

# Echoing an Eco-Catechesis

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**WE, THE 44 PARTICIPANTS**, including priests, religious, and lay faithful, convened for the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the **Indian Catechetical Association** at Don Bosco, Matunga, Provincial House, Mumbai, from 21 to 23 February 2024. During this gathering, we engaged in reflection on the theme Echoing and Eco-Catechesis, comprising seven paper deliberations and four practical sessions related to the theme.

## Our Reflections:

- 1. Our Common Home's Crisis:** Our shared home is currently confronting an existential crisis primarily attributed to humanity's irresponsible use and abuse of the resources endowed by God. The assumption that humans are the pinnacle of creation has led to a distorted view of stewardship, endorsing destructive dominance over the planet.
- 2. Social and Ecclesial Awakening:** International bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panels on Climate, the Conference of Parties of the United Nations (COP), and documents like the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* consistently warn people globally to take the escalating climate crisis and ecological disharmony seriously.
- 3. Pope Francis' Urgent Appeal:** Pope Francis, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* issues a wake-up call for immediate action at all levels to care for creation. He implores everyone to embark on this pilgrimage of reconciliation with our shared home, driven by faith. As he states, "Authentic faith not only fortifies the human heart but also transforms life, illuminates our goals, and sheds light on our relationships with others and the entire creation (LD 61)".

4. **Ecological Conversion to Eco-Catechesis:** Initiated by John Paul II, Ecological Conversion calls for a committed response grounded in Ecological Conviction. This commitment, in turn, demands effective ecological communication. Within the Church, various ministries are called upon to participate in this communication, with eco-catechesis emerging as a significant domain.
5. **The Essence of Eco-Catechesis:** Eco-Catechesis transcends the mere imparting of scientific knowledge about the environment. It facilitates a connection between oneself, God, and the environment, unveiling the purpose of their interconnectedness. It goes beyond education to create awareness, encouraging individuals to perceive themselves as a part of a larger family encompassing everyone and everything. Eco-Catechesis involves integrating ecological awareness into the teachings of faith, cultivating a sense of responsibility for the environment among believers and guiding them towards positive habits, transforming them into a spirituality, a way of life.
6. **Cry of the Poor and the Earth:** We firmly believe that the cries of the poor and the earth are inseparable. Well before *Laudato Si'*, Benedict XVI issued a caution in *Caritas in Veritate*, stating that "when human ecology is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits (CV 51)." Eco-Catechesis, in this context, equips the catechized with the principles of sustainable living through planetary stewardship, aligning with the collective moral obligation embedded in Catholic Social Teachings.
7. **Ecological Catechism:** We hold that the entirety of papal teachings, including *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, constitutes the Ecological Catechism of the Catholic Church. A central focus of Eco-Catechetical content is the Gospel of Creation, aiming to recover the Christian vision of creation, or what Pope Francis terms in *Laudato Si'* as the "Gospel of Creation".

This content instils awareness of the entire creation, prompting action and the development of ecological virtues. These virtues, crucial for caring for our common home, including praise, care, justice, sobriety, and humility (LS, 156-162, 222, 227).

8. **Rationale of Eco-Catechesis:** Francis reminds us in *Laudate Deum* of two convictions he repeats frequently: "Everything is connected" and "No one is saved alone." He says that the entire world is a Contact Zone (LD, 66). Calling planet earth common home, indicates we are a family. Catechesis implied in the kinship model is the crucial prerequisite for cultivating and caring for God's creation.
9. **Family as the Starting Locus:** The family stands as one of the most crucial loci for eco-catechesis. Unlike the parish, school, or public forums, the starting point for Eco-Catechesis is the family. It is within the family that fundamental aspects of life, including environmental care, are learned. As emphasized in *Laudato Si'*, "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)."
10. **Formation of Eco-Catechists:** The Eco-Catechist must undergo ecological formation within the skills of creativity, compassion and a sense of wonder. Serving as witnesses to the catechized, eco-catechists embody ecological virtues. Education for the care of our common home necessitates "educators capable of resetting the pedagogical paths of an ecological ethic so that they effectively help to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and care based on compassion (LS, 210)."

## In light of our reflections, we propose the following:

- 1. Training and Formation in Eco-Theology:** This initiative involves incorporating ecological theology into seminaries and formation houses, as well as providing ecological training for our catechists.
- 2. Towards a Total Catechesis:** Recognizing that a catechesis confined to intellectual and emotional aspects is inherently limited, we aim to foster a holistic approach that extends to pastoral and behavioral dimensions.
- 3. Digital and Analogue Resources:** Dioceses need to explore the creation of resource materials, utilizing both digital and analogue formats that promote eco-catechesis.
- 4. Eco-Catechisms:** We earnestly recommend a collaboration between the Commissions of Catechetics and Ecology in developing eco-catechesis, with a specific emphasis on updating existing Sunday Catechisms to include relevant ecological content.
- 5. Eco-Family Catechesis:** We propose the development of a family eco-catechism tailored for all Catholic families in India.

In conclusion, we reflect on the icon gracing the cover of the Catechism of the Catholic Church within the framework of Eco-Catechesis. This image beautifully symbolizes the shepherd who tends to and nurtures the flock, echoing the sentiments of Psalm 23. Furthermore, the prophetic words of Isaiah come to life through this icon: “Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat;... The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down (Is 11:6-7).” In this imagery, the Good News, portrayed as the melody of music and a manifestation of beauty, resonates from the pulpit under the shade of a tree laden with fruits. Within the context of his preaching and teaching, the Eco-Catechist emerges as a Good Shepherd. Like the Good Shepherd, our role is to foster a civilization of love and care, establishing connections and relationships within the context of our common home, our earthly paradise. This encapsulates our spirituality, our pedagogy, and our way of life – this is the essence of Eco-Catechesis.

### **Courtesy**

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