related to one another, and they have been the object of the many specialized interdisciplinary analyses that led to the formulation of the SDGs.

It is interesting to observe, however, that of all the many interlocutors convoked for the 2030 Agenda, none of them appears to be as influential in the global arena as the great religious

traditions. Some people consider the absence of the religions logical: they think that religions have no role to play in a technical debate that is unrelated to questions of faith. Others, however, consider that excluding religions from the debate about development and sustainability is unjustified, not only because these matters have serious moral implications but also because confessional actors cannot remain on the sidelines in a world where the great majority of people still depend on a spiritual tradition for their vision of reality, their source of meaning, and their ethical guidance. Of course, if we want to justify the introduction of the religions into the interdisciplinary forum on sustainability, we must first ask: why are the religions interested in that question? what justifies their intervention? and most especially, what is their potential contribution?

In this reflection we propose ten motives that justify the involvement of religion in the debate on sustainability. These motives not only offer important keys for reading the religious declarations of recent years, but they also provide vital strategies for personal, social, and institutional transformation. The motives coincide with structural dimensions of all true spiritual experience, or as Larry Rasmussen put it, with the “deep traditions” that are shared by the different religious confessions.² We are talking about the ten key dimensions –prophetic, ascetic, penitential, apocalyptic, sacramental, soteriological, mystical, sapiential, communitarian, and eschatological– that run through the spiritual experience of all humankind. The articulation of these ten elements will allow us to sketch out the contours of an environmental ethos with a religious stamp.³

2. THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN THE DEBATE ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Before presenting the specifically religious contributions to the debate, we should take a step back and recall the arguments that have been put forward to justify confessional involvement in the debate. In 1967 historian Lynn White Jr. made the claim that the biblical religions had theologially legitimized human domination of the planet and so had accelerated its degradation.⁴ However, many other authors have argued convincingly that humanity's spiritual traditions have a great potential for reestablishing a respectful relationship between humankind and the natural world.

Séverin Deneulin and Carole Rakodi have recently shown that development studies—a traditionally secular academic field especially resistant to dialogue with confessional actors—have in recent decades demonstrated a growing interest in the role played by religions and faith-based organizations. The resulting attempt to revise the presuppositions on which development studies are based reflects two important realities: 1) politics and religions are linked together in complex ways and 2) religions are global actors with strong local roots. Religious organizations

are in fact among the most important social organizations in the many societies where they have maintained and even increased their influence.⁵

Edward O. Wilson, the well-known Harvard biologist, has also recognized the importance of dialogue between religion and “techno-science,” which he considers the two most powerful global forces. He has advocated an alliance between them in order to “save life” and to put a brake on the accelerated extinction of species now taking place.⁶ Other voices go further, arguing that the discourse of scientific and

technical progress is outmoded and incapable of changing the direction of our civilization; they claim that now it is the great religious traditions that offer an alternative to the rationalist, utilitarian approach that has severely distorted the relations between human beings and nature.⁷

The truth is that the religions share a narrative of responsibility toward the earth that our own age desperately needs to rediscover.⁸ Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the religions is in the methodologies and tools they have developed for resolving environmental conflicts before which conventional politics and science seem to be helpless.⁹ Even the proselytizing, “missionary” character of some religions can be instructive in the development of strategies for implementing the SDGs that involve the largest possible number of social actors. Erik Assadourian puts it well: “In order for an environmental movement to be successful, it will have to take lessons from something that it often ignores or even keeps at a distance, namely religion and especially the missionary religions, which for millennia have shown themselves, in radically different epochs and regions, incredibly successful in helping people to understand the world.”¹⁰

As Gary Gardner, the veteran researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, maintains, there are five reasons why the religions represent an indispensable resource for achieving sustainability: they offer meaning and guidance; they possess the moral authority to inspire projects; they have many followers; they own large properties and have significant financial resources; and they build up and consolidate “social capital.”¹¹

A recent example of the cultural and political influence of religious institutions, and of the social and moral capital they possess, was the converging narrative among the various confessional declarations on climate change and the (inter)religious lobbying work that took place in the months before the signing of the Paris Accord and before the approval of The Agenda 2030.¹²

However, the religious contribution goes beyond the sociological, economic, and political arguments put forward by these authors, whose main interest is doing serious research on the ethical, theological, and spiritual roots that ground that contribution. The religions can also help to clarify the meaning of sustainable development by making a lucid operative contribution, and they can do something even more important: they can “sustain sustainability.”¹³

3. THE INTERRELIGIOUS KEYS FOR CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME

“A true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice into debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (*Laudato Si* 49).

The prophetic dimension

Denunciation of the social injustice produced by the many processes that damage the natural world has allowed the great religious traditions to enter into the contemporary ecological debate, and it is there that they have made one of their most significant contributions.¹⁴ As Santiago Álvarez Cantalapedra has pointed out:

A profoundly secularized society such as ours ... cannot afford to waste the potential that religions possess for constructing counter-hegemonic visions of human dignity that reinsert the human back into nature, promote fraternity in a divided humanity, de-

fend the resources that belong to all, and demythologize the idols of oppression and death.¹⁵

In the prophetic tradition of the biblical religions, the condemnation of social injustices is closely linked to environmental degradation.¹⁶ Whereas the prophets of ancient Israel made manifest the deceit and iniquity of the dynamics underlying the social, economic, political, and religious relations of their time, today the denunciation must be extended also to 1) our relations with nature; 2) our relations with future generations and (indirectly and deferred in time), and 3) our relations with our distant neighbors who are already suffering (or will soon suffer)

the consequences of our indiscriminate use of natural resources.

Given the accelerated economic and cultural globalization and the technological revolution of the last few decades, we can no longer restrict our moral considerations to the present time or to the community we live in. The limited spatial and temporal framework of traditional ethics has been overwhelmed. During the second half of the 20th century, the proliferation of arms of mass destruction and the danger of a nuclear holocaust made brutally plain to everybody –as Hans Jonas brilliantly pointed out– the radical novelty that the technological era was introducing into conventional ethics and politics.

