

Enviro-Club inaugural address: Loyola College Aug2018

Collective Journey of the Globe

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Respected officials and faculty members and dear students of Enviro-Club of Loyola College.

Where are we? Status of our Environment:

Environment might be one of the most important treasures entrusted to us, but human beings do end up treating it recklessly. We have exploited it to the maximum and now the environment is reacting through natural disasters, water shortage, air pollution etc. Other outcomes of environment exploitation are complex diseases, ever increasing child-mortality, hunger, and poverty. In order to raise awareness about protecting our environment, which is our Mother Nature, every year June 5 is celebrated as World Environment Day designated by the United Nations. The day also reminds and enables us to be more responsible in the way we conduct ourselves and treat the environment with respect and reverence.

India is the global host this year and the theme is 'Beat Plastic Pollution'. It started in 1974 and since then the day has provided a global platform for like-minded people to reach out to each other. One million plastic bottles are purchased every minute. In Kenya, Africa plastic bags are banned – Before alighting the flight, announcement is made not to take any plastic bags with you. And you do not see plastic bags scattered around in Kenya.

Each year 1.7 million deaths of children under 5 years old are linked to the present environmental situation. According to the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change, "*warming in the Arctic, as indicated by daily maximum and minimum temperatures, has been as great as in any other part of the world.*" The period of 1995–2005 was the warmest decade in the Arctic since at least the 17th century, with temperatures 2°C (3.6°F) above the 1951–1990 average. Some regions within the Arctic have warmed up even more rapidly, with Alaska and western Canada's temperature rising by 3 to 4°C (5.40 to 7.20°F). This warming has been caused not only by the rise in greenhouse gas concentration, but also the deposition of carbon soot on Arctic ice. Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest free standing mountain in Tanzania (5,895 meter-altitude) has lost over 85% of its glacial ice since 1912. 26% of the ice that remained in 2000 was gone by 2007. Kilimanjaro icecap might be all history by 2022 as some studies project.

Cf: <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/life-style/world-environment-day-2018-live-updates-twitter-5202219/?#liveblogstart>

Indian Context:

The environment of India comprises some of the world's most bio-diverse eco-zones. The Deccan Traps, Western Ghats, Gangetic Plains, and the Himalayas are the major geographical features. The country faces different forms of pollution as its major environmental issue and is more vulnerable to the effects of climate change being a developing nation.

There are 350 species of mammals, 375 reptiles, 130 amphibians, 20,000 insects, 19,000 fishes and 1,200 species of birds in India. The Asiatic lion, Bengal tiger and leopard are the main predators; our country has the most species of cats than any other. Elephants, the Indian Rhinoceros and eight species of deer are also found.

Further, there are over 17,000 species of flowering plants in India, which account for six percent of the total plant species in the world. India comprises seven percent of world's flora. Wide range of climatic conditions in India gave rise to rich variety of flora. India covers more than 45,000 species of flora, out of which several are endemic to the region. [Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environment_of_India]

Although India still has low average income per person, the country is now the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, after China and the USA. At this rate, extinction is final and irreversible – We are killing off the species on which we completely depend for our own existence. Pope Francis urgently asks us to attend to an Integral Ecology in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015). He says that “*the exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits*”.

- He points out: “*Consumerism has led us to become accustomed to the superfluous and the daily waste of food, which we are sometimes no longer able to value correctly, as its value goes far beyond mere economic parameters*”.
- He challenges every human being: “*What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are growing up? The question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.*”

What needs to be done?:

Today we have 7.5 billion people on the planet and we are growing at an unprecedented and unsustainable rate of 225,000 new people per day, heading for 9 to 10 billion by 2050. We have experienced this alarming population explosion in just the last 100 years of the entire 2.8 million year history of humans on earth.

This, compounded with our increasing ability to use energy and other resources through technological developments, and our unstoppable desire for material riches, has driven us to exceed nature's natural checks and balances by a long shot, and the biosphere, which supports us, is greatly suffering as a result. We humans are clearly overwhelming the earth; our deforestation, relentless development of wetlands and grasslands, and extensive and unsustainable agricultural practices are crowding our whole ecosystems and driving species to extinction at an unprecedented rate.

Our use of fossil fuels is changing the climate. Consumerism is flooding the planet with accumulated waste, and also with new, potentially harmful materials. All this is transforming the Earth into an unlivable habitat for all of the species in the biosphere, including ourselves. Our domination of Creation and modification of earth and its atmosphere have defined a new epoch; since WWII we have single handedly modified the earth and its systems to such a degree that we are now in a new geologic period.

