

Sacred Secularity as Spirituality

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Abstract

The title that we have chosen may look a little odd, but what we aim at is to look for new paradigms in the understanding of secularism and spirituality. There seems to be an urgent need to understand spirituality from different angles altogether. It is not a break with the past, but a development that is a must, for a history from which the need for new understanding and new expressions emerges. With regard to spirituality this applies as well, as there is nothing beyond the law of evolution and transcendence. Hence, nowadays the need to look at spirituality from various perspectives arises, and therein also comes the need for new paradigms, which may be able to give expressions to the aspirations of humankind with better relevance for the modern world. We need to realize that no absolute standard can be set for all times; and perhaps it is here that all religious institutions need to be humble enough to admit that they are always on search and it can never reach the final goal until the end of history, which is not in sight either. Thus, the Lord of history is challenging us to wake up and meet the world with its successes and failures and to build up a secularity that is sacred enough for the divine and the humans, and wherein all creatures can live in accommodation and caring for one-another in a spirit of solidarity and self-donation. This is the 'Sacred Secularity' to which we need to awaken ourselves, and may the challenge be addressed adequately by us.

Keywords: Sacred Secularity, spirituality, history, individual.

I. The Meaning of Secularity

The need to redefine the notion of 'Secularity,' as it has been understood differently in the past, especially in the West, arises, as a

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contemporary task. The sacred and secular have been looked at as opposed and irreconcilable categories; this approach is being questioned and now many have reconciled with the fact that we need to meet the sacred in the midst of the secular. The secular is the sacred and the sacred can be experienced in the secular. The 'Saeculum' is the locus where the divine is active and make its presence felt; hence God by His/Her presence sanctifies the Secular. Not only that secular is called to rise higher, but the very 'Sacred' immerses itself into the 'Secular'. For example, the Sacred becomes Secular in Jesus Christ, when God becomes human; the secular becomes sacred in the Eucharist, when bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Then God is encountered, not in some sacred ritual, but in the secular action of a common meal. It is unfortunate that we have sacralised it in a ritual with a special clerical priesthood, etc. The sacralisation of the secular becomes complete when the humans rise to a new life, full life with their bodies. Not only the human bodies are made sacred, but the whole Cosmos shares in this event-final freedom. The result is the communion with the whole of creation; a true unity is achieved (Amaladoss 2015, 241-42).

The term 'secularism' may be understood in two senses. In the 'West' it means 'non-religious' or at least separate from religion, while in the 'East', especially in India, secular and sacred are not opposed and separated. Hence, one can be religious and secular at the same time, if one is not exclusively religious, but open to the other, recognizing, respecting and accepting them. A particular religious system is one symbolic understanding of the secular, depending on one's historical and cultural context and also God's intervention. Perhaps, one of the reasons for the abandonment of religion is that they perceive it as alienating them from the secular, not as affirming it, by providing a transcendent dimension to it. Since the sacred has become the secular, it has a secular conscience; because it is in the needy other who makes me go out of myself that I discover the sacred. In this context it is good to remember that the traditional idea of the opposition of the Sacred and the Profane is to be seen in a different light. These are terminologies that came forth from an approach to spirituality, which was seen as something secluded and exclusive.

II. Spirituality as the Universal Prerogative

In the past spirituality was thought of as an exclusive prerogative of a select few called to be in a world totally alien to the ordinary mundane existence. It was considered as a special call granted only to a select few; thus a sort of exclusivism was developed. Spirituality was also thought to be unidimensional; however, today we understand spirituality has a multidimensional aspect, and there cannot be a single spirituality for the whole human race, or even for a particular society. Spirituality is highly personal, and it is characterized by the uniqueness of the personality. If in the past, spirituality was looked at as trying to cope with a special call, and be as committed to it in the best possible, when one is not even inclined to it, today we look at spirituality from the point of view available to God and one's fellow beings, which is considered as the bounden duty of every believer.

