

## Application of Ecological Theological Reflection Based on the Biblical Passage Col 1:15-20

### I. The Situation of the Colossians

Most scholars agree that the audience of Colossians lived in a syncretistic milieu. To understand clearly, the section of Col 2:6-23 illustrates that this syncretism was probably a mixture of Jewish ideas, angelic worship, asceticism and Hellenistic speculations about the cosmic powers.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Colossians were influenced by a philosophy that relied solely on human tradition, and worldly elements rather than on Christ.

“This passage is usually called a hymn, and it certainly has a poetic quality that invites us to read it as a structured and concentrated embodiment of meaning, while its pervasive focus on Jesus Christ makes it almost doxological in character.”<sup>2</sup> This letter belongs to the Deutero-Pauline letters. Many scholars believe that the hymn in Colossians already existed before Paul incorporated it into his letter, making some editorial adaptations in the process.

Most scholars agree that the structure of this hymn is divided into two strophes: (1) verses 15-17 and (2) verses 18-20, dealing respectively with the creation of all things in Christ and the reconciliation of all things in Christ. As scholar Johannes Nissen asserts, the hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 is significant for its focus on cosmic Christology.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, scholar Chandra Han states, “The theme of this particular passage is the supremacy of Christ over all creation and over his body, the church, which is the new creation.”<sup>4</sup>

### II. Exegetical Comments

#### 1) The Cosmic Scope of Creation and Reconciliation

Through the phrases “all creation,” “all things,” especially “all things” is repeated six times, as well as the further characterization of all things as both visible and invisible, the hymn conveys to readers the cosmic breadth of both creation and reconciliation. This means that the scope of reconciliation is as vast as the scope of creation. As Denis Edwards puts it, “Here the cosmic Christ is celebrated as both the source of creation and its goal: all things have been created in Christ and all things are reconciled in him.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Universal reconciliation is achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus, extending not only to humanity but to “all things,” including nature. As Joseph Sittler writes: “These verses sing out their triumphant music between two huge and steady poles – “Christ” and “all things”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, everything in creation including all creatures are created in Christ, sustained in him, and reconciled in him.

Christ is “the firstborn of all creation” in the sense that he precedes all creation. Moreover, he has such an intimate relationship with creation that he holds the status of firstborn over all creatures: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:27). Additionally, Christ is “the firstborn from the dead” in a distinct sense, as the one who, having risen from the dead, pioneers the resurrection and new creation for all of existence. There is a parallel between his role in creation and his role

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Daton, Longman and Todd, 2010), 150.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 130.

<sup>4</sup> Chandra Han, “Christ’s Supremacy: Colossians 1:15-20 and Its Implication in Education,” *Diligentia* Vol. 1, No.1

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(September 2019), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of living on Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: Writing on Ecology, Theology and Ethics* (eds. Steven Bouma Prediger and Peter Bakken; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39. Quoted in Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 153.

in the new creation, reinforced by the designation “Genesis” or “the beginning”—a term often associated with the inception of creation (Gen 1:1; Ps 102:25; Prov 8:22; John 1:1; Heb 1:10; Rev 3:14).<sup>7</sup> This parallel is further developed in the prepositional phrases: *in him, through him, for/to him*. In other words, God is both the origin and the culmination of all creation. Specifically, Jesus Christ is fully integrated into God’s divine relationship with the world. He participates in God’s role in both creation and reconciliation while also serving as the visible representation and embody of God within creation.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Denis Eward believes that this hymn reflects the concept of deep incarnation in which Christ is celebrated as the “icon of the invisible God,” as the “firstborn of all creation,” as the one in whom “all things in heaven and on earth were created.” As Denis points out, the meaning of the incarnation, of becoming flesh, is not restricted to humanity, “It includes the whole interconnected world of fleshly life and, in some way, includes the whole universe to which flesh is related and on which it depends.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2) Jesus Christ: The Fullness of God

In the second strophe, it is not simply Jesus who is the icon of the invisible God, but the crucified Jesus. His sacrificial and shameful death illuminates, more than anything else, his significance for all creation. Therefore, the hymn invites us to consider the universal significance of Jesus Christ—the man in whom the fullness of God was pleased to incarnate. Richard Bauckham asserts, “What the first strophe says about the created world concerns its relationship to the man Jesus Christ, because the agent of its creation was the one destined to be, and so already identifiable as, Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in verse 19, Saint Paul actually proclaims that in Christ alone “all the fullness (Greek: *pleroma*) of God was pleased to dwell.”

