

INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL CONFERENCE – GREENING THE GLOBE FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING

1ST - 4TH AUGUST 2019

**Organised By CSI Synod Department of Ecological Concerns
General Convener of Conference - Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad,
the Director of Dept of Ecological Concerns**

The conference was held at the CSI Synod Centre in Chennai and sought to address Climate Change as the most important issue of Science in the twenty-first Century. It was attended by more than 380 delegates from different states of India and abroad and was intended to create better ecological awareness among the participants and to impress upon them that the very survival of the human species may turn critical if there was not restraint on environmental exploitation.

After the welcome and Presidential address there was a keynote address by Prof. Dr Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan (former Professor of Environmental Science). We had a series of greetings and then Fr. Joshtram Isaac Jureethadam the coordinator of the Sector on Ecology and Creation at the Vatican spoke. His subject was 'Eco justice: A Philosophical Perspective'.

After lunch we heard about 'Antibiotics and Environment' from two Doctors from CMC Vellore. I found this very interesting as it seems to me to be another subject/danger that is not given the attention it deserves considering just how catastrophic it could (will?) be when we run out of new antibiotics. They said that the drugs companies have stopped putting money into researching new antibiotics, concentrating instead on things like cancer drugs where they perceive they will make the most profit. We then had '**Sustainable Living in tackling the Climate Crisis**' with **Mr. R. Sneedhar** followed by '**Ecological Concerns for Sustainable Living**' with **Dr. Manoj Kurian** and went on to **Religious Involvements in Eco-conservation with Rev. Asir Ebenezer**.

In the early evening there was a cultural programme. Lots of local schools had been invited to prepare songs and sketches different schools each evening. This evening we had a single dancer followed by a choir who had learnt all the words and some actions, and then a sketch with lots of children dressed as animals and birds –the costumes must have taken a lot of time, imagination and money to organise. That concluded the programme for the first day – a very full day.



For day 2 there was a choice of programmes under the headings of Environmental Science, Theological and Philosophical Perspective, and Social Science. I couldn't decide which sessions to attend – the Theological one had 'people's stories' which I thought would be interesting but I opted for the first which had as the theme Water, Energy, Waste, Sustainable Agriculture, Air, Health, Bio-diversity and Alternate Models.

Our first session was Integrated Water Management with **Dr. E. J. James**. He said that the World Commission on Environment and Development (1983) said that the common future was: Development that meets the need of the present generation without compromising the future generations to meet their own needs.

The principles of IWRM:

- Fresh water is finite and rain a variable source
- Water management is to be based on a participatory approach
- Women play a central role in water management
- Water is an economic good

We are going to have a problem – we are very close to the problem. Tamil Nadu and Kerala are close to water stress. We know how to manage resources and we should do it. Where this is managed by women it is more successful than when managed by men.

Forests conserve water. A programme had taken place in a dense forest in Karnataka and it was found that the water stayed in a long time before flowing out. Work was done in Kerala with varying thickness of canopy cover. With dense, 60% canopy there was a flow all year, in partially exploited covered, 30 – 60% the flows stopped in February and in exploited areas with less than 30% cover the flow stopped in November. Tropical rain forests were being cut down. Buildings and roads are being constructed without due thought – there is flooding in the road – water in the road but in fact the road is in the water, having been built over the water course. The wetlands are intended to hold back water but are filled with waste. No town in India treats more than 20% of its waste water – only 35% of families have toilets and in Sri Lanka 80% of families do not have toilets. We talk about Rain water harvesting – but we do not do it.