It is quite true that at times spirituality was used as an excuse to avoid one's social responsibility. Spirituality became a scapegoat and one could easily find alibis for avoiding the commitments one should fulfil as responsible citizens. Nation building and the integral growth of all is a must for spirituality. In India, for a better understanding of spirituality and commitment, they used the term *dharma*. Fulfilment of one's *dharma* in its various aspects is spirituality, and avoidance of one's *dharma* leads to chaos.

III. Spirituality as Search for Justice

Justice has to become a basic concern for any movement for authenticity. If spirituality is a search for authenticity, then, ipso facto, justice has to be a basis for spirituality. The basis is, for any sound society, justice, which involves a variety of factors. Quite often justice has been thought of as merely distributive justice, which means giving each one his/her due; but that becomes only a minimum of justice and it is not enough for a society's integral growth. It is here that the idea of

Paul Tillich's "Transformative Justice" comes into the fore.² Transformative justice is not being satisfied with the minimum, but offering each one what he or she requires to grow as an integral and mature human being. Tillich clearly shows the relation between Justice, Love and Freedom. True love and compassion are based on justice, and this brings about freedom. An authentic spirituality has to uphold these values; if not spirituality becomes fake. We need to acknowledge that global inequality is on the rise; and the market economy has ruined the life of many nations. The so-called advantages brought in by globalisation is only favouring the rich, the highly placed and the influential; the common man and the poor are left to their fate to eke out a livelihood for themselves in misery and desperation. Neo-colonialism is gnawing at the core of a just human existence; the sacrifice of humans at the altar of profit is being justified as the basis of the new economy, without which, it appears, it is impossible to move forward. In this only a few developed nations have a say, others are left in the lurch. Affirmation of justice alone is not enough; it has to be created and practised. Justice is a collaborative effort, and it is very much related to liberation. Salvation, liberation, bliss, realization, enlightenment, redemption – as well as justice, peace, human fulfilment – are not just individual problems. They call for collaboration, solidarity, a growing awareness of human and cosmic *interdependence* (Manimala 2009, 193). Hence, justice is not merely a human concern, but a cosmic issue that affects the religion as well.

Spirituality has to be understood as reconciliation, and any reconciliation can take place only on the basis of justice. Equality of the humans and also equality of creation becomes a basis for justice, and hence for spirituality as well. Unless injustice is denounced one cannot be spiritual. Consciously compromising with injustice is a betrayal of spirituality. Those who "rise up" to do battle for justice will rise up to new life as well. Spirituality is the urge to rise up to a new life. A true spirituality consists in denouncing the unjust social structures and

² Cf. Paul Tillich's book *Love, Freedom and Justice*.

announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of justice, peace and joy; and thus awaken people to the struggle for liberation (339-342).

IV. Cosmotheandric Spirituality

Cosmotheandric Experience is the 'trinitarian' dimension of one's existence; it has now to be applied to spirituality, as our main concern here is spirituality and its relevance in a secular world. As mentioned earlier, the term spirituality is not to be taken in the sense as if in opposition to the secular or as meant for some elite group of people, and as we know this is a spirituality which tries to integrate both the secular and the sacred. The whole cosmos is filled with life and is life-generating. From a true religious sense the Earth is seen as reverberating with life from two perspectives, first is the solidity and hence the centrality of the Earth; the second is her receptivity and, accordingly, her expansiveness. In order to indicate these two aspects, the Indian tradition uses two terms – *bhūmi* for the first aspect and *pṛthvi* for the second. The Earth supports everything and also is an ever expanding horizon. Almost all branches of philosophy have looked at the cosmos as the given, and accept also the phenomena constituting the world as the starting point for thought. For the Christian Scholastics World was the primary source of knowledge. The empiricist philosophy as we know very much depends on the given world, even for idealist philosophy in order to transcend the world, first it has to acknowledge the world. Revelation as a source of knowledge, which on the face of it might appear to bypass cosmological laws, most often involves the cosmic dimension as sacrament, symbol, and hierophany. The Earth is not only grounding reality, she also brings forth realities; she is the womb of beings. She receives the seed from the divine and transforms it into abundant life. The Earth is the locus where the divine manifests its bounty and power to the human. It is through change that we grow and live, and the Earth, as the source of change, becomes the domain of faith (e.g., the farmer's faith, miner's hope, etc.). We have to discover this double symbolism of the Earth. The Earth has a soul, and thus she is alive; but we should also overcome the duality of the body and soul. The

