

## **Jesus as The Cosmic Christ and The Ecology of The Human Person**

**Michael Gakbe Gokat**

Postgraduate Student

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos, Nigeria

E-mail: micgokat@yahoo.com

&

**Gideon Y. Tambiyi, PhD**

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos, Nigeria

E-mail: tambiyig@unijos.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

Jesus is referred to as the Cosmic Christ because he is the centre of all created realities. As the Cosmic Christ, he had a pre-existence before the world was created. And in human history, he existed and identified himself with this physical world of human existence. As a person with a human nature, Jesus the Cosmic Christ also had a divine nature. After his death he promised to be with his disciples till the end of time. Jesus the Cosmic Christ has an eternal existence. All things were also created through him and all human beings were created in his image. Jesus the Cosmic Christ lives in every human being. The ecology of the human person therefore reveals that all human beings are created by God in this world of human existence with the spiritual and physical dignity of the children of God. The Theology of Jesus the Cosmic Christ was systematically developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by notable theologians like Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner. The Johannine prologue (John 1:1-18) and the Pauline Christological hymns of Ephesians 1:3-10, Philippians 2:5-12 and Colossians 1:15-20 are the basic foundations that provide the scriptural bases for this theology. Thus, using the thematic method of biblical theology, this paper examines the theology of Jesus the Cosmic Christ and how he can restore the ecology of the human person. There is need, therefore, for every human being created in the image of God to accept Jesus and then permit him to work in his or her life for the restoration of the ecology of the human person.

**Key words:** Cosmic Christ, Jesus, Restoration, Ecology, Human Person

### **Introduction**

Jesus of Nazareth is among many other titles designated as the "Cosmic Christ". He is referred to as such because of the intimate relationship that exist between him and the world. He existed before the creation of the world; the world was created through him and when corruption and death entered into the world, he returned into the world as a human being in order to redeem the world. Jesus the Cosmic Christ is God but "he did not think of equality with God as something to cling on," instead he humbled himself and took the nature of a slave, to be in human form (Phil. 2:5-8). As the pre-existent Son of God with full human and spiritual dignity, Jesus the Cosmic Christ also identified himself with human beings in this physical world of human existence so that he may inform, form and transform human beings into the image of God his heavenly Father.

Jesus the Cosmic Christ was a historical figure with a genealogy and a human family. He was of the Jewish stock, and as such, he had a unique spirituality and a real identity as a human and a divine person. In identifying with the world, he had a body (Luke 2:52) and a soul (Matt. 26:38; Luke 23:46). He also had human qualities and exhibited

some human emotions. He also engaged himself in different forms of human activities like walking, talking, working, teaching, preaching and healing when he was on earth.

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the theological views of de Chardin and Karl Rahner have greatly influenced the theology of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ. The Johannine prologue (John 1:1-18) and the Pauline Christological hymns of Ephesians 1:3-10, Philippians 2:5-12 and Colossians 1:15-20 serve as the bedrocks that provide significant insights into understanding the identity of Jesus, as the Cosmic Christ. It is in this light, therefore, that this work seeks to examine the role of Jesus the Cosmic Christ in restoring the ecology of the human person.

### **The Concept of the Cosmic Christ**

The concept of the Cosmic Christ is rooted in the teachings of the New Testament. This has a specific reference to the Pauline captivity epistles, namely; Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians. The Patristic writers, the medieval scholars and the theologians of the Enlightenment period follow this thought, pattern and define the relation between Christ and the cosmos as the Cosmic Christ (Boros 81).

Abraham Bit-Shing upholds that the notion of the Cosmic Christ developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The description “cosmic” is synonymous with the Greek word “*Kosmos*” which denotes the world or the entire material universe. The adjective “cosmic” is used for Christ; the Son of God, who is described in biblical parlance as the instrument in God's creative activity. The term “cosmic” also points to the involvement of Christ in the universe. In other words, the term “cosmic” denotes the “economic” self-communication of the Trinity (4).

