

It is common knowledge that the concept of sustainability involves aspects relating to the environment, the economy, society and food.

It is also undeniable that sustainability should be considered a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely at a certain level, in other words, in equilibrium between satisfying the needs of the present and future generations, consequently, without jeopardizing the latter in any way.

According to these assumptions, and in the context of sustainable development, it is essential to respect the environment around us, so that the human footprint is able to avoid exceeding the regenerative and receptive capacity of natural systems as underlined by the World Wide Fund for Nature.

On the other hand, to overcome the dichotomy between the economic and the socio-cultural sphere, especially in the current international crisis of values, what is needed is a sense of sustainability that comes from within.

This refers to the single action of the person who, individually and in compliance with ethical principles in defense of these values, behaves not only on the basis of sobriety and equilibrium, but also on the basis of their own moral and religious identity.

In relation to these considerations, the work of Prof.J.I. Kureethadam is of particular interest being filled with ethical and fideistic principles in harmony with individual behaviour, since they produce no adverse effects on others or on the environment as a whole, but reach out and give succor to those in need of material and spiritual support.

Editor-in-Chief

# CONSERVATION OF OUR PLANETARY HOME

## The “Sabbath” as an appropriate paradigm for total sustainability

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*Keywords:* ecological crisis, creation, sustainability, solidarity, Sabbath

### Introduction

The contemporary ecological crisis points to the precarious situation of Earth, our common planetary home. The crisis is about our very home! Life, human life, civilization, religion, philosophy, art, music, literature, science and technology, and a thousand other artefacts of human culture have been possible because there is the common home of the Earth in which to dwell, and not vice versa. Without our common home, we cannot exist and flourish. Earth can exist without modern humans, as it has done for over 99.9% of its history, but not we without the Earth. The conservation of our planetary home is thus vitally important for the survival of humanity and for the flourishing of human culture.

In this paper, we shall argue that the conservation of our common planetary home requires a holistic understanding of sustainability. In the 1970s and 80s, as evidenced by landmark publications like *The Limits to Growth*<sup>1</sup> commissioned by the Club of Rome and the Brundtland Commission's Report: *Our Common Future*<sup>2</sup>, the emphasis was largely on physical sustainability. In the last couple of decades, there has been much talk about societal sustainability,<sup>3</sup> as the link between the degradation of our common planetary home and the unjust social structures that keep millions of the members of our common household shackled to poverty and misery has become conspicuously evident. In this crucial moment of human and geological history, it is evident that we need to take the sustainability revolution even further. We need today an even more comprehensive understanding of sustainability, weaving together the cosmic, the human, and the divine dimensions of the real, if we are to succeed in conserving our planetary home for ourselves and for future generations. The three pillars of total sustainability are therefore harmony with creation, human solidarity, and peace with the Creator. We will conclude by presenting the biblical institution of ‘Sabbath’ as an appropriate paradigm of such a holistic understanding of sustainability and draw some practical implications in this regard.

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## 1. Harmony with Creation

The word sustainability is etymologically derived from the Latin word *sustinere*<sup>4</sup> which means to hold up, keep, support, endure, etc. Earth, our planet, gradually became a home capable of 'sustaining' multiple forms of life, including humanity, in a stupendous cosmic process stretching into billions of years. It appears that the unique capacity of Earth to be a home that sustains and nurtures life is increasingly imperilled today. We shall cite three authoritative warnings from the scientific community in this regard.

The first is the study of "planetary boundaries" carried out by a group of scholars associated with the Stockholm Resilience Centre, among them prominent Earth scientists like the Nobel laureates for chemistry Paul Crutzen and James Hansen of NASA. In this paper that appeared first in the September 2009 issue of *Nature*,<sup>5</sup> the authors identified planetary boundaries in nine key areas: climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, interference with the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, global freshwater use, change in land use, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading. The 2009 study showed that with regard to the areas of climate change, rate of biodiversity loss and biogeochemical cycles, humanity has already transgressed the limits. A 2015 update of the study published in *Science*<sup>6</sup> has shown that we have now transgressed a fourth area, namely, land system change. Climate change and biosphere integrity are what the scientists call "core boundaries" which we transgress at our own peril as they can drive the Earth System into unprecedented states.