Earth is not a corpse enlivened by a soul. This indicates that it has spontaneity with its own pattern and freedom. What is called for is the greatest respect for Mother Earth (Panikkar 1993, 137-39).

Another important aspect of this spirituality is that the relationship is thoroughly transformed; even with the Earth Man enters into a personal relationship. We can have an I-It relationship with the Earth, but that will not reveal the meaning of Life to us. Our relation with the world of things is deeper and more humane than we may be able to rationalize. Things have a face for us, they have a special language of their own, they put us at ease or make us comfortable. Naming things represents, from this perspective, a particular task. The proper name touches the very soul of the thing named. A personal relationship is not one-sided. It elicits a response and registers a certain initiative from the other side as well. Things are not indifferent to us, although in general we cannot measure their "personal" reactions. Yet at times we feel certain things "speak" to us and others repel us, that there are things we like because we are convinced they like us. The environment belongs to me and not only influences me, but is part and parcel of myself, even if not exhaustively so. My house, the things I use for many years, these have a very personal relationship with me.

In addition to this we also enter into a personal relationship with all our fellow-brethren. Together with things they call for entering into an I-Thou relationship. The basic feature of any I-Thou relationship is that we cease to put ourselves in an exclusively active attitude, that we learn to be passive as well. This is not the place to go into a detailed analysis of interpersonal relationship. We must also stress on cross-cultural relationship. As we know today no culture or civilization can isolate itself; hence, eastern and western cultures enter into a deeper relationship. A true spirituality calls for furthering of such relationship and maintaining it. Therefore we need a new cosmology. The modern Western world has undertaken a thoroughgoing 'deanthropomorphization' of the meaning of the word *God*; it has also 'deontologized' God. In the same process Man has equally 'devitalized' the Earth. The Earth has been left for dead by the same token that Heaven has been deserted. Man has been converted into an isolated being without partners, superiors or inferiors. Heaven has become a human project, a more or

less heuristic ideal; and the cosmos, little more than a condition of human existence. But neither Heaven nor the cosmos have any reality of their own. This is the radical humanism of our times. Perhaps modern Man needed to enter deeply into this excruciating isolation and solitariness in order to rediscover with a higher degree of awareness, on a new curve of the spiral, that the three dimensions – the divine, cosmic, and the human – all belong to the real and interpenetrate one another, so that everything has anthropomorphic features, as well as divine and material dimensions. A totally deanthropomorphized God would not be real, just as there can be no totally dehumanized universe. Thus a total integration of all the three is the new cosmology that is called for (Panikkar 1993, 144 -50).

We can now sum up the basic features of the cosmotheandric spirituality. The basic attitude of spontaneity is needed in such a spirituality; cosmotheandric intuition should be something spontaneous and not something forced upon. It has to germinate freely in the very depths of our being, and for this the proper soil is the myth. Such spontaneity entails that this spirituality keep itself independent, as far as possible, from philosophical and scientific hypotheses, because the criterion for the authenticity of a myth is its meta-philosophical and meta-scientific character. For many people today, God and science are no longer myths, but ideologies.

Another important aspect of this spirituality is that the Earth is neither inferior to Man nor superior. Man is neither the boss of this World, nor just a creature, a product of a cosmic womb. The Earth is also not “equal” to Man; Man and the Cosmos are ultimate, and thus reducible neither one to the other nor to a higher entity. The relation is non-dualistic; both are distinct, but not separable. Perhaps, the similarity is with that of our relationship with our body. Further, our relationship with the Earth constitutes part of our self-understanding. To-be entails being *in* and *with* the world. Our relationship with the world is on a par with our relationship with the various parts of our body; whatever affects the parts of our body affects us personally. Old concern of ‘saving our own souls’ does not any longer hold validity because we have come to realize that there is no such salvation today. The cosmotheandric

spirituality makes us aware that we cannot save ourselves without *incorporating* the Earth in the same venture – and God as well.