Besides revising the concepts of *justice*, *duty*, and *responsibility* –which today must include the accumulated (or expected) effects of any activity producing global problems such as contamination, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity– we need a critical vision of the technocratic paradigm and the deviant anthropocentrism which has brought us into the *Anthropocene* era, the new geological epoch in which human beings have become the principal force of planetary transformation.¹⁷

Prophetic denunciation is crucial in this new era because it highlights “the intimate relationship between the poor and the planet’s fragility,” as stated in the programmatic prologue of *Laudato Si’* (LS 16). Jewish leaders have arrived at this same conclusion: “We urge those who work for social justice to tackle the climatic crisis, and we urge those who are tackling the climatic crisis to work for social justice.”¹⁸

Unlike skeptics who avoid questions about the “ecological debt” (LS 51) of the industrialized countries or who deny the importance of the rich world’s overconsumption as a major vector of environmental degradation, the religious declarations state that it is impossible to talk about ecology without talking about social justice (and vice versa). This conviction is critical for the politics of ecology, for it arises not from mere academic interest but from the pastoral accompaniment of marginalized communities that are suffering the worst consequences of environmental degradation.¹⁹

In an effort to supplement the purely technical analyses, the religious traditions propose an exercise of “dual listening”: listening to the earth and to the poor, to the present moment and to past history, to the local context and to the global dynamic, to external signs and to internal impulses. Technical analyses are incapable of explaining the full complexity of a problem whose understanding requires an interdisciplinary approach. Pope Francis explains it this way: “It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (LS 139).

The prophetic tradition has always been an indispensable instrument for believers and an irritating goad for the established powers, and it is more necessary than ever in our current cultural context of economic inequality, social injustice, and accelerated degradation

of the biosphere's support systems. The relevance of prophetic condemnation and its ability to stir consciences and put its finger on the wound is demonstrated by the surprise, the expectation, and in some cases the disquiet produced by the promulgation of *Laudato Si'* and similar religious declarations.²⁰

The ascetical dimension

We need to take up an ancient lesson that is found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that "less is more." A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. (LS 222)

Along with the prophetic approach, the spiritual experience of humankind offers us some extremely valuable resources, resources that other actors are incapable of appreciating or developing. We are thinking especially of the ascetical practices that are part of the historical praxis of the great religious and philosophical traditions.²¹ Such practices, which include fasting, abstinence, giving alms, and making pilgrimages, have the aim of purifying our relations with God and with neighbor. In many religious traditions, austerity, detachment, and simplicity of life are signs of an integrated spirituality. Given the over-exploitation of our planet with its finite resources and the growing socio-economic inequality, these practices take on great relevance.

In the struggle against compulsive consumerism and the "throwaway cul-

ture," the main engines of environmental degradation in our industrialized societies, the religious traditions can and should make a valuable contribution by recommending sobriety and self-restraint, topics that are totally neglected by the scientific community, the business world, and the political class.

Francis, along with many other religious leaders, has emphasized the problem of over-consumption. Citing Benedict XVI, he states that "we have a sort of 'super-development' of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation" (LS 109). The excess accumulation of the rich societies is not only scandalous, given the persistent poverty of a large segment of humanity; it is also the principal cause of environmental degradation.

The religious traditions have thus developed an alternative discourse, one that resonates with age-old traditions according to which simplicity of life, solidarity, and renunciation of excess are essential elements of spiritual experience.²² The ascetical tradition, which has monastic roots but is also evident in "lay" practices such as Lent and Ramadan, has a great potential for catalyzing communitarian transformations. The proposal of the Hindu community is perhaps the most radical one: it recommends renouncing the consumption of meat as a way of preventing climatic change:

At the personal level we can reduce this suffering by beginning to transform our habits, by simplifying our lives and material desires, and by taking no more than our reasonable share of

the planet's natural resources. Adopting a vegetarian diet is one of the most powerful acts that can be undertaken for reducing environmental impact.²³

In the search for sustainability, sociopolitical transformation must be accompanied by a freely chosen and communally sustained simplicity of life. However, care must be taken to avoid the "instrumentalization" of ecological practices that are really aimed at freeing believers from their own disorders and improving their relationship with God and neighbor. Thus, in proposing Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, as an anthropological model, Pope Francis explains the most basic meaning of religious asceticism: "The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled" (LS 11).

This is one of the most original and valuable contributions of spirituality to the contemporary debate on sustainability: in the face of the social injustice and the environmental degradation that underlie our habits of consumption and our modes of production, religious communities do not propose just voluntary renunciation; they invite people to discover the sacramental character of reality and to remain open to the possibility of a mystical experience in their encounter with nature.

For believers, the spiritual search provides the principal motivation for the ascetical discipline required by environmental challenges. The refusal to "convert reality into a mere object for use and domination" means opposing

the mercantilization of all spheres of life and resisting the instrumentalization of our relations with persons and with nature.²⁴ The exercise of spiritual resistance means, on the one hand, opening ourselves up to the sacramental dimension of resistance and, on the other, becoming acutely conscious of our personal and collective contribution to the numerous ruptures that are tearing our world apart.

The penitential dimension

Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it. (LS 19)

The biblical prophets preached repentance and called people to conversion of heart and reform of habits. And this call is not the exclusive patrimony of the monotheistic religions. Over the millennia many other spiritual traditions have also promoted penitential practices for the sake of "redeeming the sins" committed against others, against oneself, and against God. What we need to ask now is whether nature must be included among the many victims of human sin.

The wisdom of expiation processes, which are often spelt out through complex rites of purification in the diverse religious traditions, may be of great help in this historical moment when human beings are becoming ever more conscious of the socio-environmental consequences of their everyday

decisions. In light of the ecological crisis, the despised theological category of “sin” (*mysterium iniquitatis*) has taken on an unexpected timeliness that demands a widening of its horizon. *Laudato Si’* reinterprets the experience of sin in a way that reflects the type of understanding our epoch demands:

Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. (LS 66)

The rupture of relations involved in the reality of sin is no longer restricted to the narrow confines of immediate, interpersonal relations; it extends now toward the future, incorporating all future generations, and it extends as well toward our “distant neighbors” and even toward the whole complex of living species and ecosystems. In this way theological ethics undergoes a triple expansion: spatial, temporal, and cosmic.²⁵ We do well to remember that the first spiritual leader to use harsh theological language in referring to environmental degradation was the Orthodox patriarch Bartholomew I:

That human beings destroy the biological diversity of the divine creation; that human beings degrade the integrity of the earth, contribute to climate

change, strip the planet of its natural forests, and destroy its wetlands; that human beings contaminate the water, the soil, and the air: all these are sins.²⁶