A second authoritative indicator from the scientific community about the alarming state of our common home concerns the consumption of natural resources. A yardstick that is being increasingly used to measure human impact on the planet is that of the Ecological Footprint Analysis.<sup>7</sup> While economies, populations and resource demands grow, the size of the planet remains the same. So there is a natural limit to the resources that Earth can provide and the waste it can absorb each year. The problem is precisely that human demands on planet's services are exceeding what it can provide. Till very recently, humanity's use of nature's services was within the means of what nature could regenerate. But, sometime in the mid-1970s, humanity appears to have crossed the critical threshold. Overall, humanity's Ecological Footprint has doubled since 1966. According to the Global Footprint Network, the Ecological Debt Day, also known as the Overshoot Day, in 2014 fell on 19<sup>th</sup> August. By this day, just in eight months, humanity had used up all the resources nature could provide for the current year. Globally, human beings now demand the biological capacity of nearly 1.5 planets, i.e., the rate of overshoot is up to 50 percent more than what the planet can renewably supply.<sup>8</sup> It is calculated that we are on track to require the resources of two planets well before mid-century. We are using up more than what the common habitat that sustains us can provide. We are living beyond our means. It is a totally unsustainable situation which cannot continue indefinitely.

The most authoritative pronouncements to date regarding the sustainability threat facing our planetary home have been made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – a co-recipient of the Nobel prize for peace for 2007 – which draws on the work of nearly 2,500 scientists from 130 nations. According to the 2014 Fifth Assessment Report from the IPCC, global temperatures are likely to rise by 0.3C to 4.8°C, by the end of the century depending on possible carbon emission scenarios.<sup>9</sup> It may also be recalled that the 2007 IPCC report had warned that up to 30 per cent of

plant and animal species so far assessed are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if increases in global average temperatures exceed 1.5-2.5°C.<sup>10</sup> Climate change is the defining issue of our time, which some have described as the world's greatest challenge and our greatest collective threat to civilisation.<sup>11</sup>

Humanity lives in a profoundly disharmonious relationship with the very womb of life that sustains it along with other species. All human activities and subsystems like economy are entirely dependent upon and constrained by the geophysical limits of our finite home planet. We will need to rediscover harmony with the rest of creation, of which we are an integral part, if we are to survive and flourish in our common planetary home.

## 2. Human solidarity

We have not only rendered our common physical planetary home unsustainable. The common household of our human family, also, finds itself in a totally unsustainable situation. It is true that humanity has made remarkable strides in the last few centuries. "We are the inheritors of two centuries of remarkable waves of technological change: steam power, railroads, the telegraph, electrification, automotive transport, aviation, industrial chemistry, modern medicine, computing, and now the digital revolution, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies."<sup>12</sup> However, our globalized world is more divided and unequal than ever. Globalization along with its "economy of exclusion" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*) has *left hundreds of millions of people behind: 1.2 billion lack access to electricity, 870 million are malnourished, and at least 748 million are without access to clean, safe drinking water.*<sup>13</sup>

The world economy grew twentyfold in the last century alone.<sup>14</sup> But economic growth has not benefited everyone in society equally. Significant inequalities remain and many of the most vulnerable groups in society have been left behind. According to the recent *Oxfam* Report published on the occasion of the 2015 Davos *World Economic Forum*, the gap between rich and poor is alarmingly widening all over the world.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, seven out of 10 people lived in countries where economic inequality was worse than 30 years ago, and in 2014 just 80 people owned as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity (in 2010 it took 388 billionaires to equal the wealth of the bottom half of the world's population).<sup>16</sup> According to the Report, the share of the world's wealth owned by the best-off 1% increased from 44% in 2009 to 48% in 2014, while the least well-off 80% currently own just 5.5%. It is predicted that by 2016, the top 1% will have more than 50% of total global wealth.<sup>17</sup> Inequality entrenches wealth and power in the hands of a few, creating structures that represent the interests of the elite minority at the expense of the majority of society. Ultimately, growing economic inequality denies people their dignity and their voice, which deepens social frustration and the likelihood of conflict.

