

CCA Assembly 1-10-2023 Kottayam.

Churcha -1.Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God's Mission of  
Renewal and Restoration of Creation

## **From Stewardship to Communion**

(Fr Dr K M George)

First of all, I must say that I have difficulty with the pervasive use of the image of the steward in order to qualify our relationship with the rest of creation. We find the idea of stewardship highlighted in western ethical- theological reflections regarding humanity's relationship to the created world. Of course, this is coming mainly from the parables of Jesus who speaks about two types of stewards -responsible and irresponsible- of a master who entrusts his household and assets to his servants and goes away for a long time. In Christian ethical and theological reflection this idea of the steward is often highlighted as an example of responsibility and faithfulness. It is one of the models exemplifying the relationship of human beings to the creation like master, agent, partner, friend, priest, steward and so on.

The steward's responsibility and his relationship to the master as portrayed in the parable are rather moral and legal. The stewards are employees who get wages from a master for their work. They do not own or share

the inheritance of the master's household and property unlike in the case of the children of the master. So within this framework of legal- moral obligation to the master they can either perform their duties responsibly well or in an irresponsible manner. They are rewarded or punished accordingly.

When we come to God's creation and the place of humanity in God's plan as in the origin myth of paradise or in the gospel of love as exemplified by Christ in his life , we find this ethical- legal image of the steward inadequate to express the fullness of love and communion between God, human beings, all other creatures and the material world. The simple question is: Are we children of God, and members of the household (Ephesians 2:19-22) or are we wage labourers in the field of an alien master? Of course, the fact of being children does not exempt us in any way from the task of looking after the household with responsibility, vigilance, and hard work.

The sensitivity, however, is different here. We as children undertake the task in the spirit of love and communion with our father and all the rest of the family rather than with a sense of detached legal obligation for the sake of wages and rewards.

Secondly, the sensitivity to nature and the whole of created reality arises from the depth of our experiential conviction that we constitute *one body* not only with

our fellow human beings but with all material creation, visible and invisible. When Jesus said, 'This is my body, take it and eat it', he was in a way working in the reverse order on the original vision of the 'one-body-ness' of God's creation. We say 'reverse order' in the sense that the individualised body of Christ, the Son of Man, taken from a woman symbolising the earth and all God's creation, is returned and shared with all so that our fundamental and ultimate one-body-ness is reaffirmed. Through the scattering/sharing of his body everywhere and with all, the wholeness of creation is being restored. Remember the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian document of *Didache*, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, that highlights the image of the *one* eucharistic bread made out of the *many* wheat grains scattered across the world. The One and the Many constantly move in and out in a dynamic interpenetration. This could be the model for mission, for ecumenical dialogue, for interfaith exchange, and for several other domains that relate to creation and its restoration.

Thirdly, I may be permitted to coin a new word, namely, *Ecodoxy*. Let me explain it. 'Eco-' from Greek *oikos* meaning house or dwelling place.

*Doxa* means praise or glory. It is the praising or worshipping of God by us as one house, as one family, as one body. Familiar words like economy, ecology, ecosophy begin with 'eco-' or 'house'. In the context

of our global and planetary environmental concerns like global warming ( now 'global boiling' as it is put by the UN Secretary General) our planet earth is our oikos, the dwelling place. In a larger sense, it is our solar system. Still widening the circle, the *oikos* can be our home-galaxy, the Milky Way with more than 100 billion stars, and still further our house or dwelling place is the whole cosmos of which only a very little is known ( They say 4 or 5 % .I simply wonder how can one speak about the percentage when the total is unknown!!) .

Here in *Ecodoxy* it is the worship by the whole creation, which is our home, our dwelling place and our body, that praises God. It is the worship of the Creator God by all things, animate and inanimate. The Psalmist says : "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth; burst into jubilant song with the music. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy" (Psalm 98). The whole psalm 148, inviting all creatures including snakes and scorpions, and all inanimate things to praise God, is very much used in ancient liturgies. Nothing on earth is exempted from the ecstatic call to praise the Lord. So we all become one body as we engage in the cosmic worship. This is the implication of *Ecodoxy*. This is the fundamental characteristic of the ultimate communion between God the Creator and all of humanity and the rest of creation.

All contemporary secular pronouncements on the environmental health of our earth, as in G-20 statements, COP summit agreements, or in UN's Sustainable Development Goals(SGDs), seem to be mostly political and academic rhetoric rather than true love, compassion and concern for creation. It seems only if we develop the deep spiritual sensitivity of being one body with the whole creation, with ‘the world God so loved” that we will be able to restore the creation to its pristine capacity for true justice, non violence, peace, equality of genders, and self giving communion with all.