But it is not only the Christian confessions that have sounded the alarm with regard to the environmental question. Islamic leaders have also spoken out: “We acknowledge the corruption (*fasād*) that human beings have wrought on the Earth because of our implacable striving for economic growth and consumption.”²⁷ The Hindu community has reached a similar conclusion using comparable language: “Unless we change the way we use energy, the way we use the earth, the way we cultivate, the way we treat other animals, and the way we use natural resources, we will only increase pain, suffering, and violence.”²⁸

By broadening the concept of sin, the religions can give new meaning and substance to penitential practices. In the process, spirituality and theological ethics can engage in a new and unexpected dialogue.²⁹ Theologian Douglas E. Christie has written an interesting reflection on the importance of experiencing personally the degradation of nature and of being “grieved” by the disappearance of species and ecosystems as a prerequisite for personal transformation. He believes that it is necessary to modify or adapt traditional devotions and spiritual practices:

Naming and describing this loss and becoming aware of its full impact on us is perhaps one of the most important spiritual practices in which we can engage at this time. ... These practices of *penthos* [gift of tears] and

memento mori [remembering death] need to be reinvented ... so that they include not only consciousness of one's own fragility but also that of all living beings.³⁰

Taking as inspiration the sacrament of reconciliation, we would do well to ask whether its four structural elements—examination of conscience, contrition, confession, and satisfaction—can in our own day and age encourage lifestyles that not only make us more conscious of the social and environmental consequences of our actions but also produce the kind of personal and collective conversion we need.³¹ We should also ask whether in our own time the ancient Jubilee tradition—understood as the practice of collective penance—might best be understood in an ecological sense.³²

The penitential dimension leads us to another aspect of religious experience that is also relevant and salutary in our present cultural context: the apocalyptic.

The apocalyptic dimension

The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. (LS 21)

A catastrophic tone is often perceptible when contemporary ecological problems are treated in the media, in literature, or in film. In recent decades many novels and films that portray post-apocalyptic scenarios have presented the possibility of a global collapse of the earth's ecosystems and the economic, social, and political degradation that

would follow thereon.³³ Much controversy has been aroused by the use (and abuse) of the apocalyptic genre by ecological groups—a genre that has religious origins but is almost always expressed in technical language.

On the one hand, there are those who warn of the dangers of using a strategy that often creates unjustified alarm and makes rational discourse difficult. They argue that the pessimism regarding human progress and the redemptive possibilities of technology, which often permeate ecological discourse, have contributed to the “death of environmentalism,” as is evident from its inability to effect profound cultural changes.³⁴

On the other hand, there are those who—in continuity with the “heuristic of fear” suggested by Hans Jonas in his influential book, *The Principle of Responsibility*—encourage this type of discourse as a means for changing people's perception, transforming their vision, and moving them into action.³⁵ That is the option proposed by the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis*:

In Leviticus 26, the Torah warns us that, if we refuse to let the Earth rest, it “will rest” in any case, despite us and against us—in drought, famine, and exile that make whole peoples into refugees. This ancient warning heard by an indigenous people living on a narrow strip of land has become in our day a caveat for the crisis of our entire planet and the whole human species.³⁶

The apocalyptic visions have the potential to serve as “dramas that urge us to consider once again who we are,

where we are, and what we value.”³⁷ At the same time, the deliberately enigmatic and symbolic character of these narrations “engenders a necessary humility in readers and listeners.”³⁸ Such humility is indispensable for demythologizing our pretensions of omniscience and absolute control.

Warnings are also forthcoming from the fields of psychology and philosophy about the opportunities and dangers of the emotional impact caused by greater consciousness of environmental deterioration. Shierry Weber Nicholsen has analyzed people’s responses to the degradation of the natural world, showing that they range from intense concern to compassion, passing through sorrow, rage, and diffused depression. The sensations of loss, guilt, or grief that result from witnessing environmental degradation are ambivalent. They may lead either to personal transformation and commitment or to discouragement and hopelessness.³⁹

In any case, we should not forget that the hope proffered by most Jewish and Christian apocalypses does not promote escapism or disinhibition; to the contrary, it inspires a transformation of life by endowing existence with new value and meaning. It is in this sense –especially stressed in the Christian tradition– that the apocalyptic dimension brings forward, into the present, a sacramental vision of the cosmos; it recognizes the intrinsic value of reality and motivates people to behave as if they truly believe in a world created, permeated, and sustained by God. In a different sense, Buddhist and Hindu theologies also warn of the “karmic” consequences of our actions; they help believers “antic-

ipate the future,” gain awareness of the implications of their present decisions, and act accordingly.

The potential of religious creativity to envision future scenarios by anticipating the consequences of human decisions is a characteristic of many spiritual traditions. Properly understood, this characteristic can be an indispensable resource for expanding people’s moral imagination, making them more aware of their actions, and motivating them to care for creation by rediscovering its sacramental value.

The sacramental dimension

It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet. (LS 9)

Every spiritual tradition has its own way of expressing a sacramental vision of the world. For example, the Hindu sage Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.2.41) states: “Ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, the directions, the trees and plants, the rivers and seas –all are organs of the body of God.” By recognizing this, Hindu leaders affirm, “the devout respect all species.”⁴⁰

Christianity defines a sacrament as “a visible sign of invisible Grace,” but its sacramental vision goes beyond the narrow framework of the seven traditional sacraments. It recognizes in the whole of creation a proto-sacrament, a visible sign of the divine presence that permeates the material world. It was therefore no accident that the signatories of the interreligious declaration

that preceded the Paris Climate Accord in 2015 stated the following:

We must reflect on the true nature of our relationship with the Earth. It is not a resource that we can exploit as we like. It is a sacred heritage and a precious home that we must protect.⁴¹

The sacramental vision of the world that characterizes most religious worldviews is opposed to the unidimensional, utilitarian, and materialist vision that is often evident in the technical discourse of the international organizations. The sacramental vision is a distinctive element of the religious ethos and is also one of religion's most important contributions to the contemporary environmental debate.

In keeping with Christianity's pan-sacramental vision, Pope Francis has stated that "other living beings have a *value of their own*" (LS 69) and that "we take these ecosystems into account not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness" (LS 140).⁴² The proper response to those who criticize religion because of its exclusive emphasis on the dignity of human beings is a theocentric correction that counters the "wayward anthropocentrism" of modernity. Any vision of human and worldly reality that fragments knowledge of nature, ignores its sacredness, and recognizes it only for its instrumental usefulness is a vision that "weakens the value that the world has *in itself*" (LS 115).