In this kind of spirituality the pan-monetary ideology is overcome. The goal of life is not just to earn money or to acquire commodities, but because human activity is part of human and cosmic life and sustains the entire organism. Money gives power, but power above all opens an uncertain future. The cosmotheandric spirituality sees fulfilment not so much in some future as in a wider space that incorporates the “three times.”

Besides, this spirituality also overcomes the dichotomy between the so-called nature mysticism as a lower form of union with the World, and theistic mysticism as a supposedly superior form of union with God. God is here and now in the world as the creator and the “incarnation”. The entire reality is committed to the same unique adventure. When we proceed with this attitude, such a spirituality will help the modern man to overcome the chasm between the material and the spiritual and between the secular and the sacred, the inner and the outer, the temporal and the eternal. This does not mean that differences do not exist, but of realizing interrelations and becoming conscious of interdependencies and correlations. Man is not living on the basis of a double citizenship, one here below and another above, or for later on. He or she is here and now the inhabitant of an authentic reality that has many mansions and presents many dimensions, but which does not slice human life into various sections, either in time or in space, or for the individual or for society. Service to the Earth is divine service, just as the love of God is human love. What is called for is an ‘expatiating’ of this spirituality in our life (Panikkar 1993, 150-52). Perhaps, the call of great saints like St. Francis of Assisi was towards the imbibing of this spirituality in which one sees an integration of the whole of creation and the divine, and this integration has made him attractive both to the theists and the atheists alike.

IV. Love for Mother Earth – An Eco-Centred Ethics as Spirituality

The sad aspect of the human search for ethics and morality is very much anthropocentric, and even very much male dominated. We need

to extend the notion of ethics to include other species and work out an ecological evolution which bases its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of recognition and cooperation. This we call symbiosis – the complex cooperative mechanisms which evolve between organisms and their environments. We do not find any meaningful ethics developed with regard to human being's relation to land, and to the animals and plants which grow upon it, although governments have enacted some regulations with regard to the forests, which are also continuously being violated especially by multinational companies. The extension of ethics to this third dimension is an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. The land ethics simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals – the diversity of life in all its manifestations. Levinas' concept of 'interessence,' a being is linked to all entities whose interrelations are determined by each being's endeavour to maintain and expand its own existence, infers that if the nonviolent relation between humans is the trace of God, and that trace is 'proximity of God in the face of the other,' then the quality of that relation must inform all our interbeing. We know that the world-wide response to the loss of biodiversity has been extremely slow, even after the signing the agreement at the Convention on Biological Diversity. It calls for responsibility that goes beyond what I do to the attitudes which inform all relationships (Panikkar 1993, 54-5).

When a person is involved in environmental ethics his/her relationship to all aspects of life become transformed; many questions such as how I live, and what choices are being made with regard to life, consumerism, etc., arise. My choices involve overt and covert relationships, and a sincere and conscientious person will have to ask many questions to himself/herself as to how his/her actions affect others. My responsibility is universal and is not limited to those whose faces I can see. The complexity of our *interbeing* within an ecosystem is such that we cannot limit our responsibility to those who are nearest to us. World-wide webs of trade, pollution and resources connect us to others we never see or meet. In such a situation a particularly theological response would be that this issue which religions have neglected for long should be taken up as a priority especially in the field of

interreligious dialogue. The hostility between religions and consequent wars has been a contributory factor in the destruction of biodiversity. Religion is a major factor both in peace and war; and the challenge of religions is to make human beings more peaceful, and lead their followers to respect earth and the biodiversity. Here the Indian attitude of seeing as Mother Earth will be greatly beneficial (Panikkar 1993, 56)³.