Lately, in a renewed quest for the Cosmic Christ from the historical Christ, there are other additional meanings to the adjective “cosmic.” These designate “universal,” “infinite,” and “immense.” The modern “Cosmic Christ” terminology relates to the immensity of the universe as disclosed by the natural sciences. This convention also relates Christ to the sum totality of the created order and concludes that the relationship between Christ and the cosmos extends beyond the compass of earthly affairs. The Cosmic Christ terminology, therefore, sheds light beyond the confines of human history. The contemporary belief in the Cosmic Christ opens up a window of hope for all of creation and invites human beings to put their trust in a future of promise when all things will be redirected to Christ (Bit-Shing 6).

### **The Theology of Jesus the Cosmic Christ**

The theology of the Cosmic Christ is defined as, “Jesus' liberating, healing, redemptive and all-inclusive love.” The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the main issue in discussing this theology because Jesus, according to Mcfague Sallie, became incarnate in the cosmos as a human person (160). This theology also expounds the dignity of each human person and all creatures of God that exist in the universe, since God, the Father, has set forth his purpose in Christ, “as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). All creatures on the surface of the world are intimately linked and cosmically connected. Margaret Pirkl, citing Thomas Berry, re-echoes this assertion by affirming; “Nothing can be itself without everything else” (1). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, therefore, is the centre of all created realities that exist in the world since “without him, nothing that was made was made” (John 1:3).

The Johannine theology of the Cosmic Christ is contained in prologue of John's

gospel (1:1-18), where Jesus is defined as the divine Word of God. Jesus is the word that was in the beginning with God, who himself is God (John 1:1-2) and through him all things were made (v. 3). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, is the life and the light of all people (v. 4). As the light, he shines in the darkness (v.5). He is the true light that gives light to every human being that comes into the world (v. 9). He was full of grace and truth (v. 14). Blessings were received from the fullness of his grace (v. 16): Thus grace and truth came through him (v. 17). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, is the one and only who has seen God and who is at the Father's side. The same Jesus has made the Father known (v. 18).

The Pauline theology of the Cosmic Christ is expressed in the Pauline Christological hymns of Ephesians 1:3-10, Philippians 2:5-12 and Colossians 1:15-20. The Christological hymn of Ephesians 1:3-10 presents the plan of God in restoring and transforming everything in Christ. The hymn of Philippians 2:5-12 presents the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of the Cosmic Christ who emptied himself and became obedient to God the Father. In obedience to God's will, the Cosmic Christ accepted death on the cross, while in Colossians 1:15-20, Paul teaches of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, who is also the firstborn over all creation (v.15) and the firstborn from among the dead (vs 18).

Hildegard of Bingen, the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Christian mystic, opines that the Cosmic Christ archetype (model) is a universal way of seeing the world with its splendor and divine grace in all things. Hildegard further states that: "Every creature is a glittering mirror of divinity". In line with Hildegard's position, Bonaventure, the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Scholastic theologian and philosopher teaches that; every leaf, cloud, fruit, animal, and person is to be seen as an outward expression of the Word of God in Love. Thus each creature has its own identity, integrity and dignity. Each creature is sacred because it holds something of the Word of God, which is Christ, in a unique way. According to Hayes, "each creature is a Word of God, spoken in love, by Love itself! Therefore, the Cosmic Christ is the divine radiance that is present in every galaxy, in every star, every plant, every animal, every insect and every human being" (3).

Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, lives in every human being. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus is at the center of his experience of Christ, who appeared to him at that time as a blinding light. The words of Christ to Paul were very mysterious: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Saul, the future apostle who became known as Paul, had not persecuted Christ, but Christians. What must therefore have become quite clear to him when he heard these words was that there is no difference between Christ and those who believe in him: A Christian can become Christ; he can become one in his being with him (Boros 81).

The Franciscan Eco-Spirituality of the Cosmic Christ is firmly rooted in the theology of Bonaventure and Don Scotus that flows from the spirituality of Francis and Clare of Assisi and their early followers. The Franciscan theologian, Zachary Hayes, states that revelation really began with creation and not with the Bible. If the universe is the external embodiment of the inner Word of God, says Hayes; "There is something incarnational throughout the whole of creation" (64). Don Scotus asserts that Jesus Christ was God's perfect creation, who, in turn, would love God perfectly. This perfect creation existed in God's intention before the world was created that this Word was "the first-born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15); that "all things came to be through this Word" (John 1:3); that the Word became human out of love (Fox 109-110).