The Christian understanding of creation cannot be reconciled with either modern anthropocentrism or a materi-

alist vision of reality. Human beings possess a non-negotiable dignity, it is true, but humans are not the exclusive source of value in the world: "The world, rather than a problem to be solved, is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise" (LS 12). Creation is not simply nature; it is a work of God endowed with dignity, and that dignity radiates a sacramental dimension:

This is the basis of our conviction that all of us, as part of the universe called into being by one Father, are linked together by unseen bonds and form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion that fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. (LS 89)

Destroying nature, therefore, means destroying privileged mediations of supernatural life.⁴³ In this sense, the practice of contemplative prayer can be understood as an exercise in restoration and reconciliation; it helps us discover the mediations that sustain life, and it highlights the sacramentality of nature:

Contemplation is useless; it arises from a dimension of life to which no precise utilitarian value can be given. In fact, at its deepest level it resists being forced into such categories. At the same time, it is necessary and important (that is, useful) for the task of renewing human culture and healing a natural world that is fragmented and degraded.⁴⁴

In synthesis, a sacramental vision rejects the pantheism that divinizes

nature, the materialism that reduces the value of the natural world to its instrumental use, and the rationalism that makes an idol of scientific and technological reason. It recognizes instead a sacred dimension in creation, but without divinizing it; some authors call such a stance “pan-en-theism.” Without going into the complex theological debate on this concept, we can conclude that a sacramental vision of the world –along with the prophetic, ascetical, penitential dimensions to which it is closely connected– provides us a privileged entryway into the ecological question.

Added to this fifth religious contribution –and closely related to its ability to inspire, motivate, and sustain our commitment to caring for creation– is the experience of healing that comes through contact with nature: its soteriological dimension.

The soteriological dimension

If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. (LS 119)

In one of its many acceptations, the term “religion” means “rebinding,” “restoring,” or “reestablishing” broken relationships. The soteriological dimension –from the Greek σωτηρία (sōtēria, “salvation”) and λογος (logos, “study of”)– of spiritual experience is a central concern for most religious traditions since it deals with the heal-

ing of disorders in our personal and communal relations with God, other persons, nature, and self. *Laudato Si’* and most confessional declarations on ecology refer to this soteriological dimension –with its radical healing of our relationships– and to the centrality that direct contact with nature has in this process.

The environmental movement, from its origins to our own day, has also stressed the importance of direct contact with nature. Landscapes that are “wild” or relatively unspoiled are increasingly perceived as restorative, healing spaces; they have become new places of pilgrimage where a stressed-out urban population can find rest and reestablish its physical health and psychological balance. The creation of various juridical figures for protecting spaces separated from transformed, humanized territories –such as the establishment of national parks at the beginning of the 20th century– gives evidence of the therapeutic function that the new ecological sensibility attributes to nature.⁴⁵

During this long historical process, the relations of humans with the natural world were increasingly expressed in aesthetic and therapeutic terms.⁴⁶ People made little use of religious language and disregarded the ambivalent character attributed to nature since ancient times, when it was seen as not only a space for spiritual purification and encounter with transcendence but also a menacing and diabolical place.⁴⁷

However, despite this “therapeutic” drift and the more frequent use of secular language, belief in the redemptive power of nature has permeated ecological discourse and praxis since the start.

As Evan Berry notes, the influence of biblical traditions can be perceived in people's defense of the "positive moral status of the natural world" or in their "ability to develop soteriological rituals rooted in mundane physical practices" such as tourism and recreation.⁴⁸ Along with the monotheistic faiths, other religions traditions such as Buddhism insist on the importance of overcoming a purely therapeutic approach; they stress that the health of nature and the health of human beings are intimately connected:

We need to wake up and realize that the Earth is our mother, as well as our home; the umbilical cord that unites us to her cannot be severed. When the Earth gets sick, we also get sick because we are part of her.⁴⁹

This Buddhist declaration points out in a veiled way that an exclusive emphasis on human well-being conceals presuppositions that are elitist, dualist, and Manichean. There are presuppositions that religious criticism is called upon to expose. Indeed, the most important correction that religions can make to certain currents of contemporary ecological thought involves the denunciation of a vision of nature that is immanent, individualist, and elitist.

Several spiritual leaders have in fact stressed that the healing of our relations with nature must include a transcendent dimension –with God, in the case of the theistic religions. At the same time they have denounced the way in which certain distinctions—between nature and culture, between natural spaces and humanized spaces, between sacred and profane –intro-

duce false dichotomies and conceal historical social injustices. Regarding the social injustices, Michael Northcott, in analyzing the emergence of the modern environmental consciousness, observes that "even the Romantics protested mainly against the ecologically destructive effects of industrial development in rural zones, rather than against the short, toxic lives to which the poor in the cities were condemned."⁵⁰

There is still another aspect of the soteriological dimension that is especially important for the traditional religions: its communitarian character. This is a significant element in the current environmental debate. Francis refers to it in his reflection on "urban ecology" when he states that "this experience of a communitarian salvation often generates creative ideas for the improvement of a building or a neighborhood" (LS 149). In contrast to individualist conceptions, the religions point out that salvation is a collective task that contributes to a relational vision of a society in which believers live together as members of a "sublime fraternity of all that is created" (LS 221). In other words, we will be saved only if we are saved together, and will save creation from destruction only if we save it together.

The mystical dimension

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to

discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. (LS 233)

It is by no means easy to define the term “mystical.” It is easier to examine the writings and the lives of the mystics in an effort to discern the key features of this type of spiritual experience, which should not be the exclusive patrimony of a few privileged people but a real possibility for everyone. That seems to be the strategy of Francis in drawing up a list of “ecological saints” that allows us to see the elements of an “ecological mysticism” of Christian inspiration. Conceding preeminence to the Franciscan and Benedictine traditions, Francis proposes several persons as models for a life that is reconciled with God, with humankind, and with creation. They are Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Benedict, Saint Thérèse de Lisieux, Saint John of the Cross, and Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

The one who holds a central place among all of them as a model of ecological mysticism is the *poverello*: “[Francis of Assisi] was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature, and with himself” (LS 10). The pope says something similar when referring to Saint John of the Cross, insisting that “the mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that ‘all things are God’” (LS 234).

Looking at other traditions, we discover in the biographies of the great religious founders accounts of mystical experiences centered on encountering the sacred or the divine in the midst of nature. Moses was given the tables of the Law on Mount Sinai, beside a

burning bush; the enlightenment of the Buddha happened in an isolated place, under a fig tree; the archangel Gabriel recited the Quran to Muhammed in the solitude of a cave.