What is Paul’s theological insight regarding the term “fullness”? The concept of “fullness” played a significant role in Colossians,

particularly in the context of its critique of syncretism. The citizens of Colossae assumed that God was holy and unapproachable, that people were imprisoned by earthly desires and cut off from God by their physical bodies, and that between God and humanity existed angelic powers, the *pleroma*. These powers were believed to be mediators between God and humanity, necessitating their appeasement through adherence to the law (which, according to tradition, was given by angels) and rigorous ascetic practices. In contrast, Saint Paul argues that the fullness of God is already present in Christ and that it has bodily form. Scholar Patricia M. McDonald exegetes that: “the cosmic ‘fullness’ (*pleroma*) refers to the fullness of God.”<sup>11</sup> That is the reason why, the Colossians have no reason to fear the rulers and powers.

## 3) Christ’s Supremacy Over All Powers and Reconciliation

Christ is the one through whom all things were created and for whom they exist. “Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers,” he sustains everything and brings about reconciliation. Specifically, the hymn emphasizes that no power in the world exists apart from Christ—everything was created through him, and thus, all things have been reconciled by him and to him. Patricia comments on verse 16: “it is probable that ‘visible and invisible’ and the references to thrones, dominions, rulers, powers are the author’s expansion to cover explicitly the kinds of forces whose influence underlay the writer’s concern for the community.”<sup>12</sup>

## 4) The Gospel centers on Jesus, who is the fulfillment of all creation

Since Christ is the creator of all things, their ultimate purpose is connected to him. Since everything was made for him, he will guide all creation toward its intended fulfillment. This underscores that the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—is central,

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 154.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 153.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia M. McDonald, “The Letter to the Colossians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, and Donald Senior (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 1710.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia M. McDonald, “The Letter to the Colossians,” 1709.

culminating, and decisive for all of creation. According to Richard Bauckham: “The whole narrative is thus highly particular in its focus on the story of Jesus Christ and at the same time holistic in its embrace of the whole creation. Any Christian attempt to understand creation as a whole must likewise see all in the light of Jesus Christ and the Gospel story.”<sup>13</sup>

The fulfillment of destined all creation in this hymn also means that Christ’s death and resurrection are the beginning of the transformation of the whole of creation.<sup>14</sup> This idea also resonates in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 9-10, 20-30, where all things will be gathered up in the risen Christ.

### III. Ecological Reflections

#### 1) Christ as the Center and Cosmic Peace of the whole Creation

Firstly, the hymn offers a holistic vision of all creation integrated in Jesus Christ. The prepositional phrases (*in him, through him, for him*) emphasize relationality. Just as all creatures are interconnected, they are also intimately connected to Jesus Christ. He is their goal in the sense that this relationship to Christ is what will in the end constitute the peace of the whole creation.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, to perceive creation in its entirety, we must see it in relation to the crucified and risen Jesus. Contextualizing this approach for the contemporary world, theologian Jürgen Moltmann asserts: “Today a cosmic Christology has to confront Christ the redeemer with a nature which human beings have plunged into chaos, infected with poisonous waste and condemned to universal death; for it is only this Christ who can save men and women from their despair and preserve nature from annihilation.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 2) Jesus Christ: Reconciler and Renewal of All Things

Secondly, in today context, Jesus Christ is compared to the world as the one who, through his cross, reconciles all things and, through his

resurrection (as “the firstborn from the dead”), renews everything. In this regard, to understand creation as a whole interconnected world, we must see it in relation to the crucified and risen Jesus, who is the Reconciler and Renewal of all things not only restricted to humanity. Reconciler and Renewal of All Things through incarnation that evokes us to a deeper appropriation of the meaning of God-with-us in Christ. In the concept of deep incarnation, Denis says, “the Christ-event can be understood as God entering into the evolutionary history of life on Earth, embracing finite creaturely existence from within.” This perspective raises further questions about the theological connection between Christ and evolutionary history, calling us to ongoing discovery.