The heart of the theology of the Cosmic Christ is inextricably bound to the Franciscan cosmological tradition which posits that, "every being in the world of nature and the human society somehow carries the divine." As a result of this, "every being is basically sacred." Pirkl is of the view that "If we truly believe," that every being is sacred carrying the divine, "we would change our ways and be more thought-full, and show our love, gratitude and concern for brother sun, sister moon, brother cloud, sister water, sister star, and the rest of the human family" (1).

The Pauline Christology of the Cosmic Christ as expressed in the Christological hymns of Ephesians 1: 3-10, Philippians 2:6-11 and Colossians 1:15-20, have greatly influenced de Chardin's development of the theology of the Cosmic Christ. The letter to the Colossians, for instance, begins with an early Christian hymn presenting Christ as the head of all creation, the "*πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*," the first born of all creation (Col. 1:15). The Cosmic hymn reveals that what was manifested in the resurrected Christ was to be the destiny of all creation (Bit-Shing 5).

By the time of Paul's captivity, it became evidently clear that Jesus Christ does not only dwell in an individual but he dwells collectively in believers who constitute his body (1 Cor. 12:27) since he is the head of the body which is the Church (Col. 1:18a). The development of Paul's understanding of equal treatment due the individual and the communities as the body of Christ can be examined in setting the ecclesiology of *Ephesians* against the background of the Christology of *Colossians*. To highlight the supremacy of the risen Lord as Head, not only of the whole human race, but also of the entire created universe, Paul composed the magnificent Christological hymn of Col. 1:15-20 (Fox 90).

Fox opines that the features of the invisible God are visible in Christ, who, in imaging God, renews the splendour of creation and the miracle of the incarnation. Paul, according to Fox, was not explaining to the Colossians that everything simply exists in Christ; he was also declaring that everything was created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by God through Christ, thus distinguishing between the Creator and what he creates. Paul's vision in *Ephesians*, according to Fox, is focused on the Church as the intimate and vital bond between Christ and the individual Christian, as the collective unity between the head and the members (90).

Many evolutionary theologians acknowledge that, just as Paul had to Christianize certain stoic views of the Greek world in order to create great impact upon his hearers, so too, today's appeal must include the new dynamics of scientific representation of the cosmos. The challenge for contemporary theologians today is to reinterpret Jesus Christ in terms of an emergent universe. Paul insists that the presence and power of Christ reverberates throughout the universe (Fox 90).

de Chardin influenced by Cosmic thinking of St. Paul understood the spirit of Christ as present throughout the entire cosmos (universe). de Chardin believes that the cosmic spirit of Christ exerts an energy drawing all things toward a more complex and converging unity (King 102). According to de Chardin, the spirit of Christ is the great source of power and energy which is drawing all things towards itself. de Chardin tried to capture his thesis by using terms such as "universal Christ," "Christ the Evolver," or "the Christic." His interpretation of the role of Christ in the universe appears to be at one with the Greek Fathers' tradition, and in Byzantine art was expressed as Christ *Pantokrator* (Griffin 2).

### The Theology of the Cosmic Christ in Contemporary Studies

de Chardin has been very instrumental in bringing to the forefront of Christian theological reflection the importance of developing a cosmic understanding of Jesus, the resurrected Christ. de Chardin accepted the findings of modern science, and was deeply conscious of the theological tension between the literal interpretations of Genesis and the biological revelations that were undermining this theological perspective. As a Roman Catholic priest, de Chardin's essay on the need to reconsider the doctrine of original sin, brought him into conflict with his own religious authorities and with the Vatican in the 1920s. The conflict with the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy resulted to his banishment to China for over twenty years, and the imposition of a total embargo on the publication of any of his theological or spiritual writings (Edwards 83).

After some years, prominent theologians within the Catholic clerics began a strong theological defence of de Chardin's works as well as their rehabilitation and incorporation into Catholic Theology. Henri de Lubac wrote three comprehensive books on the theology of de Chardin in the 1960s. De Lubac is of the view that de Chardin was less than precise in some of his concepts. He nevertheless affirmed the orthodoxy of de Chardin's works with a stinging rebuke to his critics. Over the next several decades, prominent theologians and Church leaders, including leading Cardinals, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. all wrote approvingly of Teilhard's ideas (Edwards 83).