In most cases, the mystical experience led to a perception of the harmonious relations between Creator and creation –the *fascinating* aspect– and also to an awareness of the overwhelming, threatening dimension –the *fearful* aspect. Such experience makes manifest the limited nature of our existence and the need to accept an ethical code (the Torah, the commandment of love, or the Quran) or to submit to a process of personal transformation (the eightfold path of Buddhism).

Intuitions such as these –awareness of interdependence and finitude, discovery of a heteronomous morality, or the invitation to undertake a path of spiritual transformation– are desperately needed to counter a globalized Promethean culture that despises everything fragile while exalting arrogant self-sufficiency, compulsive consumption, and ecological degradation. In a word, mystical experience is an entryway to ethical transformation.

A common feature of all mystical experience is the awareness of interrelation and interdependence. From its beginning, ecological science formulated the *principle of interconnection* as one of its fundamental pillars. The Meadows Report (1972) argued for the existence of biophysical limits that should determine the scope of global economic activity. In more recent years the scientific community has described and quantified the “planetary boundaries” that must not be exceeded, as well as their interrelations.

Assimilating the scientific community's conclusions and responding to its calls to action will require not only ecological literacy, but also a profound spirituality, one that is able to integrate and sustain the required sociopolitical commitment. The dualisms introduced into our culture in modern times –between spirituality and work, study and action, science and religion, secular and religious, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*– have made it difficult for holistic, relational visions to emerge and have hindered the dialogue between science and religion. Given our many cultural divisions, the monastic tradition turns out to be very relevant since it proposes to harmonize active life and contemplation, study and prayer, immanence and transcendence. Someone like Saint Benedict of Nursia can teach us that “personal growth and sanctification should be sought in the interplay of recollection and work. This way of experiencing work makes us more protective and respectful of the environment; it imbues our relationship to the world with a healthy sobriety” (LS 126).

The Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh has spoken about the need to live in a more conscious, more compassionate, and more committed way. In addressing contemporary socio-environmental questions, Buddhist spirituality proposes a series of “practices for a life of consciousness” that can help us to live in a way that is more balanced and more respectful of nature.⁵¹

Religious leaders today are urging us to use simple spiritual exercises that will help us become more aware of the consequences of our decisions and of the profound interrelation between our daily habits and their deferred effects

in time and space. Constant exercising can lead to a certain type of illumination or lucidity that will help us accept the fact that we live in a world with limited resources, a world where our narcissistic desires for consumption, prestige, and accumulation collide with a finite world and with the basic needs of our poorest sisters and brothers.

The mystical tradition is by no means an historical relic fit only for specialized research, nor is it a source of inspiration only for the most devout. It is also a repository of cultural intuitions that can help us meet some of the challenges presented by the contemporary crisis of sustainability. As Francis tells us, we must draw on every possible source of human wisdom: “A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an ‘interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity’” (LS 216).

Although mystical experience may appear to be a very personal matter, it is inspired, supported, and nourished in community. Religious community is the womb that configures the faith of believers; it is the setting in which they discover transformative responses. We therefore turn now to this communitarian dimension of spiritual experience.

The communitarian dimension

Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. (LS 219)

The centrality given to the communitarian dimension is another contribution of the religions to ecological discussion and action. In the midst of proposals that seek to empower the consumer, educate the citizen, and transform the political order by means of the individual vote, the religious traditions insist that communitarian action is essential if we wish to find operational responses to the challenges we face. There are various reasons for emphasizing, and even prioritizing, the community as a unit of social analysis and transformation.

The first reason is of a practical nature: modern-day individuals are overwhelmed with the complexity and the multitude of the decisions they must make. As well-informed and well-intentioned as they may be, their personal commitment needs to be supported and sustained through larger networks: “Self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today” (LS 219).

The second reason is spiritual; it is the realization that we, along with all other forms of life, constitute a community: “As part of the universe called into being by one Father, all of us are linked together by unseen bonds and form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion” (LS 89).⁵² For Islamic leaders, “God, whom we know as Allah, has created the universe in all its diversity, richness, and vitality: the stars, the sun, and the moon; the earth and all its communities of living beings.”⁵³ That experience of communion and interdependence, “that sublime fraternity with all creation,” (LS 221) shapes the believer’s way of viewing the world.

Third, knowing and feeling oneself to be part of a web of relations that stretches beyond the visible world, the present time, and the human species requires a pedagogical effort that will anchor an ethos of responsibility in this foundational experience. Ecological science and evolutionary biology have clearly shown us that we are “interdependent and eco-dependent,”⁵⁴ but that knowledge does not always translate into a change of either consciousness or ethics. We need to interiorize what it means to be part of a complex network of interdependencies. This is where religious experience can help us, because feeling oneself to be part of a “universal fraternity” (LS 228) is a spiritual attitude that can be cultivated:

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered.” (LS 225)

Finally, the centrality of the communitarian dimension of sustainability resonates also with traditional teaching about the *common good*, a key concept not only in Christian social thought but also in other religions and philosophies. The economic and sociopolitical vision of the common good has been receiving increased attention recently because of the mismanagement and accelerated degradation of our “global common goods” (LS 174).⁵⁵

When Pope Francis states that “the climate is a common good belonging to all and meant for all” (LS 23), he

is pointing out that we cannot limit ourselves to a merely physical or economic analysis of the reality we call “climate.” Our traditional understanding of the common good—defined as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment” (LS 156)—needs to be broadened so that it includes all of nature, the primordial “cosmic common good”⁵⁶ that is the condition of possibility of any other good.

Without entering into the details of the debate about the common good, which began with Greek philosophy, we conclude that the communitarian aspect of the faith experience is not only a structural element of religious experience; it is also extremely relevant to the pursuit of the common good and sustainability.

The sapiential dimension

If we are truly concerned about developing an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. (LS 63)

Scientists, engineers, and economists have in recent decades offered us ever more precise knowledge and an ever more sophisticated technology for addressing environmental questions. Their analyses are indispensable for understanding what is happening to our planet and for considering the alternatives available to us. At the same time,

the religions urge us not to forget the wisdom emanating from the millenarian spiritual traditions, for such wisdom can be a valuable complement to the technological know-how. It can sagely guide our personal decisions toward the common good, the care of nature, and the welfare of future generations.