#### 3) Violence, Evolution, and the Struggle for Harmony

Thirdly, only from the creation itself alone, it cannot be said that its destiny is peaceful and the path to that peace must be through the absence of violence and just only self-sacrificing love.<sup>17</sup> From a positive perspective, modern science—particularly Darwin’s theory of evolution—has revealed a dynamic and ongoing process in which violence is an inevitable aspect of existence. Thomas Berry comments theory of evolution of Darwin following: “Life emerges and advances by the struggle of species for more complete life expression. Humans have made their way amid the harshness of the natural world and have imposed their violence on the natural world. Among themselves humans have experienced unending conflict.”<sup>18</sup> In response to this, Pope Francis call for a recover serene harmony with creation, “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’.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 156.

<sup>14</sup> Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1990), 275. Quoted in Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 158.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988), 216–217. Quoted in Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 225.

#### **4) Christ's Victory Over Hostile Powers and the Call to Action**

Lastly, the hostility and violence present in the world today parallel the challenges faced by the Colossian community, particularly concerning “the powers”—whether political, social, or spiritual. These forces remain tangible today in the form of natural disasters, illness, pandemics, and oppressive political and social structures. Whatever hostile powers may exist, in heaven or on earth, Christ has pacified them. Through his death and resurrection, he inaugurated the peace that creation was originally intended to embody. Notably, Christ's pacification of these powers takes effect through humanity, as people actively work toward peace between themselves and the rest of creation. Applying this insight, individuals are called to engage with contemporary challenges, including pollution, climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and global inequality.<sup>20</sup>

#### **IV. Implications of Eco-Theological Reflections on Col 1:15-20**

In short, the hymn contributes to Eco-theological interpretation which is relevant in today's religious and cultural situation. God's economy of salvation reaches out far beyond that world of Christians, even beyond the human world, that mean include all creatures.

##### **1) Ecological conversion ground on Christocentric salvation**

Theologian M. Barth rightly criticizes a tendency in biblical scholarship to reduce salvation to only human sphere.<sup>21</sup> Christ is the Lord of the universe, not only of humans but of all creatures. Salvation operates not only at the level of individual redemption but also in terms of social solidarity, addressing the broken interconnectedness between humanity and nature. Therefore, a paradigm shift is necessary for theological approaches—one that includes ecological conversion at both individual and communal levels, ecological pastoral care, and Christian ecological education. Above all, these shifts must remain rooted in Christocentricity.

<sup>20</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Chapter One: What is Happening to Our Common Home.

<sup>21</sup> Barth M., “Christ and All things,” in Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 136.

#### **2) Theology of Reconciliation: Embracing Nature in God's Mission**

Opening for vision of theology of reconciliation that include nature. Johannes Nissen says that “theology of reconciliation which is of great significance for today's mission.” This theological paradigm can be discerned on three levels: (1) a Christological level, in which Christ is the mediator through whom God reconciles the world to Himself; (2) an ecclesiological level, in which Christ reconciles Jews and Gentiles; and (3) a cosmic level, in which Christ reconciles all powers in heaven and on earth.<sup>22</sup> From this perspective, eco-theology promotes theological studies that not only focus on the role of nature in God's creation and salvation but also research the threefold harmonious relationship between God, humanity, and nature.

##### **3) Approaching Ecological conversion from Christian education**

The concept of the pre-existent Christ affirms that His presence precedes all things. This signifies that Christ is not a created being but is equal to God, making Him the foundation of everything. If Christian education seeks to uncover God's truth, it must begin with Christ, who is both the center and the firm foundation of Christian education. Replacing Christ with mere human morality would diminish the purpose of Christian education, shifting its focus away from knowing God through Christ. Moreover, Christian education—particularly catechesis—must remain connected to the role of nature in God's plan of salvation. As Pope Francis teaches: “The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things.”<sup>23</sup>

##### **4) Mission to “foreign” structures**

Scholar Ukpong opines that the “powers” in the New Testament letters can have various meanings instead of seeing as intrinsically evil.<sup>24</sup> According to Nissen, the word translated

<sup>22</sup> Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 83a.

<sup>24</sup> Ukpong, J. S., “Pluralism and the Problem of the Discernment of Spirits,” *Ecumenical Review* 41:416-425, See in Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 139.