The economic apartheid that is being erected around the world is also an ecological one. It is evident in the divide between the rich and the poor when it comes to the 'ecological footprint' of nations and individuals. There exist huge disparities in the consumption of natural resources across the globe which are conspicuously evident in the scandalous differences in the ecological footprint of individuals and communities. As the noted American scientist Jared Diamond has noted "the average rates at which people consume resources like oil and metals, and produce wastes like plastics

and greenhouse gases, are about 32 times higher in North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia than they are in the developing world.”<sup>18</sup> According to Diamond, the estimated one billion rich people who live in developed countries have a relative per capita consumption rate of 32 while the rest of world’s population have per capita consumption rates below 32, mostly down towards 1. We may cite from the 2012 *Living Planet Report* some examples of the discrepancy in the ecological footprint of citizens around the globe.

If all of humanity lived like an average Indonesian, for example, only two-thirds of the planet’s biocapacity would be used; if everyone lived like an average Argentinian, humanity would demand more than half an additional planet; and if everyone lived like an average resident of the USA, a total of four Earths would be required to regenerate humanity’s annual demand on nature.<sup>19</sup>

We are also living in what Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called an era of ‘climate apartheid’.<sup>20</sup> As a recent Bulletin from the World Health Organization points out: “the greenhouse gases that cause climate change originate mainly from developed countries, but the health risks are concentrated in the poorest nations, which have contributed least to the problem.”<sup>21</sup> In the case of climate change, the world’s richest half billion people – about 7 percent of the global population – are responsible for about 50 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the carbon footprint of the world’s poorest 1 billion people is about 3% of the world’s total carbon footprint.<sup>23</sup> However, these populations, along with future generations, will be the ones most affected by climate change.

The great ethical tragedy of our times is that a large majority of the members of our common household suffer on account of the greedy actions of a minority. As denounced by the Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara, the ecological crisis is caused because “greedy or thoughtless people destroy what belongs to all.”<sup>24</sup>

We live in a profoundly unequal and unjust world. Solidarity appears to be the sole solution to heal such wounds of division. Solidarity is more than responsibility. It is co-responsibility for our common home and for all the members of our common household, especially the poor and most vulnerable. As Pope Paul VI wrote in *Populorum Progressio*: “God intended the Earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. ... created goods should flow fairly to all.”<sup>25</sup> Solidarity springs from the profound conviction, as Pope John Paul II wrote in his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, that “we are *all* really responsible for *all*.”<sup>26</sup> More recently in *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI defined solidarity as “first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone.”<sup>27</sup> Solidarity means working to ensure the welfare of ‘all’, especially of the weakest who are unjustly denied access to the common goods of our planetary home. As Pope Francis reminds us time and time again, we need to work for a more just redistribution of the world’s resources and the elimination of the structural causes of poverty, performing those small daily acts of solidarity.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Peace with the Creator

The unsustainable situation of our common home, and of our common household, is ultimately caused by a profound rupture in our relationship with the Creator, the

ground of all being, who has brought the entire material universe into existence and lovingly sustains it along with all forms of life. Humanity cannot expect to live in harmony with creation, if they are not at peace with the very Creator. Pope Benedict XVI offers some very poignant reflections in this regard:

The brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property ... The waste of creation begins where we no longer recognize any claim beyond ourselves, seeing only ourselves.<sup>29</sup>

Is it not true that an irresponsible use of creation begins precisely where God is marginalized or even denied? If the relationship between human creatures and the Creator is forgotten, matter is reduced to a selfish possession, man becomes the 'last word', and the purpose of human existence is reduced to a scramble for the maximum number of possessions possible.<sup>30</sup>