Greek philosophy distinguished different types of knowledge: *technê* (technological knowledge), *phronêsis* (practical wisdom, prudence), *epistêmê* (science), *sophia* (wisdom), etc. Coordinating these various dimensions of human knowledge—especially technological expertise, prudence, and wisdom—has become an especially important task in our own time given information overload, academic fragmentation and specialization, the difficulty in reaching political agreements, and the cultural inertia that impedes the development of new habits.

We need to ask: is it possible for the religions to become agents of cultural transformation, channels of dialogue, and creators of interdisciplinary spaces for resolving conflicts, achieving consensus, and catalyzing collective action? There is no clear answer to such a question; before anything, there needs to be an exercise of mutual recognition. On the one hand, if the religions are to engage in fruitful dialogue with the different types of knowledge, they need to renounce their pretension of possessing absolute truth; they must humbly acknowledge their epistemological limitations, accept the conclusions of the best science available, and carefully delimit the extent of their authority. On the other hand, if the academic world, the ecological movement, and the political class truly want

to educate and mobilize society in the pursuit of sustainability, they must also admit the limitations of their analysis, recognize the relevance of religious actors, and give due consideration to the religious wisdom of humankind:

The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to the loss of an appreciation for the whole; the relations between things and the broader horizon then become irrelevant. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the most complex problems of today's world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests. Any science that seeks to offer solutions to the great issues of the day must take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics. (LS 110)

The urgent educational task imposed on us by socio-environmental questions can find a strategic collaborator in the spiritual wisdom of humankind. As Jewish leaders have already proposed to their own community: "We are moving from inherited wisdom to action, in our present and our future."⁵⁷

Traditionally it has been the religious traditions that have offered a worldview capable of uniting society, establishing political organization, and creating traditions, customs, and ethical codes. In our own day these functions are fulfilled by other actors, with the support of the positive sciences and technology. These actors project (par-

tial) visions of reality –the cosmos, nature, humanity– but they do not offer a synthesis that is capable of harmonizing the social order and guiding collective action. Some authors have attempted to elaborate a new cosmology, one that is not only founded on contemporary science but also open to religious interpretation (see, for example, *Journey of the Universe*).⁵⁸

In recent decades one of the most promising developments is the readiness of most religious traditions to accept the conclusions offered by modern science as a starting point for their reflection on the environment. General dialogue has been shown to be possible between two spheres of knowledge –the scientific and the theological– that have very different methodologies and objects of study. While considering the various ways of conceiving the relations between science and religion –conflict, interdependence, dialogue, integration, cooperation– Francis has expressed his conviction that "science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both" (LS 62).

As they seek to address the mounting socio-environmental conflicts of the 21st century, religious communities are called upon to reread their sacred texts and consult their theological sources in order to find inspiration and consolation, so that their followers take seriously their ecological responsibility and promote transformative practices. They should not forget, however, that there can also be hybrid forums that make space for in-depth listening and sincere dialogue; circles of wisdom can be created in which an

environmental, interreligious, and intercultural ethos will flourish.⁵⁹

Two good examples of the importance of the interdisciplinary and sapiential dimension to which we refer are 1) the successive “Study Weeks” sponsored in the Vatican by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and 2) the intense labor of the interreligious lobby before, during, and after the 2015 Paris Climate Accord and the New York Summit on Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, besides the sapiential dimension, there is still another important element of humankind’s spiritual experience: its eschatological vision, which can be especially valuable for helping us deal with the sacrifices and difficulties presented by the challenge of sustainability.

The eschatological dimension

Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems. (LS 61)

A major criticism of the biblical religions made by the ecological movement is their confidence preaching of a future, celestial salvation in the “great beyond.” Such a conception works to the detriment of a commitment to the present, to the earth, to the “right here and now.” In the case of Christianity, the vision of a reconciled future world and the hope for the definitive irruption into history of the *eschaton* do much to shape the thinking of believers, nour-

ish their faith, and sustain their struggles in the midst of difficulties.

The problem is that placing one’s faith in the future may lessen one’s interest in what is happening here and now, and it may dull one’s concern for temporal affairs. It is no accident that some evangelical churches and ultra-orthodox groups of other religions express skepticism about environmental problems or even deny they exist.⁶⁰

The danger of religious escapism is real; it is perhaps for that reason that Francis reminds us that we must “come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast” (LS 244). Christians are called to live “in the meantime” and to experience the tension between future hope and present task; they are expected to “take charge” of their common home, knowing that the future of the world is ultimately not in their hands. As the old Jesuit adage goes, we must live and work as if everything depended on us even though we know that ultimately everything depends on God.

Reflecting on the tensions inherent in faith, Douglas Christie has suggested that eschatology be reconceived as a way of “practicing paradise” in the present.

The idea of paradise expresses the conviction that one can learn, though assiduous spiritual practice and openness to grace, to overcome the anxieties and fears (our condition outside paradise) which prevent us from opening ourselves to a simple and honest loving relationship with God and other beings (humans and others).⁶¹

This spiritual practice –purged, to be sure, of the naïveté and the danger of millenarian escapism that is always a temptation– can help to project and sustain the “work of spiritual ecological renewal” that our epoch requires to overcome the paralyzing fear produced by talk of catastrophe.⁶²

For most religions, hope is a constitutive element of their faith and a buttress against the inevitable difficulties of life; it is a profound motivating force and the foundation of their ethical commitment. In a declaration made before the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, Hindu leaders called for the exercise of responsibility toward the future and for coherence with their received tradition:

By means of this combination of significant action, personal transformation, and disinterested service, undertaken as an act of adoration, we will be able to bring about the internal and external transitions required by climate change. In doing this we are acting in a profoundly *dharmic* manner, in fidelity to our ethos, our philosophy, and our Hindu tradition.⁶³

Reshaping religious liturgies in order to “dramatize” love for the poor and reverence for creation can be a valuable experience. For theologian Willis

Jenkins, the “future of ethics” involves taking responsibility for future generations and for the future of the planet as a whole. In a way that may surprise the secular world, liturgy can become into a practice that not only “anticipates the future” symbolically but also “unmasks the phony logic of sustainability: the sacrifice that would assure the future through the consumerist fire of the present. Any action that silences the poor and makes other creatures disappear –all in the name of guaranteed future growth– is a false sacrifice.”⁶⁴

Once we become conscious of the accelerated degradation of the biosphere and the risks we have created, we cannot ignore the gravity of the situation or minimize our responsibility. To the contrary, the hope generated by faith leads us to seek out new paths of salvation. One of the most moving phrases in *Laudato Si'* underlines a basic conviction of believers: “May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope” (LS 244).