Dr James was followed by ‘The importance of Rivers to address water crisis: Human rights as well as ecological perspective’ with Mr. Ranjan Panda – at least that is what the programme said – I am not sure if that was the name of the person who addressed us. The Chairman started giving an autobiography of Mr Ranjan Panda and the speaker said ‘no, not right’ and came to the podium saying that the chairman was speaking about someone else! He gave an interesting talk starting by saying ‘I am a water man, working with water since I was a student’. He gave various facts:

- the water for Bangalore used to come from 20 miles away, then 60 miles away and now 120 miles away
- He talked about a village with a potential water shortage. They have planted trees and brought the forest to the village and now have eight water springs.
- Water harvesting – he said that the forests are the biggest water harvesters and preserve most of our water.
- Things should be integrated – we should not just have a river department. People in cities consume all the rivers and 66% of city dwellers think that water comes from taps and ragi from the supermarket.
- The bottled water industry is growing and the rivers are dying.
- Sediment flows with rivers, if they are dammed this stops the flow of sediment which would help to preserve the mangrove grow.
- The Ganges is the most polluted river on earth.
- India is planting millions of trees – but this is not a substitute for a forest which is an integrated system
- Most rivers are running on a deficit rainfall.
- There is a disturbed rainfall system
- We should remove dams if we can and stop taking out forests
- The more urban people, the more chopping of forests, the less water.

He came over as a bit of a maverick but someone who knew his subject well and was very passionate about it. He and others spoke about how the rivers are dying, they cannot be relied upon to supply all the water, they are polluted.

The next speaker was **Prof. S.A. Abbasi of Pondicherry University** who talked about Waste water treatment – 80% of waste water is poured straight into rivers without treatment – which is why they are so polluted. He said that we were going to the moon while the carpet was being pulled from under our feet. Instead of addressing the problem we were leaning the other way all the time. Untreated sewage was the number one problem – 80% is discharged untreated. 62 billion litres of untreated sewage is released into the Indian rivers daily, three trillion annually. He said we have the technology to build and make Waste water treatment plants but they are not much used:

- They are expensive and the lesser the scale the more costly they become.
- They require trained personnel

We need to develop systems that are:

- Low cost
- Easy to install
- Easy to operate
- Generate little or no waste

The road to Shefrol:

- Use plants to treat water
- Monoculture based tank systems
- Slower than other systems
- The SHEFROL idea
- Tested for two years and now started pilot plants

He then handed over to an assistant who gave a presentation on the Shefrol method. She said that Pondicherry University is great, lots of different departments – but no sewage treatment plant – so they had made a Shefrol system. Shefrol – Sheet Floor Root level.

She described with the help of powerpoint how they had dug out channels, lined with plastic sheeting and stacked with plants – weedy plants no use for anything else – waste water is then run through the channels and the roots of the plants absorb the poisonous microbes. After passing along all the channels the water emerging from the other end is clean enough to go back into the rivers. This was set up without any large outlay – no pump, no material, no chemical input. They hope that this method will be suitable for villages. This method is cheaper than the traditional Water treatment plants but slower. They had also set up a small system for one house lived in by four students. With the water emerging from the end of the system they had fed tomato plants and successfully grown tomatoes.

Prof. S.A. Abbasi then came back to say that it was very difficult to get people to try anything different, though the cost was lower and construction fairly simple people/companies etc. were reluctant to try new ideas.

The next speaker was **Dr. Paul Appasamy of Karunya University** who spoke about Biodiversity Conservation.

- Biodiversity is the natural biological capital for our life support system
- Biodiversity is the variety and variation of plants, animals, fungi and microbes in the world
- We are losing the forest system – forests are being cut down for railway sleepers etc. without any recognition of their worth
- Most biodiversity is on the tropical part of the earth

He said that in Chennai there are 7000 unoccupied flats, people do not want to move into Chennai with the water problems. He felt that instead of saying we need more water, perhaps we should say that we have enough water for xxx people and do not allow permission for more accommodation when water cannot be supplied to those additional units.

We went to **Religion and Sustainable Development – Panel discussion – sustainable living : inter Religious Perspective, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Jain perspectives**

The first speaker was **Ms Sribaia Mylavarapu** from the Hindu perspective, followed by **Ms Fathima Serah** from the Islamic perspective and finally **Mr Reshma Bhansali** from the Jain perspective. I had been looking forward to hearing about these different religions and their thoughts on the ecology. However they did not seem to be very stimulating, or perhaps not exactly easy to understand, but for whatever reason I did not gain much from this session. I felt it was encouraging that all the different perspectives had been invited but there did not seem to be a Christian perspective or a panel discussion.

Presentation of papers by students took up the rest of the afternoon and there was another very good cultural programme by schools.