The ecological crisis reveals how the gods of secular reason, technological prowess and economic profit have displaced faith in a divine Creator and sacred respect for the order of creation. As Michael S. Northcott writes: "the excess greenhouse gases produced by industrial capitalism are the fruits of the modern devotion to the gods of secular reason, technological power and monetary accumulation, and the sidelining of traditional understandings of community, justice and the sacred."<sup>31</sup>

The contemporary ecological crisis, it appears, arises precisely from our inability to perceive the physical world as God's creation, to love it as the Creator does, to respect its integrity, and to appreciate its intrinsic goodness and beauty, beyond mere considerations of utility and consumption. The various manifestations of the ecological crisis are not mere 'natural disasters' as they are still largely seen by the general public. No ecological imbalance comes about by itself. The ecological crisis is a consequence of our own values, beliefs and of our conscious choices, and ultimately of our sinful behaviour. The contemporary ecological crisis thus amounts to sin, in the widest sense possible, as it ruptures the bonds of divine, human and cosmic fellowship.

It is only within a relational view of reality, where everything is inter-related and inter-dependent, that the concept of ecological sin makes sense. Nothing in creation exists in isolation. There exists a physical and spiritual interconnectedness between all of Creation. Sin is precisely the distortion of this underlying and all-embracing relational unity. Sin is the rupture of relationships and of communion between created realities and with the Creator. The contemporary ecological crisis results ultimately from our refusal to see ourselves as creatures.

At the heart of the pathology of ecological crisis is the refusal of modern humans to see themselves as creatures, contingently embedded in networks of relationships with other creatures, and with the Creator. This refusal is the quintessential root of what theologians call sin. And like the sin of Adam, it has moral and spiritual as well as ecological consequences.<sup>32</sup>

The contemporary ecological crisis reveals the unbridled human desire to be the arbitrary dictator of the whole of creation, leaving out any reference whatsoever to God, the Creator. From a theological point of view, the roots of the ecological crisis lie in modern anthropocentrism which makes the human being the measure of all things,

with no accountability to any higher Being. Modern anthropocentrism, along with the *hubris* associated with it, appears to have substituted the traditional theocentrism of the Christian scriptures and of other religious traditions of humanity. From a theological viewpoint, all creation proceeds from God and is destined to return to God. Creation's *alfa* and *omega* is God, and God alone!

Ecological sin is not only an offence against the Creator, but against one's own fellow humans and to the very creation. To devastate the natural world, as in the case of the human-induced contemporary ecological crisis, is a sin against God, humanity and the world. The ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I writes:

It follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For human beings to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests, or by destroying its wetlands; for human beings to injure other human beings with disease; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances – all of these are sins before God, humanity and the world.<sup>33</sup>

The ecological crisis reveals how we have betrayed the 'eucharistic' vocation of human communities, namely to 'share' the gifts of creation with all the members of our common household in a spirit of communion (*koinonia*), like the one bread broken and shared at the table of the Lord. The earth is indeed humankind's common table laid by God for all. Around that table we gather, in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, nurturing and sheltering one another.

The unequal distribution and consumption of our home planet's life-essential resources, and the tragic fact that nearly one in seven of our fellow humans goes to bed hungry every day, are indeed grave moral sins against the eucharistic nature of human communities.

From a theological point of view, there exists a significant link between human sin and the state of the physical world. Sin literally defiles the land. A fundamental principle in the Bible and in life is that sin has consequences. "God created us to live in harmony with him, and in a comfortable web of relationships within his creation. Any break in those relationships – sin – results in consequences."<sup>34</sup> This fundamental truth is evident from the earliest chapters of the Book of Genesis. As we read in the third and fourth chapters, both the sin against God – the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and the sin against one's own fellow human being – Cain's assassination of Abel, lead to negative repercussions for the land. The pattern is tragically repeated throughout the Old Testament, and in our own days, as evident in the contemporary ecological crisis. The sin against God (theocide) and our own fellow human beings (fratricide) indeed have negative repercussions for the land (ecocide).

As Pope John Paul II pointed out in *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, if humanity is not at peace with God, then Earth itself cannot be at peace.