Today it is commonly acknowledged that the creation account in the Bible has been wrongly interpreted. It was thought that just because human beings were created at the end, Man is the crown and superior to all creatures, and that he is called to master and manipulate nature which was seen as opposed to him. Man was projected as the controller and ruler of the world having the power to deal with nature as he wishes. Ever since Francis Bacon, the relationship between human beings and nature has been continually described as a relationship of master to a slave. Up to now the creations of human history have led only to nature's depletion. Today we are becoming conscientious of the peril we are in, unless there is a different attitude being shown to nature. If the common catastrophe of human beings and the earth is still avertable at all, then it is certainly only by synchronizing human history with the history of nature, and if the experiment of modern times is carried out 'in accordance with nature' and not in opposition to nature, or at nature's expense. For the survival of the human beings and the whole of creation there needs to be a reversal of attitude. In order to arrive at a viable symbiosis between human society and natural environments, it is essential to 'cool off' human history, and to slow down its one-sided varieties of progress. Our understanding of time must be brought into harmony with the laws of life and the rhythms of nature, in the environment and in the bodily nature of human beings themselves. This is urgent because among human beings the progress of one group is always achieved at the cost of other groups. If technological progress is achieved at the expense of nature or the coming generations, this progress is illusory and fictitious. We stand in need of more systems of equilibrium in order to keep the advancing processes of history

³ See also Varghese Manimala 2009, 551-54.

within bounds and to make them endurable. The relationship between progress and equilibrium in the human and natural systems must be brought into a coordinated, fluid equilibrium if the cost-utility accounts are to be set up realistically and honestly, and if the sum is to come out right.⁴

V. Ecology, Ecofilia, Ecosophy and Responsibility – Norms of Spirituality

We are using three important terms in our discussion – Ecology, Ecofilia and Ecosophy. All these are based on the Greek language: the first term coined from Eco + logos (έκο-λογός) = science of the earth, Eco + filia (έκο-ψιλία) = friendship with the earth, and Eco + Sophia (έκο-σοψία) = wisdom of the earth. In the first term there is a clear cut duality expressed namely the Earth is made an object of a subject's analysis; and hence there is a lot of imposition of the pre-suppositions of the subject on the object, and the analysis is done not with any prescribed ethics or norm but Earth as an object to be made use of. At present there may be some amount biological ethics being brought in because of the impending danger that may overtake us. In the second term, *Ecofilia* is a movement from reducing the Earth to an object reflecting our affinity towards it; the term *filia* means friendship. As we can guess, friendship is possible only between beings who can acknowledge one another as inter-subjective and inter-protective. A true friendship is not possible in a relationship of over-protection or domination. In friendship there is an assurance given: "I shall be there for you," and there is also a certain mutuality expressed in the notion of friendship; there cannot be a one-way friendship. Thus we find that in *ecofilia* there is a little more intimacy expressed. This leads us to the final term of our discourse – *Ecosophy*, the wisdom of the earth. Here it is not the subject who imposes a concept or a notion upon the object but the earth itself is inviting the human to learn from her, thus calling for an attitude of receptivity from the part of the human being. Wisdom is the result of enlightenment and

⁴ See Moltmann 1989, 323 ff. Also Manimala 2009, 554-55.

an attitude of humility, and it will call for commitment. Wisdom is not so much the result of analysis and research but is more of intuition, and it is more a gift rather than an attainment. Hence, one remains always grateful for this gift, and that attitude makes one more receptive. The attitude of Receptivity is very much at the core of wisdom (*Sophia*). Wisdom also indicates a willingness to share and be co-responsible.

VI. Navasūtrāṇi for a Meaningful Ecosophy

Thinkers of Deep Ecology and other great masters have suggested various principles for maintaining a good ecological system with a diversity which we are unable to fathom. Following Panikkar's way of putting principles in the form of *sūtras* here I am attempting at nine principles (*navasūtrāṇi*) which should guide all our efforts at the restoration of the ecological balance. Not that they are exhaustive but are some basic principles we should adhere to.