Joseph Ratzinger spoke glowingly of de Chardin's Christology in his book *Introduction to Christianity*. In his book, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, he asserts that, de Chardin depicted the cosmos as a process of ascent, a series of unions. From very simple beginnings, the path leads to ever greater and more complex unities, in which multiplicity is not abolished but merged into a growing synthesis. Invoking the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, de Chardin looks on Christ as the energy that strives toward the *Noosphere* and finally incorporates everything in its "fullness" (Ratzinger 29).

For de Chardin, the concept of the Cosmic Christ embraces not only the destiny of the human family but the destiny of all of creation. In Christ, all of creation is on an evolutionary journey back to its source, the reservoir of divine creativity. de Chardin saw this evolutionary journey as a manifestation of "Divine Mystery" drawing all things back to the source. He named the goal of this evolutionary journey, the Omega Point, the point where creation and the Creator meet in a cosmic embrace (Haught 62).

### The Ecology of the Human Person

The term "ecology" was coined by the German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel c. 1870. Haeckel applied the term "oekologie" (*oekologie*) to the "relation of the animal to its organic as well as its inorganic environment." The word comes from the Greek, "oikos", meaning "household," "home," or "place to live." Thus, ecology deals with the organism and its environment. The concept "ecology" involves relationships between individuals within a population and between individuals of different populations. These interactions between individuals, between populations, and between organisms and their environment form the ecological systems or the ecosystems (Smith 45).

Ecology has been defined variously as "the study of the inter-relationships of organisms with their environment and each other," as "the economy of nature," and as "the biology of ecosystems." Ecology evolved from the natural history of the ancient Greeks. The historical evolution is traced to Theophrastus (c. 372- 287 BCE), a friend

and associate of Aristotle, who described ecology as “the inter-relationships between organisms and their non-living environment.” Later foundations for modern ecology were laid in the early work of plant and animal physiologists. Plant, animal and human ecology developed separately until American biologists emphasized the interrelation of three communities as a biotic whole. Conservation biology seeks to understand what factors predispose species to extinction and what humans can do about preventing extinction. Human activity has tailored global ecosystems in ways that are increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide, a carbon source but also a greenhouse gas (greenhouse effect), and causing excessive runoff of fertilizers into rivers and then into the ocean, where it kills the species that live there (Smith 47).

God created everything in the entire cosmos for human beings, human beings in turn were created to love God and offer all creation back to him. The human person, created in the image and likeness of God is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen. 2:7). Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God. In the Sacred Scripture the term soul often refers to human life or to the entire human person. The soul also refers to the innermost aspect of the human person. It is of greatest value to human existence (Matt. 10:28, 26:28). The soul is that by which human beings, most especially, are in God’s image: soul signifies the spiritual principle in every human being (CCC 363).

The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: It is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 15:44-45). In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the image or, in the original Greek, as the *icon* of God. Paul speaks of Christ as “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4) and sees others as conformed to this image by grace (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18). The Christological hymn of Pauline Christology written in honor of the Cosmic Christ in the letter to the Colossians sings of Christ as the “image of the invisible God” (1:15). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, is the true image and icon of God and he is the one in whom all things are created and in whom all are reconciled (Eph. 1:10). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, according to de Chardin, is the risen Christ. Jesus risen from the death is the true image of God, is the first born of all things in creation (Edwards 15).

The Latin concept *imago Dei* (the image of God) transcends the human person. It is applied to the risen Christ, as the true image in whom all creatures find salvation and new life. It has a universal meaning. Christ Jesus is the image of God not just for human beings but for all creatures. For in him the reconciliation of all things is bound to take place. While recognizing this universal role of Christ as the true image of God, the Christian community has usually used the concept “image” for human beings to bring out the uniqueness of each human person before God. Patristic writers of the early Church, like Irenaeus (c. 120-200 CE), distinguish between “image” and “likeness”. They used “image” to refer to humanity created by God and “likeness” for what occurs when human beings are conformed to Christ through grace. Athanasius (293-373 CE) spoke of Jesus as the true “image” and others as, by grace, “according to the image” that is Christ. The human person created in the image and the likeness of God bears the divine image of God. Over the ages there have tendencies to locate the image of God in one aspect of the human person, such as the human soul, the capacity to reason, or freewill. Some recent thinkers

have located what is unique to human beings in their self-consciousness. Karl Rahner views the human being as “creation coming to self-consciousness, able to respond to the creator in freedom and love” (189).