When man turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. If man is not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace: "Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away." (*Hos* 4:3)<sup>35</sup>

“The wages of sin is death,” wrote St Paul in the Letter to the Romans (*Rm* 6:23). This truth is conspicuously evident in the unsustainable situation of our common planetary home. Our continued sin, our persistent sinful behaviour is preventing the healing of Earth.

#### 4. Reclaiming Sabbath

To arrive at total sustainability we need to regain once again harmony with the Creator, with our fellow human beings, and with creation itself. We need a genuine ecological conversion today that requires a return to the Creator, to one’s own fellow humans, especially the poor and vulnerable, and to the very *adamah*, Earth itself. In this return (*metanoia*) to creation, humanity, and God, we have a wonderful heritage in the biblical institution of Sabbath.

The *telos* of the physical universe, right from the dawn of creation, has been to enter ultimately into God’s Sabbath. The creation saga as narrated in the Book of Genesis does not end with the creation of the human being on the sixth day, but only on the seventh day, when God, together with all of created realities, including humanity, enters into Sabbath, the divine rest. Sabbath is the supernatural destiny of all creation. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds, “the whole of creation, in the end, has been thought of to create the place of encounter between God and His creatures, a place where the love of the creature responds to the divine love.”<sup>36</sup>

It is only the Sabbath which completes and crowns creation. It is only in his Sabbath rest that the creative God comes to His goal. In fact, on the Sabbath and through the Sabbath God ‘completed’ his creation. The Sabbath is not a casual day of rest following six working days, like our modern fashionable weekends. “On the contrary: the whole work of creation was performed *for the sake of the Sabbath*.”<sup>37</sup> As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “Creation was fashioned with a view to the Sabbath and therefore for the worship and adoration of God. Worship is inscribed in the order of creation.”<sup>38</sup> The Sabbath is the final destiny of creation, creation’s own meaning and goal.<sup>39</sup> On the Sabbath the redemption of the world is celebrated in anticipation.<sup>40</sup> The Sabbath opens creation to its true future, namely, to rest in God, to be with God. As the ultimate *telos* of creation, the Sabbath is the hope and future of every created being. Creation can find its true existence and ultimate rest only in the very Creator. On account of the Sabbath, creation is aligned towards its redemption already from the very beginning. Creation is thus teleologically oriented, from a theological perspective, towards the peace (*Shalom*) of God’s own Sabbath.

The teleological destiny of all creation to enter into God’s peace (*Shalom*), however, is to be realized in time. The eternal, eschatological dimension of Sabbath is to be accomplished in the temporal order, spanning the rhythm of the days of the week, the cycle of seven years, and the great jubilee cycle of 49 years, as the institution of Sabbath went on to assume definite contours in the history of the people of God. It is important to note that observance of the Sabbath is structured at a triple level, involving God, fellow humans and the whole of creation, with all these levels interlinked among themselves.

To celebrate Sabbath is, first of all, to be at peace with God. The Sabbath is the day of worship of the Creator *par excellence*. It is the hallowed day to contemplate God in the beauty and goodness of His own creation, to partake in God’s own delight

in His creation, and to bow in adoration before the Creator. In the hallowed light of the Sabbath, all creation acquires a loveliness of its own. "Questions about the possibility of 'producing' something, or about utility, are forgotten in the face of the beauty of all created things, which have their meaning simply in their very selves."<sup>41</sup> The Sabbath is to be lived in a spirit of thanksgiving, in gratitude towards the Creator for the very gift of existence conferred on every created being. "Just as the Sabbath is sanctified by God's resting presence, so men and women also sanctify the Sabbath through their recollection of their existence, and their grateful expression of that existence."<sup>42</sup>