The first session for Saturday morning was a **Workshop on Sustainable Living with Brahmakumaris**. They are not Christians but work spiritually. The workshop was quite interesting – a sort of group counselling session really with the emphasis on the world.

The next session was **Rev. Dr John Samuel Ponnusamy with Water for life: A prerequisite for sustainability of planet earth**: he was looking at Biblical insights about sustainable development. There are 613 commandments that a Jew should perform, because there are 613 parts of the body. Then there are instructions about time and the land – the Sabbath is a day of rest for man and there is a year of rest for the land every seven years. When you reap the harvest do not go right to the edge, leave for the poor. Humanity does not own the earth, God does. How to balance personal effort and planetary health. Is it not enough for you to drink clear water but you must also muddy with your feet what is left? Like Noah learned to live with all the creatures in the ark we must learn to live with resources in a sustainable way.

Rev. Michael Starck spoke about Climate change and the response of Faith Communities

He said that he was from the Evangelical Church of Baden which is linked with CSI and supporting CSI victims of flooding. He said that we are living in times of global crisis. The sustainable goals were welcomed by Churches in Germany.

The Agenda for 2030 was to administer/mediate/monitor eco change. The goals set for 2015 were achieved. In 1980 they had the first concept of parish based energy accounting development. The Ecological outlines of the Evangelical church of Baden had seven points (but I did not get them all down!)

- They had 'Green Rooster' parishes – a wake up call tracking energy consumption for heating, power, water and mobility
- In 200 Church of Baden churches a climate protection concept had been adopted to cut rates of CO² by 25% by 2050
- In 2005 they adopted 'We purchase differently' a service centre for ecologically ratified socially responsible goods.

The next speaker was **Dr Solomon Benjamin (EMS)** speaking on **Eco Mission and International Networking**. EMS = Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

Greening the globe for sustainable living – topical in the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, Germany. EMS has a great appreciation for work of CSI and appreciates the work of Dr. Koshy in the field of Social justice. It is based in Stuttgart and has endorsed the sustainable development goals. There are different challenges in different places:

- In Korea there is river pollution and a fine dust which gets everywhere.
- In Germany there had been a six day fire

- In Indonesia Palm Oil extraction was a problem.
- In Cape Town, South Africa there was a water crisis – the ground water was dead and there were no streams.
- In Lebanon there were piles of trash and littered beaches. Military tanks had been dumped in the water.
- In China there it was the food pattern and the toxic blanket that cloaks the skies.
- In Japan – Fukushima – we have been working with them
- Women and girls were affected – collecting wood etc
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- Things that were/should be happening
- Indigenous medicines preservation
- Seed cultivation
- Good Agriculture
- Water Harvesting

After the tea break we went onto the next topic How Green is my School? Thirteen schools and twelve colleges presented a documentary on the green initiatives of their institution

The Cultural programme this evening was by CSI Madras Diocesan Presbyters - very good but very loud with a base drum and lots of smaller drums. Those taking part were obviously enjoying it – but it is designed to be done outside where the sound can travel!



The last day of the conference – just a morning session. This began at 7.30 am with a communion service.



We then went back to the conference hall for the welcome of all the various bishops and dignitaries present, and for had the presentation of the prizes to schools and colleges and a cultural programme. Vorhees college gained a third prize. The cultural programme this morning included two items from the deaf and dumb school. The first was a set of girls dancing and the second a group of boys all in black

with white faces and white gloves who mimed a presentation about trees, growing, being watered, being cut down etc. and ended with each one holding a card, standing in a line so that the cards read SAVE WATER. The girls song/music had been all about passages from Genesis so all in tune with the general theme.



This was a well organised conference with a number of notable speakers from whom I learnt a lot of facts and heard about new ideas – however I have to say that the thought that keeps coming back to me is ‘Is there any hope that the general population will realise the severity of the problem and take such actions as they can?’ I say this because we were a group of people coming together, presumably concerned about ecological matters, staying in a City with a severe water problem and on the second day the Convener had to address the whole conference and ask that people please turn off the taps in their rooms as by leaving them running this meant that others did not have a supply.