Denis Edwards maintains that what makes the human person unique is not any capacity that the human person possesses or any partial aspect of the human person. It is the whole human being understood as personal and interpersonal. The creation of human beings in the “image of God” means that God created human beings as persons in order to embrace them in interpersonal love. Klaus Westermann interprets the phrase “image of God” in Genesis as indicating that humans are creatures with whom God is able to engage personally (Gen. 1:28, 29-30). The theologian, Karl Barth, describes the “image of God” as involving the “confrontation and reciprocity” of an “I” and “Thou” (184-185).

God gave the earth to human beings. He expects every human being to use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given. Human beings are gifts of God. The Second Vatican Council document on the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World* asserts that; “the human person has a unique value because he is the only creature on earth which God willed for himself”. God has imprinted his own image and likeness on human beings (cf. Gen. 1:26), conferring upon them an incomparable dignity (*Gaudium et Spes* 24).

The place of the human person in creation is built along two axes. Firstly, the human person is part of the whole of creation and, secondly, is clearly distinguished from all the rest of creation. It is precisely this distinction that defines the relationship between the human person and the world. Such also is the distinction that exists between the ecology of the human person and the ecology of the environment. Each of the two accounts of creation in Genesis describes the radical, fundamental difference between the human person and the rest of creation. In the first account of creation, the human person was created on the same day as all the cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth (Gen. 1:24). The human person however is not of the same nature as they are. God said; “Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness...” (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, “God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The second account uses other words to express this same reality. God formed man from the dust of the earth and he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). The human person is therefore in personal relationship with a personal God. All human beings from the very first moment of their existence are also in relationship with other persons as well as the entirety of the creation of God (Marjorie 2).

There is another fundamental distinction between human persons and the rest of creation. At the very moment of creation, God entrusted the entirety of creation to Adam and Eve, our first parents. He gave them a special mission. They are to “have dominion over (Gen. 1:26) all other living beings, to “subdue” the earth (Gen. 1:28), or according to the second account of creation, “to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). They are to also rule over the animals by giving them names (Gen. 2:19-20). The human person, as the image of God, ought to act as God would in his or her relationship with the rest of creation (Marjorie 4).

The ecology of the human person stems from the dignity of the human person created in the image of God and the unique place of the human person in the creation of God. Commenting on the ecology of the human person, John Paul II in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* opines that: “The human person receives from God its essential dignity

and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness". Therefore, the fundamental structure for "the ecology of the human person", John Paul II maintains, is the family, in which a person receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here, we mean the family founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny. But it often happens that people are discouraged from creating the proper conditions for human reproduction and are led to consider themselves and their lives as a series of sensations to be experienced rather than as a work to be accomplished (No. 38).

The result of the foregoing is a lack of freedom, which causes a man to reject a commitment to enter into a stable relationship with a woman so as to bring children into the world, or which leads people to consider children as one of the many "things" in life which an individual can have or not have, according to taste, and which compete with other possibilities (Jackson 75). In *Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)*, John Paul II states: "Today's family in the Western World is in Crisis. The widespread practice of unnatural conception, a decreasing birth rate, a rising divorce rate, a greater tolerance of pre-marital sex and adultery, sterilization and abortion, a confusion of sex roles in combination with a decline in parental authority comprise a list of contributing factors resulting in deterioration of family life."

John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus*, further asserts that "It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life - the gift of God - can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life" (No. 39).