1. The whole ecosystem is a chain of beings with interrelationship and inner worth. They are of immense value and no one has the right to disrupt this relationship or destroy their worth.
2. All need to respect the rich biodiversity and there should not be any priority or exclusive greatness attributed to any being as every species is unique.
3. Human beings are called to shepherd Nature and not to exploit it. They can make use of Nature for the satisfaction of their basic needs.
4. In the name of development and growth there should not be denuding of Nature because she is our Mother, and depleting of resources should be avoided as this places the future of the World in jeopardy.
5. Since the species are disappearing at an alarming speed policies that are adopted and found to be harmful should urgently be changed.
6. The norm of 'higher standard of living' should be modified to "respect for all forms of life and Mother Earth," and thus bring about an ecological balance.

7. In the wake of Global Warming an all-out effort should be made by all nations to reduce gas emission. This should not be seen only as a problem of some nations and thus minimize the efforts.
8. There should be an immediate reduction and stoppage of production of nuclear weapons and their sale. All chemical weapons should be destroyed forthwith, and no nation should be excluded from this responsibility. Without total disarmament life in its various forms is at the risk of extinction; the after effects of the usage of nuclear weapons are unpredictable.
9. A peaceful living in an ecologically balanced Nature is possible only through the acceptance and practice of *Ahimsa*. The term does not restrict the imperative of not harming other beings to the humans only; it is a principle which supports and promotes all forms of life. *Ahimsa* should be exercised not only among human beings but should be applied to the whole of Nature.

Aware of the fact that the whole ecosystem is in peril, it needs to be a shift of emphasis to the ecosystem, accompanied by the acceptance that the individual or the species can survive only within a viable ecosystem; there comes the urgency for a new ethical system based on relationships. The key quality in ethical relationships is responsibility, responsibility as a particular kind of responding to biodiversity in my species and in my ecosystem. My response is, consciously or not, shaped by my belonging there in a state of '*inter-esse, interbeing*, in which my *inter-ests*, are contingent, on the reality of being sustained in an ecosystem I share not only with those of my own species but with myriads of others. How do I exercise my responsibility when I am part of so many different wholes? In what spirit do I respond? Perhaps, the short and veritable answer is non-violent response in the spirit of compassion. Response to the other in this way constitutes the ethical relationship required by biodiversity. Otherwise what will come about is destruction, and this destruction occurs at many levels: the personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and the communal, the individual and the systemic (Primavesi 1998, 52-3).

Emmanuel Levinas, one of the great contemporary philosophers of the West, gives a beautiful formulation regarding the responsibility for the quality of interactions. He holds that life's work consists in proclaiming the primacy of ethics. Taking for example the norm: "Thou

shall not kill," he shows that this norm implies "You shall do everything so that the other lives" (Levinas 1984, 53). As is well known, the image of 'the Face' has a predominant place in Levinas' philosophy. Face stands for what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose meaning consists in saying 'thou shall not kill.' If true murder takes place, prohibition against killing renders murder evil; one may kill, but it is universally acknowledged that it is better not to kill. The moral law still has relevance because the face of the sufferer remains calling us to responsibility. This resonates well with Gandhi's advice: "Whenever you are in doubt, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be any use to that person." The moral law stands because the evidence of its violation is still there within the face of the sufferer.

VII. Spirituality as Involvement – Social Responsibility

Today spirituality cannot be thought of without social involvement, especially involving in fighting for the basic necessities of life for the whole human race, in a special way for the underprivileged ones. Thus Human Rights form a basic content of contemporary spirituality. Promotion of Human Rights has to become a central theme of our mission. Our mission has to include advocacy of human rights, and taking up the cause of the oppressed and the deprived. Although some nations and governments speak vociferously about human rights, they themselves do not mind violating these when it comes to their own advantage. Human rights are rights of all, and not of a few privileged people. The rights of the deprived and downtrodden are the first to be protected. Does our spirituality and mission take up this as a challenging task?