This is the final contribution that spirituality can make to the contemporary ecological debate: nourishing people’s sense of responsibility with a bright, hope-filled joy committed to the future. And this is –or should be– also the distinctive mark of “an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (LS 10).

4. CONCLUSION

In the mid-1990s U.S. theologian Mary Evelyn Tucker identified four tasks that the ecological challenge presents to interreligious dialogue.⁶⁵

The four tasks are the following:

- The need for each tradition to carry out a critical review of its attitudes toward creation.
- Openness to the visions of other religions regarding the interaction between human beings and nature.
- Readiness to engage in a “vulnerable dialogue” capable of transforming self-perception.
- Constructive reappropriation of one’s own tradition in response to the contemporary challenges of sustainability.

Several years later Tucker identified *retrieval*, *reevaluation*, and *reconstruction* as the three theological tasks required by the ecological crisis, and she singled out five priority areas:⁶⁶

- Reinterpretation of sacred texts.
- Systematic reconstruction of theology.
- Renewal of liturgies and symbols.
- Reconsideration of the ethical paradigm.
- Restoration of the sense of celebration and surprise at the wonder of life.

After more than a half-century of ecological thought, we can state that the religions have worked hard at the three theological tasks indicated by Tucker, but the results have been uneven. While the quantity and quality of theological reflection and articulate declarations has steadily increased during this period, most confessions still have much work to do in transforming their communities and influencing the habits of their members.

We began this reflection by asking about the role of the religions in the urgent socio-environmental debate. That question led us to rethink the tasks proposed by Tucker in the light of ten structural dimensions of religious experience that are relevant to the contemporary discussion of sustainability: *prophetic, ascetical, penitential, apocalyptic, sacramental, soteriological, mystical, sapiential, communitarian, and eschatological*. As we come to the end of this essay, we hope that the key aspects we analyzed will shed some light on the socio-environmental debate and make a meaningful contribution in non-religious circles. While it is true that the religions by themselves will not resolve the complex challenge of sustainability, it is also true that without their assistance no resolution will be possible.

During the last 50 years the religious traditions have entered into this relatively new area of sustainability and have engaged in a fruitful dialogue with the civil society, the scientific community, and the business world. Their statements are being heard with

increased interest and are welcomed in this dialogue, which has been remarkably ecumenical and interreligious.

The ecological debate has unexpectedly made possible one of the greatest exercises of public theology in recent history: the religions have effectively appealed to the political class, they have dialogued with the academics, and they have restored credibility to the religious institutions themselves. We therefore conclude this reflection by pointing out that, not only will the great religious traditions play a decisive role in addressing the complexity of the socio-environmental challenges, but these challenges will also have a tremendous influence on the spiritual evolution of humankind.

The response of religion to the environmental crisis –and to the social forces of industrialization, globalization, militarization, and consumerism that are causing this crisis– is the most important factor determining whether religion will be a vital part of the future of humanity or will instead sink into increasing irrelevance.⁶⁷

1. Cf. STEFFEN, William *et al.* (2015). «Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet», *Science* 347, pp. 736-747; ROCKSTRÖM, Johan *et al.* (2009). «Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity», *Ecology and Society* 14/2, p. 32.
2. Cf. RASMUSSEN, Larry (2013). *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*. Oxford University Press, New York.
3. Some of these dimensions have been described in TATAY, Jaime (2016). «Experiencia religiosa y *Laudato si'*», *Corintios XIII* 159, pp. 48-65.
4. Cf. WHITE, Lynn (1967). «The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis», *Science* 155/3767, pp. 1203-1207.
5. Cf. DENEULIN, Séverine; RAKODI, Carole (2011). «Revisiting Religion: Development Studies Thirty Years On», *World Development* 39/1, pp. 45-54.
6. Cf. WILSON, Edward O. (2006). *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, Norton, New York.
7. Part of this distortion is due to the introduction of false dichotomies like society-culture, mind-body, natural capital-human capital.
8. Cf. CALLICOTT, Baird J. (1994). *Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
9. Cf. WOLF, Aaron T. (2017). *The Spirit of Dialogue: Lessons from Faith Traditions in Transforming Conflict*, Island Press, Washington D. C.
10. ASSADOURIAN, Erik (2013). «Building an Enduring Environmental Movement». In *State of the World 2013*, Worldwatch Institute, Washington D. C., p. 297.
11. Cf. GARDNER, Gary (2006). *Inspiring Progress: Religion's Contributions to Sustainable Development*, Worldwatch Institute, Washington D. C., pp. 41-53.
12. Cf. TATAY, Jaime; DEVITT, Catherine (2017). «Sustainability and Interreligious Dialogue», *Islamochristiana*, 43, pp. 123-139.
13. Cf. MARTÍNEZ DE ANGUIA, Pablo (2012). *Environmental Solidarity: How Religions can Sustain Sustainability*, Routledge, Nueva York.
14. Cf. TUCKER, Mary E. (2003). *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*, Chicago: Open Court.
15. ÁLVAREZ CANTALAPIEDRA, Santiago (2018). *Religiones proféticas y crisis ecosocial: Apuntes a propósito de Laudato si'*, Madrid: Fuhem, p. 22.
16. For a work that highlights the relevance of the prophetic tradition for addressing the modern environmental crisis, see: MARLOW, Hillary (2009). *Biblical Prophets: Contemporary Environmental Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press.
17. The term «anthropocene» was first used in CRUTZEN, Paul J. (2002). «Geology of Mankind», *Nature*, 415, p. 23.
18. *A Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis* (29 October 2015).
19. As Sorbonne sociologist Razmig Keucheyan has lucidly explained, «the environmental inequalities constitute a datum that structures political power relations in the modern era. The inequalities mean that the disastrous consequences of capitalist development are not suffered in the same way and to the same degree but all sectors of the population». Cf. KEUCHEYAN, Razmig (2016). *La naturaleza es un campo de batalla. Ensayo de ecología política*, Madrid: Clave intelectual, p. 74.
20. Something similar has happened, for example, with the less known *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*, which is supported by some Muslim leaders and rejected by others (most