To celebrate Sabbath means also to be at peace with fellow humans, especially the poor – the *anawim* of Yahweh, and with the whole of creation, including animals – domestic and wild, and with the land itself. The Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue that deals with the observance of the Sabbath "requires not only *your* rest, but the rest of all of your household, including everyone who works for you and all of your animals – and the land itself. It demands that we do not push to the limits our ecological systems or the people who work for us."<sup>43</sup> The observance of Sabbath assumes very concrete and down-to-earth implications in the Old Testament as evident in the Sabbath commandment given in the book of Exodus, where respect for Yahweh's sovereignty, care for the earth, concern for the poor, sensitivity to the needs of both wild and farm animals, are all intricately woven together.<sup>44</sup> In Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, God commands to set aside one day in seven as a day of rest for people and for animals. In Exodus 23:12, we read:

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. (*Ex 23:12*)

In the Book of Exodus, and later in the Book of the Leviticus, it is clearly stated that the land also must have its time of rest. Nothing in all creation must be relentlessly pressed. The Sabbath year is given to protect the land from relentless exploitation, to help it rejuvenate, to give it a time of rest and restoration, and to guarantee sustenance for the poor of the land and for wild animals.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild beasts may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. (*Ex 23:10-11*)

... in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. (*Lev 25: 4-5*)

In the context of the observance of Sabbath which allows the land to recuperate and the poor to recover, the concept of the Jubilee Year assumes particular significance. According to Leviticus 25: 8-55, after seven Sabbath years, on the Day of Atonement, the trumpets were to sound throughout the land, to proclaim the fiftieth year as 'God's year of release'. The liberation associated with the Jubilee Year consists in the restoration of the original harmony of human communities and of creation. It was the time to wipe out debt, to set free slaves, and to restore liberty to every member of God's

chosen people as well to the foreigners. The land was also to find rest in the Year of Jubilee so that it too can recuperate and celebrate. The Jubilee commandment (*Lev 25; Dt 19:14; Prov 23:10-11; Mic 2:1-5*) clearly links care for land and care for people. In leaving land fallow and in forgiving debts of the poor, there is an integration of the social and ecological concerns, so as to recreate the original peace and harmony associated with the primordial Sabbath of creation. "There is release for the ground, that is given a year of recovery from farming. There is release from the build-up of capital only in the hands of the few, and every jubilee it reverts to its original owner ... There is the release of hired labourers from their servitude, because, they, too, belong to the Lord."<sup>45</sup> The Sabbath laws were *God's ecological strategy* to preserve the land and protect the inhabitants of the land.

Today, we seem to have forgotten that creation's ultimate destiny is God's own Sabbath. The sorry state of our home planet today is due to our neglect of the supernatural destiny of creation to share in God's Sabbath. Our society has forgotten a vital aspect of God's creation: the need for Sabbath. We deny Sabbath to the very Creator – the giver of all gifts, including our very existence – by not sanctifying time, and setting apart time and space, to worship God. Modern hectic life styles have largely pushed the Creator God out and created the new pantheon of the false gods of profit and consumerism, as evident, for example, in the sprawling shopping marts and malls, open day and night and every day of the week.

We have denied Sabbath also to the poor of the land. We over-exploit our fellow human beings as evident in the increasing prevalence of cheap labour, factory supply chains and call centres where people work round the clock to increase the profits of a minority. Modern society appears to have understood rest only in terms of entertainment, often possible only for the wealthy. While the super-rich live lavishly, holidaying in exotic places, millions of our fellow men and women toil day and night to eke out a living, with nearly a billion going to bed with empty stomachs, in spite of all the growth churned out by an economic system that does not respect the Sabbatical rhythms of creation and of fellow human beings.

We deny the Sabbatical rest to God's creation as well. Sabbath rest is about rediscovering the rhythms of creation, conferred by God. It is vitally important to respect these rhythms, "if we are to live at the pace of the planet, living as part of a healthy creation rather than separate."<sup>46</sup> We deny the Sabbatical rest to the land and to our planet's life-sustaining ecosystems, as evident in the increasing degradation of the land and in the over exploitation of the natural resources beyond their capacity for regeneration.