“subsist” (NRSV: “hold together”) in verse 17 has the same roots the modern word “system”. Thus, it can be said that in Christ everything “systematizes,” everything holds together.<sup>25</sup> And Nissen proposes that this observation invites a reflection on the parallel between the ancient concept of “powers” and modern societal structures. These structures include religious frameworks that underpin stable societies, moral structures embedded in customs and cultures, and, importantly, environmental and ecological systems that maintain balance in nature and sustain biodiversity. These are areas where the Church must actively engage, addressing new and peripheral challenges in the contemporary world as “foreign” structures.

## V. Eco-Theological Implications on Reflections Drawing from Col 1:15-20

Ecological conversion and reconciliation are deeply connected in Christocentric salvation (Cosmic Christ), emphasizing that salvation is not just for humanity but for all creation. As the Lord of the universe, the Christ (risen Christ) calls for healing the broken relationship between humanity and nature. This requires a shift in theology—one that embraces ecological pastoral care, catechism focused on ecological awareness, and Christian education rooted in Christ. As Pope Francis reminds us, since the fullness of creation is already realized in the risen Christ: “The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things.” (*Laudato Si*, 83) Thus making ecological conversion an essential part of Christian faith journey: “[ecological conversion] whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.” (LS 217)

Reconciliation in Christ restores harmony at every level—between God and humanity, among people, and within creation itself. Eco-theology highlights this by showing that salvation isn’t just about individuals but about the whole world being brought back into balance. Recognizing nature’s role in God’s redemptive plan, the Church must promote holistic ecological education, teaching that

caring for creation is part of our mission of reconciliation.

In order to fully embrace this calling, the Church must engage with social, moral, and environmental structures that shape our world. These systems are not separate from faith but are part of Christ’s sustaining and redeeming work. By addressing today’s ecological challenges with justice, ethical stewardship, and holistic education, the Church fulfills its mission of reconciliation—bringing healing to humanity, nature, and the entire creation.

Reconciliation in Christ evokes the terms recycling, reuse, renewal, and re-establishment. Meanwhile, and salvation in Christ evokes the rediscovery Christ in the midst of Nature, through encounters with people, discovering that the natural energy is from God. In general, each person, each parish community, and school is invited to become an ambassador of Christ to reconcile the relationship between people, nature, and God.

The aim of this section is to develop the ideas drawn from the theme “Cosmic Christ – Reconciliation and salvation for whole creation” that draw from biblical and theological reflection on passage Colossians 1:15-20. These ideas that need to be implemented with more concrete programmatic directions, or at least applied in the context of not only the environmental crisis but also the crisis in the relationship between humans and creation as well as with the Creator. The project as an approach and suggestion for mission of the church, specifically this theme will emphasize the area of holistic ecological education and put that idea into practice with a model. As the command for all Christians in *Laudato Si* evokes: “all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.” (LS 83) specifically, in this section the way of holistic ecological education as a approach for mission of the Church.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 139.

## **VI. Missionary Orientation for Ecological Education: Training Environmental Peacemakers**

### **Setting goal for Ecological Education:**

Ecological Education is about re-thinking and re-designing curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action.<sup>26</sup>

#### **1) Ecological Education needs ecological spirituality**

Base on the principle of all creatures are interconnected. Thus, it is necessary a kind of ecological spirituality of solidarity or another name might be called as spirituality of accompaniment in terms not just spiritual counselling but broader to possess the sense of belong to web of life. Ecological spirituality must become a way of life for the eco-peacemakers of reconciliation, whose primary target learners are children and young people.

#### **2) Spirituality of accompaniment in education and transformation**

As Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* On the Development of Peoples on March 26, 1967, Pope Paul VI teaches: “An ever more effective world solidarity should allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny.” (PP 65). And *Laudato Si'* highlights on humans as beings of “the ability to work together in building our common home.” (LS 13)

In conclusion of *the second world meeting of popular movements* in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, July 2015, Pope Francis affirms that: “the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change. I am with you.”<sup>27</sup> In this vein, Séverine Deneulin explains that

‘Accompaniment’ is the term that has been used within the work of Catholic organizations, and other faith-based organizations, to describe this ‘I am with you’, as an expression of solidarity with the lives of the marginalized.<sup>28</sup> Accompaniment actually is instead of doing something for the marginalized, is to being with them and sharing with them by simply being present to them such as visiting them in their homes, and sharing their commitment to be artisans of their destiny through the organizations that they form.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, accompanying with them as they are as agents of structural change, sometimes at the cost of their lives.