We cannot continue to pollute our air, water and soil and exterminate the biosphere and at the same time expect to be able to survive on this planet. We are completely and utterly dependent on the goods and services that are bequeathed to us by the biological diversity on this planet. In addition to providing 100% of our food and over 80% of the world's medicines, the forests, grasslands and oceans grace us with the oxygen we breathe, consume our bodily wastes, regulate the water cycle and stabilize the climate.

Entire ecosystems continue to be plowed down, species are driven to extinction to make way for our kind, and our common atmospheric,

geologic and oceanic resources have become open dumping ground for our toxic industrial waste. The poor and the indigenous continue to be exploited and left behind with smaller pieces of the pie.

Cf. [TF statement on: Environment and Economic Justice – \(IAJU\)Bilbao July2018](#)

Think globally and act locally:

Our indigenous peoples are demonstrating varieties of adaptation and mitigation strategies across Asia. These successful cases are often based on the use of their traditional knowledge, innovations and practices with minimal support from outside. The success in their adaptation and mitigation strategies is contributing to the survival of their cultural identities, sustainable use and management of natural resources and ecosystem restoration.

To counter the disappearance of medicinal plants that is found in the forest areas, some communities have started ex-situ conservation in their backyards or in community gardens guided by indigenous healers in countries like Nepal, Malaysia and Vietnam. Some of this knowledge are documented and taught in community schools for knowledge transmission. Many indigenous communities in Asia have enhanced their food preservation and storage methods such as drying or smoking the food items. The indigenous knowledge offers new models for development that are both ecologically and socially sound.

Cf. [Bioethics of Climate Change and Adaptation for Children and Youth Wellbeing at the African and Asian Regions – Paper to be presented by M. Selvanayagam and Francis P Xavier in Durban, Aug2018.](#)

Action Plan:

We need to act and act here and now. Here are a few suggestions from the Task Force on ‘Environment and Economic Justice’ of International Association of Jesuit Universities (Bilbao July 2018):

- Teaching environmental and economic justice across the curriculum is needed. Not a single student should be graduating from our universities without a high degree of ethical, environmental and economic literacy.
- Conducting community-based research and action, with a global perspective should be carried out. Students could be engaged in this plan so that they can put to work what they learned, and practice what they should do in their professional lives. There is need to create in them a global mindset and a desire to address large-scale challenges.
- Collaborating with our Social Centers in service and advocacy is highly recommended. Our Universities could provide answers to the social and environmental issues posed by our social centers, and work together with them in implementing them. Working together we can empower and educate women and impoverished communities, enabling the stabilization of the human population with this education, collaboration and outreach.
- Building a Campus Sustainability Ethic through living out Laudato Si' is the need of the hour. Demonstrating love of each other and care for our common home is needed. We must embrace the practice of reduce, reuse, recycle, and share the wealth while also sharing the pain, poverty and pollution.
- Developing networks of faculty research and curricular resources toward strengthening those impactful areas of learning and action is a must. For example, some universities/colleges might have expertise in sustainable agriculture, while another might have a center on water conservation, or excel at community organizing, international law, or environmental science.

- In concrete, the Enviro-Club of Loyola College could practice a couple of concrete proposals:
 1. You could promote the use of cloth bags over plastics. If we do not change, nobody or nothing will change;
 2. You could use the rainwater as well as waste-water from RO plants or from water-purifiers for watering the plants in your kitchen gardens;
 3. You could be careful not to waste food. If no food is wasted, no one needs to go hungry; and
 4. You could plant trees in the campus, in the neighbourhood, and in the city for a better environment.

Finally, everything is inter-connected. Every action, decision, and purchase we make has a ripple effect both upstream in the supply chain, and downstream in the consumer or waste stream. The overall goal of Laudato Sí is to help all of us recognize the urgent need to become integral ecologists; to live as people who dare to imagine a healed Earth; and to be people who are ready to put their hands, hearts, and minds to the task of taking care of our environment as we are making a collective journey in this globe, which is our home.

References:

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4. Laudato Si': Pope Francis on 'Climate Change and the Environment' - <https://allthatsinteresting.com/pope-francis-climate-change-quotes#21>
5. Task Force Statement on: Environment and Economic Justice – (IAJU) Bilbao, July 2018.
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