Fight against nuclear arms race and sale of weapons has to become part of our mission and spirituality today. The production and sale of weapons have become part and parcel of international dealings. Every company and all so-called Christian nations are engaged in this murky deal. Churches and religions seem to maintain a 'dignified' silence. Our conscience seems to have been blunted. It appears that organized terrorism of nations is approved. There has been an urgent appeal by

some leaders with a sense of mission and burning with a holy urgency. Pope Francis seems to be a unique voice, even though it may appear to be a voice in the wilderness, yet like that of St. John the Baptist it will be heeded to by conscientious people. For the World Day of Peace he was urgently appealing to people especially the youth to protest against nuclear arms race, and the wars that are going on. Peace cannot be brought about by war or arms race. There should be a humble submission before the all compassionate God that all of us especially the developed nations have erred and run away from their responsibility.

VIII. Fight for Gender Justice as Spirituality

Today we need to acknowledge with a great sense of guilt that 50% of humanity, namely women of all cues have been under oppression of various sorts, and their struggle for liberation has been met with obdurate resistance. A true spirituality can only be based on an equality of all persons without any trace of gender discrimination. Promotion of gender justice should become a part of our Mission today. All religions including Christianity oppress women and deny them their basic rights. Hence, the promotion of gender justice has to become part of our spiritual formation today. There is too much of male supremacy in all fields of life; women have to be offered their rightful position to fulfil themselves. Therefore our mission and spirituality has to be an all-inclusive one.

IX. Conclusions. Promotion of *Ahimsa* and a New Spirituality for a Sustainable Ecosystem

As a conclusion to this paper I would suggest the great Indian virtue of *Ahimsa* be promoted, and that we arrive at a new spirituality which will promote and make life flourish in its various forms. Very often *Ahimsa* has been interpreted in a negative meaning 'not to do any harm to humans,' but an integral meaning of the term is something different. It means not only the absence of doing harm especially to human beings but it means promotion of life. We can say it is justice in

praxis; justice is not giving what is his/her due but doing all that is required to give fullness of life. *Ahimsa* calls for wishing the good of the other in thought, word and deed, and doing everything one can to promote life. This is the meaning of *Ahimsa* especially in the Jaina understanding. Life is sacred and doing harm to life is a desecration.

The cosmotheandric spirituality tries to integrate both the secular and the sacred. The whole cosmos is filled with life and is life-generating. Man as the microcosm is a model but is not in a privileged position to dominate the Earth. The three worlds – Heaven, Earth and Man – share in the same adventure of life (Manimala 2009, 63). The Earth supports everything and also is an ever expanding horizon. The cosmos is a ‘hierophany,’ a sacred manifestation. The Earth is not only the grounding reality, but also brings forth realities; she is the womb of beings. The Earth is the *locus* where the great manifestation of life takes place, and it is the domain of our hope (e.g. the hope of the farmer, miner, etc.). After having discovered the double symbolism of the Earth we need to realize that she has a soul and is alive; but we should overcome the duality of the body and soul. The Earth is not a corpse enlivened by a soul; it has a spontaneity with its own pattern and freedom. What is called for is the greatest respect for Mother Earth (Panikkar 1993, 137-39).

Panikkar also shows the need to move from cosmology to ‘*kosmology*’ although the distinction is not very clear to an ordinary reader. He says by *kosmology* is meant the science (in the classical meaning of the term) about the holistic sense of the *kosmos*. *Kosmology* (*kosmos legein, κοσμος λεγείν*) is a “reading” of the *kosmos*, the disclosure of the world to our human consciousness by means of all forms of knowledge we may possess. Humans should try to hear and understand by attuning themselves to the music of the world, to the mysteries of the *kosmos*. On the other hand *Cosmology*, as Panikkar understands, is the result of the scientific *ratio* applied to the cosmos, which is open to the rational *logos*. *Kosmology* deals with how Man envisions the universe, how the *kosmos* displays itself to Man, and with the experience of the universe of which Man is a part helps to discover the real universe in which he lives. *Kosmological* is paramount, and also there will be conflicting cosmologies. In order to overcome this conflict what we stand in need of is an Emerging Mythos, and it will call for