Human ingenuity seems to be directed more towards limiting, suppressing and destroying the sources of life by having recourse to abortion, which, unfortunately, is so widespread in the world. The encyclical "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*". John Paul II also denounced systematic anti-childbearing campaigns which, on the basis of a distorted view of the demographic problem and in a climate of "absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved," often subject them "to intolerable pressures in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression". These policies are extending their field of action by the use of new techniques, to the point of poisoning the lives of millions of defenseless human beings, as if in a form of "chemical warfare" (No. 25).

Benedict XVI speaks of "human ecology" alongside the ecology of nature in his 2007 message for the World Day of Peace. He states that there exists what can be called a "human" ecology, which in turn demands a "social" ecology. All this means that humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature and human ecology (No. 8).

*Benedict XVI, in Caritas in Veritate, further upholds that the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only the earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone; she must, above all, protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology.... The deterioration of nature is,*



in fact, closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence. The Holy Father asserts that *when "human ecology" is respected within the society, environmental ecology also benefits*. Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature. Furthermore, Benedict asserts:

If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person (No. 51).

The goal of the church's entire educational commitment, according to the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome with the theme: *The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, is to construct what Pope Benedict XVI calls "ecology of the human person". The Synod Fathers maintain that "there is need for what might be called a human ecology" (No. 21).

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, the Synod Fathers, states that the Church is perennially concerned with the integral development of "every man and the whole man". The Synod Fathers took pains to emphasize the questionable elements found in certain international documents, especially those concerned with women's reproductive health. In promoting the ecology of the human person, the synod Fathers maintain that the position of the Church on abortion is unambiguous. The child in his or her mother's womb is a human life which must be protected. Abortion, which is the destruction of an innocent unborn child, is contrary to the will of God, for the value and the dignity of the human person must be protected from conception to natural death. The ecology of the human person has to be promoted, thus the Church in Africa must be committed to offering help and support to women and couples tempted to seek abortion, while remaining close to those who have had this tragic experience by helping them to grow in respect for life (No. 70).

The Synod Fathers acknowledge the courage of governments that have legislated against the culture of death in favor of the culture of life. Serious threats loom over human life in Africa. Here, as elsewhere, one can only deplore the ravages of drug and alcohol abuse which destroys the continent's potential and afflicts young people in particular. Malaria, as well as tuberculosis, hepatitis, typhoid and HIV-AIDS, gravely destroy the African people and their socio-economic life.

This is not enough, however, the problem goes deeper. Above all, it is an ethical problem. The change of behavior that requires – for example, sexual abstinence, rejection of sexual promiscuity, fidelity within marriage – ultimately involves the question of integral development, which demands a global response from the Church (No. 71). The prevention of AIDS, teenage pregnancies leading to abortion, the use of contraceptive pills and devices, according to the Synod Fathers, must be based on a sex education that is grounded in an anthropology anchored on the natural law and enlightened by the word of God and the Church's teaching (No. 72).

The choice of name Francis by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio upon his election as Pope was to honour the Catholic Church's patron saint of animals and the environment. In 1979, John

Paul II proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi (1181(2)-1226), the patron saint of ecologists. In his first mass as Pope, the Holy Father Pope Francis on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2013, said: "Let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment." In his homily, he further upholds that we should be protectors of God's gifts because whenever we fail to live to this responsibility or fail to care for creation and our brothers and sisters, the door is open to destruction and hearts are hardened.

Francis has awakened the hopes of ecologists and others who are concerned about rampant consumerism and the deterioration of the planet. In Latin America and Africa, "environmental problems are closely linked to poverty, with the poor living in areas that are the most vulnerable to climate change and the degradation of the soil," Francis maintains (Valente 1).

The world today is experiencing a global warming (greenhouse effect), the depletion of the ozone layer and the extinction of living organisms. The industrial emissions, saturation of the environment with chemicals, extensive use of pesticides in agriculture, wastes in consumption process, pollution and depletion of earth's resources and hosts of ecological crises are massively destroying the earth's natural spaces for plants, animals and human beings (Antonisamy 307).

The earth is our mother. The great Benedictine Abbess of the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen asserts: "The earth is at the same time mother. She is mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human. She is mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all". In the face of the ecological crises of the twenty first century, mother earth is the victim. Matthew Fox warns that if this continues, "... we and our children will pay the price". Mother earth continually bestows good health, good soils, good forests and good bodies but human beings are not responding to this immense act of blessing (Fox 13).