The effect of accompaniment is not only to increase the efficiency of work, but also to be a concrete manifestation of the spirit of solidarity. Psychologically, the accompaniment of church leaders with all Christians or of Christians and non-Christians helps to create trust and opens the way for religious dialogue, social dialogue, and spiritual support. Moreover, the eco-peacemakers must be experienced in accompaniment from family, teachers, parish; then they will become companions for their friends, their families, and for those threatened by the environmental crisis.

#### **3) Spirituality of accompaniment need to attach ecological spirituality (Eco-Spirituality)**

Eschatological character in **ecological spirituality (Eco-spirituality)** that is founded ultimately on the eschatological destiny of all creation to be recapitulated in Christ. God is the eschatological point of arrival of all creatures: “All creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things” (LS 83)

Catechism should emphasize and add this eschatology in curriculum: It is important to remember that it is the whole creation, the entire physical universe, and not just humanity alone that is destined to be redeemed and transformed

<sup>26</sup> See <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/laudato-si-goals/> (accessed March 18, 2025)

<sup>27</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis To Ecuador, Bolivia And Paraguay (5-13 July 2015): Participation at The Second World Meeting of Popular Movements* [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150709\\_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html) (accessed on March 22, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> See Séverine Deneulin, *Human Development and The Catholic Social Tradition: Towards an Integral Ecology* (Routledge: New York, 2021), 84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

in Christ.<sup>30</sup> Since “Jesus says: ‘I make all things new’ (*Rev* 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.” (LS 243)

#### 4) The vision of education for the Transition

The ecological and social transform demands community education that innovative methods to both formal learning and lifelong civic engagement education. The comprehensive viewpoint given in this guide supports an education that enables each individual choose their own path for participate in and contribute to common goods. It identifies in six different pedagogical and competency axes: (1) Systems thinking (*Oikos*), (2) Ethics and responsibility (*Ethos*), (3) Changing mental models (*Nomos*), (4) Shared images and narratives (*Logos*), (5) Collective learning and action (*Praxis*), and (6) Sense of self and connection to others (*Dunamis*).<sup>31</sup>

Some Suggestions and oriented implications in Catholic education and Catechism which these orientations help train soft and hard skills for behavior, action, and for thinking as well:

- (1) Systems Thinking– Teach about the interconnectedness of the whole creation through biblical stewardship and ecological projects.
- (2) Ethics and Responsibility– Instill moral responsibility for the environment by integrating *Laudato Si'* and sustainable practices into catechism.
- (3) Changing Mental Models– strengthening critical mindset on materialism and promote ecological conversion through retreats and lifestyle changes.
- (4) Shared Images and Narratives– Use biblical stories, saints' lives, and creative expression to inspire the spirit of taking care for creation.

<sup>30</sup> See Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2014), 324 – 25.

<sup>31</sup> See Renouard, Cécile, Beau, Rémi, Goupil, Christophe and Koenig, Christian, Eds. *The Great Transition Guide: Principles for a Transformative Education* (Campion Hall, Oxford: Forges and Laudato Si' Research Institute, 2021), 108.

- (5) Collective Learning and Action– Encourage hands-on ecological initiatives like eco-clubs, service projects, and advocacy for nature.
- (6) Sense of Self and Connection to others– Foster a deep spiritual and communal identity through prayer, reflection, and environmental leadership.

#### 5) Ecological spirituality towards “change in lifestyle”

In front of the collapse of our common home and the declining state of social relationships, “we are faced with an educational challenge” (LS 209) such as throw-away culture and excessive consumerist culture. Therefore, the way of education is the road that will lead everybody, especially young generation, to become responsible citizens of our earth. Education in general or educational activities are mainly aimed at raising awareness in students. Education not only brings knowledge to people about the living environment around them but above all, it also educates about environmental ethics, from awareness to creating a sense of responsibility in students.