‘demythification’ and a new ‘remythification.’ A mere scientific concept will not do, one should become capable of feeling and hearing the music of the universe. Panikkar’s proposal is the cosmotheandric mythos.⁵

Another important character to be noted is temporality. The world is in movement and is not a dead reality. Being and Time are intimately connected; time is not an accident to Being; Being itself is temporal. Time is the peculiar way each being exists and lasts. Gradually Time became identified with its quantitative parameter under the assumption that there was a univocal correspondence of “measured time” to the richer reality of time. Temporality is a peculiar form of human existence and, as such, not just a freeway along which Man drives, but part and parcel of his/her own constitution. The past is not left behind, but accumulated in the present, the future is not just to come, but to some extent also effective (as hope) in the present. Time is the “Lord who works change in beings.” Time created the Earth, in time is consciousness; and in time is life (*prāṇa*). Indian tradition expresses various aspects of Time by using words like *prāṇ*, *jīva-*, *jīvanam*, *āyus*, etc. (Panikkar 1993, 140-42). In time Man enters into a relationship with the Earth, which is thoroughly transformed, and it becomes a ‘personal’ relationship. We can have an I-It relationship with the Earth, but that will not reveal meaning of Life to us. Things have a face for us, they have a special language of their own; they put us at ease or make us uncomfortable. Martin Buber, the famous philosopher of inter-personal relationship, used to say that even a tree can have an I-Thou (personal) relationship with us. As it is clear that a personal relationship is not one-sided; it elicits a response and registers a certain initiative from the other side as well. Things are not indifferent to us, although in general we cannot measure their “personal” reactions. Still, at times we feel certain things “speak” to us and others repel us; there are things we like because we are convinced they like us. The environment belongs to me and not only influences me, but is part and parcel of myself (Manimala 2009, 64-5).

⁵ Panikkar proposes this in his famous book *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* to which we have referred earlier. He is very much aware of the meaning of the words he chooses and at times gives a new meaning and interpretation and also coins new words, not for the sake of neologism, to express his ideas better.

Our effort was to show how the whole cosmos is in a network of relationships, and these relationships sustain all. Friction or breakage of this relationship brings about unpredictable harm, and it calls for a tremendous effort to restore such a relationship. Harmony of all beings is something that has to be highlighted and human beings with all the great advancements bring disharmony into creation. Let us make a concerted effort for the reinstatement of eco-balance and arrive at a cosmological harmony. There are simple ways to contribute to this ecological equilibrium as Dr. Mathaai, the Nobel Laureate did, planting millions of trees to save the people and nature. She took it up as a life mission, and today we need such committed people imbued with a deep sense of all-embracing spirituality for saving our planet earth.⁶ This calls for a counter-culture that will challenge the principle of maximum profit through exploitation and cut-throat competition, and unbridled development and progress. We need to overcome the 'globalization of indifference' and be aware that 'injustice is not invincible,' and that peace, justice and preservation of creation are interconnected; and this is the true spirituality to which we are challenged. We need to accept the past with gratitude and live passionately in the present and look to the future with hope, as Pope Francis challenges us.⁷

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- ⁶ The contribution each one can make is very valuable howsoever small or insignificant it may appear to be in the sight of modern scientific minded person. Here I would like to refer to a small booklet in Malayalam: *Nohayude Kathayum Kathayile Rehasyangalum* by Prof. S. Sivadas (Ernakulam: Varna Press, 2012). It is a book meant for children, and the book beautifully illustrates through the story of Noah in the Bible how the whole ecosystem consists of millions of species with inter-relationship and inter-dependence.
- ⁷ Pope Francis' new encyclical *Laudato Si (Praise be to You)* is, perhaps, enshrining this new Spirituality of Sacred Secularity.

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