The ecology of the human person is seriously threatened by the ecological crises of the twenty first century. Today, more than ever, in the annals of history, we are confronted by the damages human beings are exerting to the atmosphere, the rivers, and the seas of the earth. It is becoming more obvious that if human beings continue this reckless exploitation of the lands, the rivers and the seas, what we will pass on to our descendants will be an improvised and far more sterile place. In this contemporary world, we are in the midst of the process that, if allowed to continue, will end in the destruction of the ecology of the environment as well as the ecology of the human person (Edwards 1).

### **The Cosmic Christ in Restoring the Ecology of the Human Person**

The Cosmic Christ is the center of all created realities that exist in the world. All things were made through him, and without him, nothing that was made was made (John 1:3). In him is life. He is the life and the light of people (John 1:4). As the light, he shines in the darkness (John 1:5). And as the true light, he gives light to every human being that comes into the world (John 1: 9). Since the Cosmic Christ is the source of all created realities and the light that shines in every human being created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), every human person therefore needs him to work through them in order to restore the ecology of the human person by showing love and appreciation to humanity and the whole of God's creation.

Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, identified with human beings in the world. As the Word of God (John 1:1), the world was made through him (John 1:3), he was in the world but the world did not recognize him (John 1:10), even his own people did not receive him (John

1:11). However, he gave the right to become children of God to all who receive him and believe in his name (John 1:12). He was the word that became flesh and made his dwelling among "us" (John 1:14). In his dwelling with human beings, he had apostles (Matt. 10:1-5; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-16) and disciples (Luke 10:1-24) who shared in his mission, in his kindness he went about doing good preaching the good news of the kingdom of God to the poor and healing every disease and sickness (Matt. 4:23-24, Matt. 9:35-36, Matt. 11:4-6), in his love he welcomed sinners and ate with them (Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:30-32; Luke 15:1-2). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ presents himself as an example and a model of human existence in a world that is full of the physically and the spiritually poor. While on earth, he administered to the needs of those who were physically and spiritually poor, his life, therefore, is a paradigm for service to many who are physically and spiritually poor in the world. Imitating Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, will help to restore human dignity and the ecology of the human person.

Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, took human flesh in the womb of Mary, his mother (Luke 1:31-35). He identified himself with the people of the world. He was a lover of nature. He taught with imagery taken from his culture pointing to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the sower, and many more to explain the mysteries of the kingdom (Schineller 24). He also described himself using natural imageries as the door and the good shepherd (John 10:1-18), the light of the world (John 3:19, 8:12; 9:5, 12:35-36), the true vine (John 15:1-5), the bread of life (John 6:25-40), the resurrection (John 11:25) and, the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, also humbled himself and identified himself with simple cosmic elements of the cosmos; bread made of wheat and wine made of ripen grapes (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25) to be celebrated by apostles and disciples who are cosmic images of Christ on earth (Luke 22:19). As a memorial of the Lord's Supper, all who are to participate in the celebration are also the cosmic images of Christ. All who participate in the Lord's Supper are expected to be transformed into the image of Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, and then announce his death until he comes again (1 Cor. 11:16).

Christianity in the view of Edwards is a religion of promise and hope. The goal of Christianity is directed towards a future in God. The way in which the future is envisaged matters a great deal for studies in ecological theology. If Christianity is understood to be about leaving this physical world for a heavenly world; if we are only in this world for a short time before abandoning it for another, more spiritual, then the physical world faces the risk of being devalued and exploited (82). Agreeing with Edwards, human kind needs to be influenced by the theology of the Cosmic Christ. The earth is a home for all, even if there is an eschatological hope of leaving this world to a more spiritual world, there is no need to devalue and exploit the world that was created through the instrumentality of Jesus the Cosmic Christ.

Studies in ecological theology suggests that the Christian hope for a better world does not imply the destruction of the ecology of the human person and the ecology of the environment. Since the Cosmic Christ liberates, heals and possesses an all-inclusive love for humanity and the whole of God's creation. Thus, all human beings, and more specifically Christians, are the cosmic images of Christ in this world. Therefore, Christians ought to work for the physical and spiritual liberation of fellow human beings, following the footsteps of the Jesus, the Cosmic Christ.