- of whom come from countries that are major exporters of hydrocarbons). Cf. HOWARD, Damian (2015). «Una declaración islamica sul cambiamento climatico». *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3967, pp. 44-53.
21. Para una argumentación filosófica de la simplicidad voluntaria, véase: READ, Rupert; ALEXANDER, Samuel; GARRETT, Jacob (2018). «Voluntary Simplicity Strongly Backed by All Three Main Normative-Ethical Traditions», *Ethical Perspectives* 25/1, pp. 87-116.
 22. For a conception of solidarity with an ecological dimension, see MARTÍNEZ DE ANGUITA, Pablo (2012). *Environmental Solidarity. How Religions can Sustain Sustainability*, Nueva York: Routledge.
 23. *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change* (23 November 2015).
 24. As Michael Sandel has lucidly explained, there is an urgent need to recognize that the market is not morally neutral and that there are things that money cannot and should not buy. Cf. SANDEL, Michael (2012). *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. Nueva York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
 25. For this question, see SCHEID, David P. (2016). *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 26. BARTOLOMÉ I, *Discurso en Santa Bárbara*, California (8 November 1997). See also HABEL, Norman (1996). «The Crucified Land: Towards Our Reconciliation with the Earth», *Colloquium* 28/2, pp. 3-18; THEOKRITOFF, Elizabeth (2017), «Green Patriarch, Green Patristics: Reclaiming the Deep Ecology of Christian Tradition», *Religions*, 8(7), p. 116.
 27. *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* (18 August 2015).
 28. *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*, *Op. Cit.*
 29. Cf. FREDERICKS, Sarah E. (2014). «Online Confessions of Eco-Guilt», *JSRNC*, 8/1, pp. 64-84.
 30. CHRISTIE, Douglas E. (2013). *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind. Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 93 y 98.
 31. For this question, see the valuable article: ORMEROD, Neil; VANIN, Cristina (2016). «Ecological Conversion: What Does it Mean?», *Theological Studies*, 77/2, pp. 328-352. Jorge Riechmann has also made use of the term “conversion” to refer to the process of transformation that is needed. See RIECHMANN, Jorge (2015). *Autoconstrucción. La transformación cultural que necesitamos*. Madrid: Catarata, pp. 207-238.
 32. That would seem to be what Pope Francis means when he writes: «After seven weeks of years, which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and “liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (cf. Lev 25:10). This law came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in their relationships with others and with the land on which they lived and worked» (LS 71).
 33. Film such as *The Road* (2009) and *The Book of Eli* (2010) are good examples of the genre. This is also one of the plotlines of blockbuster films like *Avatar* (2009) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). The “revelatory,” apocalyptic character of the environmental crisis has been highlighted by GODIN, Christian (2012). *La haine de la nature*. Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon.
 34. Cf. SCHELLENGERGER, Michael; NORDHAUS, Ted (2011). *Love Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene*. Oakland: Breakthrough Institute.
 35. Cf. JONAS, Hans (1995). *El Principio de Responsabilidad: ensayo de una ética para la civilización tecnológica*. Barcelona: Herder.
 36. *A Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis*, *Op. Cit.*
 37. MOON, Jonathan (2015). «Climate Change and the Apocalyptic Imagination: Science, Faith and Ecological responsibility», *Zygon*, 50/4, p. 938.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 944.
 39. NICHOLSEN, S. Weber (2001). *The Love of Nature and the End of the World: The Unspoken Dimensions of Environmental Concern*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
 40. *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*, *Op. Cit.*
 41. *Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders*, New York (18 April 2016).
 42. For a theological development of the potential of Christian sacraments for addressing the ecological crisis, see HART, John (2006). *Sacramental Commons. Christian Ecological Ethics*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

43. In the case of Christianity, the sacramental vision is the foundation for *cosmic fraternity* and the ethics of care that permeates the spiritual proposal of *Laudato si'* and resonates with other spiritual traditions. On this question see, for example, CHRYSOAVGIS, John (1997). «The World as Sacrament: Insights into an Orthodox Worldview», *Pacifica*, 10, pp. 1-24.
44. CHRISTIE, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind, Op. Cit.*, p. 325.
45. In this regard, see CLINEBELL, Howard (1996). *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
46. On this point we would do well to consider the reflection of Charles Taylor on “the triumph of the therapeutic” in post-modernity and its break with earlier spiritual and moral paradigms: TAYLOR, Charles (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 618-623.
47. ADLER, Judith (2006). «Cultivating Wilderness: Environmentalism and Legacies of Early Christian Asceticism», *Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History*, pp. 4-37.
48. BERRY, Evan (2014). *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*. University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 28.
49. *The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change* (14 May 2015).
50. NORTHCOFF, Michael (2015). *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 139.
51. Cf. NHAT HANH, Thich (2009). *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*, Berkeley: Parallax Press. See also *The Time to Act is Now, Op. Cit.*
52. This point is developed by EDWARDS, Dennis (2016). «“Sublime Communion”: The Theology of the Natural World in *Laudato Si'*», *Theological Studies*, 77, pp. 377-391.
53. *Islamic Declaration, Op. Cit.*
54. Cf. RIECHMANN, Jorge (2012). *Interdependientes y ecodependientes. Ensayos desde la ética ecológica (y hacia ella)*, Barcelona: Proteus.
55. Cf. HOLLENBACH, David (2002). *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In this regard see also the important work of a Nobel Prize winner for economics: OSTROM, Elinor (1990). *Governing the Commons. The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
56. That is the recent formulation of SCHEID, David P. (2016). *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press. Scheid argues that an updated “ecological” understanding of the common good is one of the principal contributions of Catholic Social Teaching to contemporary ecological ethics.
57. *A Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis, Op. Cit.*
58. Cf. SWIMME, Brian T.; TUCKER, Mary E. (2011). *Journey of the Universe*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
59. That has been the finding of Aaron Wolf in his long experience as a mediator in conflicts involving the management of natural resources: Cf. WOLF, *The Spirit of Dialogue, Op. Cit.*
60. Cf. FUNK, Cary; ALPER, Beck A. (2015). «Religion and Views on Climate and Energy Issues». Available at: <http://www.pewinter.net.org/2015/10/22/religion-and-views-on-climate-and-energy-issues/> [last consulted: 18 November 2018].
61. CHRISTIE, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind. Op. Cit.*, p. 315.
62. The title of a U.N. document of an interreligious nature is a good reflection of the eschatological dimension: «Alliance of Religions and Conservation –United Nations Development Program (2015)». *Faith in the Future*, Bath: ARC-UNDP.
63. *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai!, Op. Cit.*
64. JENKINS, Willis (2013). *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Washington D. C.: Georgetown University Press, pp. 47-48.
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N. 173, October 2019

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