Theoretical education needs to go hand in hand with vivid visual principles, especially for children and young people. Theoretical education is meaningless if it does not help children practice changing their lifestyle and holistic ecological thinking. As Pope Francis calls for a radical “change in lifestyle” which “could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. .... ‘The issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle’.” (LS 206) According to Pope Francis, “There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.” (LS 111)

### VII. Proposing a Model of Holistic Ecological Education

#### 1) Inspired by Pope Francis' proposal

Pope proposes a model of holistic ecological education, which is supposed to result in integral ecological. This approach, as he describes it, has the capacity to re-establish

harmony between man and nature, God and his fellow human beings: “It [holistic ecological education] seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God.” (LS 210) This educational model requires three elements: responsibility, synodality, and religious sensitivity.

**First**, holistic education towards a kind of curriculum that educates learners to become responsible members of society. Therefore, holistic ecological education as model or approach not neglect fundamental and realistic steps toward caring for the natural environment: “Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.” (LS 211)

**Second**, holistic ecological education lead to a greater sense of solidarity within human family: “It [holistic ecological education] needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.” (LS 210) holistic model help cultivate for the pupils the sense of solidarity not only among human fellows but also with all creatures.

**Third**, it is very important element that Education toward sustainability needs to be anchored in a profound **religious sense of God’s goodness** and his loving presence in evolutionary process of the natural world and in human history. Since the earthly Jesus, risen and glorious, is “present throughout creation by his universal Lordship.” (Col 1:19-20) Thus, students need to be educated in a balanced way in terms of social sciences and religious feelings. From there, learners will have a multidimensional and comprehensive view of the world and life.

## 2) Implementation for Holistic Ecological Education

In order to implement the settings for holistic ecological education, it is not lacking the role of family. Schools, media, catechism, and religious formation institutions can all serve as settings that strengthen or expand ecological knowledge and sensitivity because of the family’s essential role in education.

Highlighting the role of family in such ecological education, Pope Francis teaches: “in the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity.” (LS 213)

The context of ecological education, Pope Francis sets a goal for this: “It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment.” (LS 214) Implementation for holistic ecological education is not only aimed at the present stage but above all looks to the future, so this approach focuses on training groups of children and youth activists.

## 3) Create and Promote for Ecological Spaces of Encounters

Pope Francis propose a model of encounter that so-called the culture of encounter: “To speak of a “culture of encounter” means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 216)

External encounter at the level of encounter begins from the social and cultural aspect, gradually moving towards interculturality in post-modern context especially in context of cities. External encounter creates mutual trust that it will move towards internal encounter, together encountering the Creator, moving towards a reconciling encounter with God as Creator, of whom Christ is the mediator and reconciler. As **Amartya Sen** explains that, it



needs to form a culture of listening and of attentiveness to what happens to the lives of others and to the lives of ecosystems.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the ministry of the church is an instrument to create and promote for ecological spaces of encounter. The ecological space of encounter is not only for individuals, groups, and families, but also for individuals to immerse themselves in living nature, and to reconnect spiritually with the Creator. In the Asian context, especially the Church in Vietnam, the influence of the clergy and religious is respective in society. That is an advantage for them to influence the community for the younger generations. Furthermore, the clergies and religious people not only care about the Catholics but also create environmental programs that can collaborate with inter-religious friends, to build fraternity through working together to protect the environment and build a green community for everyone.

### **VIII. Apply a Model of Renewable Agricultural Farm**

This kind of model not only for parishes or religious orders in suburban or rural areas but for benefits of urban parishes and schools.

#### **1) Explaining on the model of Renewable agricultural farm**

Children and youth who are attracted by gadgets are less likely to play outside. This causes not just a loss of connection with nature, but also direct health problems.

Parishes and religious schools do not have available ecological land space but have a budget of resources (financial, and social relationship). Meanwhile, parishes in the rural areas have ecological land space to create but lack finance and the ability to consume vast agricultural products. Therefore, based on these two needs, this model can be a space and a bridge for parishes and schools to collaborate to solve the problems: (1) consumption sources for agricultural products, (2) providing educational space for children and young people, and (3)

spending the financial resources for investment in ecological technology and agriculture.