Rahner, like de Chardin, takes up the issue raised by de Chardin from his own theological perspective. Rahner begins his ecological theology of the transformation of the

universe from the resurrection of Jesus. The risen Jesus who resurrected from the death is himself the Cosmic Christ who will come eventually to restore and transform the ecology of the human person and the entire universe at his *parousia*. Rahner also sees the resurrection of Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, as a change at the deepest level of things in the universe. The resurrection of the Cosmic Christ is not simply something that happened to the person of Jesus. Rahner opines, it is an event and a reality that has a retrospective and a prospective effect beyond the death of Jesus to entire humanity and the whole world creation. Rahner further speaks of the resurrection as the beginning of the divinization of humanity and the world. Thus, the Cosmic Christ will at his second coming restore the dignity of human persons who believe in him and therefore restore the entire creation to its original state of blessedness (Edwards 87).

### Conclusion

The discourse on Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, is very relevant in restoring the ecology of the human person created in the image of God. The ecology of the human person is in dire need of restoration. If the ecology of the human person is not restored, humanity as a whole stands the risks of facing extinction as a result of human activities threatening the fundamental existence of the human person on the surface of the earth. The human person passing through dehumanizing conditions of poverty, hunger and disease truly needs restoration.

Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, creates, re-creates, heals, liberates, redeems and restores. At creation, the ecology of the human person was created for every human person to have a meaningful existence on the surface of the earth. Every human person was also created with the full dignity of the child of God. Human beings were given full dignity as the most valued creation of God.

In the course of human history, sin and anti-human activities of human beings on the surface of the earth have been a constant threat to the beauty of life to be enjoyed by the human person in accord with God's plans. The human person stands in need of restoration. Since all of creatures are sacred, every human person created in the image of God is sacred, holding something of the word of God which is Christ. Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, dwells in every human being who accepts him. The Christians who accept Jesus therefore must realize that the Cosmic Christ dwells in them and therefore the need to permit him work in them and through them for the restoration of the human ecology to its original dignity and the blessedness.

### References

- Antonisamy, F. *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Bangalore: St Paul Press Training School, 2003.
- Benedict XVI. *A discourse to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2008.
- Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate [In Charity and Truth]* 2009.
- Benedict XVI. *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2007.
- Benedict XVI. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Africae Munus*, 2011.
- Bergoglio, Jorge. *Homily as Pope Francis*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013.
- Bit-Shing, Abraham. *Evolution of the Third Nature of Christ: A Study of Peirre Teilhard de Chardin's Cosmic Christ*. Washington D.C.: 1999.
- Boros, Ladislaus. *The Cosmic Christ*. London: Search Press, 1975.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Paulist Press, 2000.
- Edwards, Denis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. New York: Orbis books, 2008.
- Fox, Matthew. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987.
- Gaudium et Spes. *Vatican Council II, the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 2004.
- Graffin, I. Mary. *Body of Christ in St. Paul and in Teilhard de Chardin*, Shenandoah: Faith and Reason, Christendom Press, 2001.
- Haught, John. *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.
- Hayes, Zachary. *The Gift of Being: A Theologian of Creation*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991.
- Jackson, Robert. *Human Ecology: A Physician's Advice for Human Life*. Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publication, 1990.
- John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus [On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum]* 1991.
- John Paul II. *Familiaris Consortio [The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World]* 1981.
- John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis [On the Social Teaching of the Church]* 1987.
- Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics III*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958.
- King, Ursula. *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Marjorie, Keenan. *The Ecological Problem Today: The Relation between the Human Person and the World*. Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, September 22, 1992.
- McFague Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theological*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: ATC Publications Ignatius Press, 2000.
- Schineller, Peter. *A Handbook on Inculturation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.
- Smith, Robert. "Ecology." Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Student and Home Edition, 2010.
- Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly. *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. Rome: 2012.
- Valente, Marcela. *Pope Francis Raises Hopes for an Ecological Church*. Inter Press Service News Agency, 2013.
- Westermann, Claus. *Creation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.