## 5. Conclusion

The path towards the conservation of our planetary home through total sustainability is three-fold. It requires that we regain a profound sense of harmony with the rest of creation and return to the land (*adamah*) as commanded by God to the first parents (*Gen 3:19*). It also calls for a real sense of solidarity with our fellow-humans, especially the poor and weak among us. True sustainability can ultimately be founded in peace with the Creator, the very ground of our being, who holds all things together and sustains them in His infinite love. The dream of total sustainability is not a utopian vision, but a true praxis, as evidenced in the millennia-long tradition of the Sabbath.

In the wake of the contemporary ecological crisis, the rediscovery of Sabbath is vitally important, if we are to protect Earth – our common planetary home –for ourselves, for future generations, and for the rest of the biosphere.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Prof. Salvatore Lorusso for the invitation to publish the present article in this prestigious journal.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Meadows D.H., Meadows D.L., Randers J., Behrens W.W., 1972, *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Books, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Brundtland G. (ed.), 1987, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> See the 2005 World Summit on Social Development. United Nations General Assembly, 2005 *World Summit Outcome*, Resolution A/60/1, adopted by the General Assembly on 15 September 2005.

<sup>4</sup> This original meaning continues to be preserved in the Italian *sostenere*, Portuguese *suster*, Spanish *sostener*, Catalan *sostenir*, English *sustain*, French *soutenir*.

<sup>5</sup> Rockström J., *A Safe Operating Space for Humanity in Nature* **461** (2009), pp. 472-75. A more detailed version of the same study came to be published later in *Ecology and Society*. See Rockström J., et al., *Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity in Ecology and Society* **14** (2009), pp. 32ff.

<sup>6</sup> Steffen W. et al., *Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet in Science* **347** (8 January 2015): [DOI:10.1126/science.1259855].

<sup>7</sup> The Ecological Footprint Analysis was pioneered by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel. See Rees W. – Wackernagel M., 1996, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>8</sup> WWF International – Institute of Zoology – Global Footprint Network, 2012, *Living Planet Report 2012: Biodiversity, Biocapacity and Better Choices*, WWF, Gland, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2013, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis: Contribution of Working Group 1 to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Group I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, IPCC, Geneva, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> See Hillman M. – Fawcett T. – Rajan S.C., 2008, *How We Can Save the Planet: Preventing Global Climate Catastrophe*, Thomas Dunne Books, New York, p. 1; Kirstin D. – Downing T.E., 2006, *The Atlas of Climate Change: Mapping the World's Greatest Challenge*, Earthscan, London.

<sup>12</sup> *Statement of the Joint Pontifical Academy of Sciences / Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Workshop on Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility* (Vatican City, July 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Data from World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/environment.html> (accessed on 07 February 2015).

See Maddison A., 2004, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics*, OECD, Paris; United Nations Environment Programme, 2012, *Global Environment Outlook 5: Environment for the Future of All*, UNEP, Nairobi, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Aid, *Wealth: Having It All and Wanting More* (19 January 2015).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Diamond J., 2008, *What's Your Consumption Factor?* in *The New York Times* (2 January 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Global Footprint Network et al., *Living Planet Report 2012*, p. 43.

- <sup>19</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2007, *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Facing Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*, Macmillan, New York, p. 166.
- <sup>20</sup> Campbell-Lendrum D. et al., *Global Climate Change: Implications for International Public Health Policy* in *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 85 (March 2012), p. 235.
- <sup>21</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2011*, p. 94.
- <sup>22</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 43.
- <sup>23</sup> Camara H., 2008, *Sister Earth: Creation, Ecology and the Spirit*, New City Press, New York, p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 22.
- <sup>25</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 38.
- <sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 38.
- <sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188.
- <sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone (6 August 2008).
- <sup>29</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience (26 August 2009).
- <sup>30</sup> Northcott M.S., 2007, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, Darton, Longman, and Todd/Christian Aid, London, p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. See also pp. 5 and 16.
- <sup>32</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, *Address during the Environmental Symposium in Santa Barbara, November 8, 1997* in CHRYSSAVGIS J. (ed.), 2009, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI), p.190.
- <sup>33</sup> Brown E., 2006, *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*, Doorlight Publications, South Hadley (MA), p. 58.
- <sup>34</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, n. 5.
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- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 286.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 285.
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