#### **2) Setting up goals for this model- Renewable Energy+ Biodiversity Energy+ Education (RBE)**

##### **First goal: Renewable Energy**

It comes from natural energy such as solar panel, wind energy, water (hydroelectric machine). The electricity is sold or using electricity for supplying farm itself.

##### **Second goal: Biodiversity Energy (decomposition from waste)**

Utilize organic waste from leaves, green waste, food, and organic fertilizer to produce bio-fertilizer. This is a reusable organic fertilizer source and does not waste bio-waste, saving costs for crops and farm animals.

##### **Third goal: Education for youth and children<sup>33</sup> through community Engagement**

RBE aims to use its unique offer to engage kids in a dynamic program of education (both formal and informal) and to demonstrate how a renewable agricultural farm contributes to their life. For example, how their smart phones are charged, how a power plant works, how solar, wind, or water energy is transformed into the grid, how photosynthesis captures sunlight, and how biodiversity energy is transformed through the food chain to the well-deserved lunch.

<sup>32</sup> See Amartya Sen, "Listening as Governance," *Indian Express*, 8 April 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/-opinion/columns/coronavirus-india-lockdown-amartya-sen-economy-migrants-6352132/> (accessed on March 22, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> Initiated by researchers David Gazdag and Guy Parker in program entitled *Wild Power, Biodiversity and Solar Farms: A Business Model to Encourage Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation at Scale*, See in 398-399.



### 3) Example for RBE community and training Programs

Activity		Description
Ecology Team Building		<p>Community participants such as local farmers and cooperated customers in business work with ecologists, chaplain to study and improve the RBE.</p> <p>Parish priests and pastoral council members work with farmers, schools, environmental experts and local businesses to specify suitable locations, models, scales, and fund-raising.</p>
Creative Programs		<p>Children or the youth in the school will participate in designing some recycled items, decorating, volunteering to promote the use of solar or wind powered devices as part of the RBE challenge event.</p>

Educational Visits		<p>School children or the youth will visit a clean power and learn how renewable energy is generated, supporting their science learning and encouraging them to be thoughtful consumers.</p> <p>They will study the biodiversity of the site and follow this up with workshops in class. They also have chances to engage experiences as farmers These activities are designed to fit into the Curriculum.</p>
Touring day		<p>Teachers, and student are invited to tour at farm, learn how energy is generated, return to a local school to share findings and explore ways to use the site in the classroom. Discount for groups of teachers, students, and families...etc</p>
Spiritual Need		<p>Supply the spaces for relax and spiritual reflections, towards to opening for small houses for individuals, groups, and families would to have retreats.</p>

**Fig. 1** RBE engaging with children

RBE has the potential to supply multiple benefits from the land, including the generation of renewable solar energy, improved biodiversity, and the supply of a range of ecosystem services including water/air/soil quality. These benefits not only contribute to climate change mitigation, they also support adaptation both of native biodiversity and agricultural production.

**IX. Conclusion and Applied Contributions**  
**Missionary Orientation for Holistic Ecological Education** as a response to the ecological conversion. Ecological education must be deeply rooted in a spirituality of accompaniment that fosters solidarity and interconnectedness among all living beings. This missionary orientation emphasizes not only knowledge but also an ecological conversion towards a transformative relationship with creation that inspired by the belief that all creatures share a common destiny in the cosmic Christ. Through spiritual accompaniment, educators and religious communities walk alongside learners, fostering trust, social dialogue, and a commitment to justice. By standing with marginalized communities and embracing ecological responsibility, this approach nurtures a sense of belonging within the web of life and empowers individuals to become agents of environmental and social transformation.

**The holistic model of ecological education** inspired by the ideas of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato SÍ*, the holistic educational model helps people have a multidimensional view of the environment, fostering the awareness that humans are part of a network of ecological diversity, Christians have the mission to awaken awareness of God's presence in creation.

**RBE** is the result of a combination of utilizing renewable energy sources, balancing ecological diversity and educating people. A renewable agricultural farm model provides hands-on ecological education while addressing sustainability challenges. This initiative integrates renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, and educational programs to teach children and communities about ecological responsibility. Through collaboration between urban and rural parishes, this model enhances environmental awareness and fosters sustainable living practices.

