

1. Interconnectedness, Diversity and Belonging

The Pan-Amazonian Pact calls us to commit to:

Recognise and celebrate the interconnectedness of all humanity and Creation. Respect the diversity of cultures and religious traditions. Welcome people who are different (as Peter welcomed the Roman centurion, Cornelius). Abandon in our parishes, dioceses, and groups all types of colonialist mentality and posture, welcoming and valuing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in a respectful dialogue with all spiritual traditions.

The key to appreciating these issues is to develop a spirituality of interconnectedness and to do that we have to appreciate the story of how we got here. Without a full story and a spiritual awareness of the interconnectedness of all life, Earth will continue to be plundered for its 'resources' and risk the future of many species (including humans!) and humans will continue to dominate those who are 'weaker' putting aside their cultures and traditions as meaningless.

There is no doubt that every area of modern science has come to a common appreciation that life, on this planet, is interconnected. For humans, this is a call to appreciate that we are all related. In one sense, we are all African and we are all earthlings! We are made of stardust. We are related to other life forms; we belong to the Whole. Everything we see on the earth either living or constructed has come ultimately from the galaxies, where the core elements were formed. The interconnectedness of life begins with this relationship. In his book 'Breath of Life', (Fr) Denis Edwards said that, "*Life is intimately related to the stars. If there were no stars there could be no trees, flowers, kangaroos, or human beings. We are all made from stardust*".

Diversity is life giving, and a natural gift of, and to a community. Belonging together is defined by a shared purpose, not necessarily by specific behaviour, common or otherwise. Individuals do not need to forfeit their uniqueness in a community, Rather, the community should celebrate its diversity, since no two 'things' are identical. If we take more time to contemplate about the world around and what it has to teach us, it can bring much richness to our relationships, to our families, communities and organisations.

If we watch the partnerships at work, observe the ants and bees, animals and plants and take time to notice the ecosystems and micro climates, they will speak to us about interconnectedness, not isolation. They also speak about being yourself in the context of others. They will speak about adaptation through the seasons and the gift of symbiosis (mutual benefit as the result of interaction). What better teacher could we have for how to live and work together?

The interconnectedness of all life reveals a God of relationships who creates and holds life together. What seems like randomness and what appears to be clearly directed processes, are drawn together and transformed, sometimes through intense suffering and out of death. It is no surprise that many people discover an entirely different sense of God when contemplating in the natural world, rather than in a church. After all, this was Jesus' common practice. Nature is not a resource but a primary revelation of the divine.

The great civilizations that held supreme power have gone; every single one of them! All life is interconnected, and the Spirit breathes life into every species and every habitat. How will we live together? It will not happen if one is supreme over the others, and seeks to 'use' them, as humans are recklessly doing today with the earth's resources.

Homo Sapiens has only lived on this planet for 300,000 of earth's 4.5 billion years! We are new comers. Ninety-nine percent of all the species that have lived are now extinct. The Indonesian volcanic eruption of Mt Toba, seventy-four thousand years ago, is estimated to have killed ninety percent of the human population. The fourteenth century Black Plague killed more than twenty-five million people, including one quarter of Europe's population. The Great Influenza of 1918-1920 killed more than fifty million people. COVID-19 has highlighted the global effects of a pandemic in our modern age.

The Sri Lankan tsunami of 2004 killed over two hundred and fifty thousand people. Other earthquakes and volcanoes have killed tens of thousands of people and other forms of life. Chaos, destruction, and mass death are a part of the story of life. We find that view expressed in the Scriptures. What we have to admit is that Earth can live without us, but we cannot live without Earth!

Pope Francis issued his encyclical 'Laudato Si' five years ago. The title comes from the opening lines of Francis of Assisi' canticle of creation. "Praise be to you, Lord". St Francis wrote, "If you have people who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have people who deal likewise with their fellow men. These creatures minister to our needs every day; without them we could not live and through them the human race greatly offends the Creator every time we fail to appreciate so great a blessing."

Looking at our planet today, Pope Francis commented "*the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth*" (L S 21). What we have to appreciate is that Earth is a living organism. We came out of the earth. So we need to develop a sense of wonder and reverence for the earth and the relationship of mother can help achieve that. Our planet and everything that it has given life to, was born from star dust and all that star dust was created in the original moment of the birth of our universe.

When we appreciate that this is our story, we can recognise that the universe is in us. Passionist Thomas Berry claimed, “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects”. He also said “to tell the story of anything we have to tell the story of everything”. An example of this worth reflecting on, is that it took 13,800,000,000 years for you and I to appear on this planet. When we allow ourselves to experience the interconnectedness of all life we can see that that this can underpin our environmental responses. What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves.

There are many practical things we can do to help our environment
If what we do comes out of a spirituality of connectedness, our moral responsibilities will become obvious

The PACT that Fr Joachim signed on behalf of the Passionist family, says, “We will recognise and celebrate the interconnectedness of all humanity and creation. We will respect the diversity of cultures and religious traditions. This is a natural flow on from living with an appreciation of our interconnectedness. The PACT continues: We will welcome people who are different from us (just as Peter welcomed Cornelius the Roman centurion. We will abandon in our parishes, dioceses, and whatever groups to which we belong in the Passionist Family, all types of colonialist mentality and posture, welcoming and valuing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in a respectful dialogue with all spiritual traditions.

This colonial mentality is at work when the cultural values of the dominant culture are presumed to be superior to that of others. We can hear comments such as, “This is the way we do things here; why don’t they fit in with us?” The colonial mentality has little time for the customs, or language of smaller or ancient cultures, and regard other skin colour inferior to their own. Sometimes we do not recognise this mentality at work and how it treads on the dignity of others.

Some questions worth sharing are:

1. Can you recognise the divine presence in the variety of interconnected life forms?
2. How does this affect your view of:
 - Creation
 - The differences in cultures
 - The diversity of religious traditions
3. What needs to happen for us to abandon a colonial mentality?

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