

## SR. MAAMALIFAR M. POREKU PRESENTATION

### ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE: A CALL TO SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION THROUGH A RENEWED RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION

**“Everything is Connected: A Faith Response to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor”**

#### INTRODUCTION

Imagine this: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that feeds us, all whispering the same truth: *“You are connected to me.”* But somewhere along the way humanity has forgotten this sacred bond. We built systems that reward greed over gratitude, domination over care, and consumption over communion.

Today, creation groans, the poor cry out, echoing Saint Paul’s words “All creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19).

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si’*, “Everything is interconnected, and genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (LS 70).

This presentation invites us to rediscover that truth, that **ecological justice** is not just about environmental activism, or protecting nature. But a demand of faith, a call rooted in CST, to restoring right relationships, with God, with Oneself, with one another, and with the Earth, our common home.

It is in truth, a **call to systemic transformation**, to change not only our behaviour but the very systems and values that shape our world, and the way the world works, from within and from below, through a **renewed relationship with creation**.

#### 1. Understanding Ecological Justice in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching

**Ecological justice** is the moral and spiritual recognition that the Earth and all its creatures have intrinsic value, not merely utility. It calls for fairness, not only among human beings but also between humanity and nature and demands respect for the web of life across generations, between rich and poor, and between humanity and the natural world.

It means asking ourselves: *Does our way of living respect the rights of creation?* As Pope Francis writes, “We are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion” (*Laudato Si’* 220).

In the language of **Catholic Social Teaching**, ecological justice embodies:

- **The Dignity of the Human Person:** every person is sacred, and ecological harm always violates human dignity.
- **The Common Good:** creation is a shared inheritance meant for all, not for the profit of a few.
- **Stewardship of Creation:** we are caretakers, not owners, of God’s gift.

As *Laudato Si'* declares, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth... yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what He desired” (*LS* 21, 53).

Therefore, ecological justice demands that we **listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor**, for the degradation of one is the suffering of the other. It calls for a **moral and spiritual awakening**, a conversion of heart that restores harmony between humanity, creation, and the Creator.

## 2. Systemic Change and Systemic Transformation: Catholic Insights

To understand how to respond, let us define two key concepts that often intertwine but are not identical.

**Systemic Change** means altering or reforming unjust structures, policies, laws, institutions or systems that perpetuate injustice or inequality, so they promote the common good and protect creation. It focuses on fixing what is broken, reforming education, economics, governance, and culture to be more just and sustainable. It reflects the CST principles of **Justice, Participation, and Solidarity**.

**Systemic Transformation**, however, goes deeper. It is not only about changing systems but re-envisioning the very values, mindsets, and paradigms that shape them. It invites **conversion of heart**: personal, communal, cultural, economic, social, and political, renewing not only systems but also the values that drive them. It mirrors CST call to **Integral Human Development**, where the social, economic, ecological, political, cultural and spiritual dimensions of life are harmonized.

### ♦ Similarities Between Systemic Change and Systemic Transformation:

- Both seek long-term, structural responses to injustice.
- Both challenge the roots of ecological and social problems.
- Both require collaboration, solidarity, faith, and courage.
- Both aim for justice and sustainability for all creation.
- Both require solidarity and commitment to the common good

### ♦ Differences Between Systemic Change and Systemic Transformation:

- **Systemic change** reforms systems; **systemic transformation** converts and recreates them.
- **Change** may adjust the symptoms; **transformation** renews the heart and soul behind them.
- **Change** is structural or technical; **transformation** is spiritual and moral.

As *Laudate Deum* (2023) emphasizes, “It is no longer enough to speak of a gradual change. What we need is to transform our models of development” (*LD* 56).

True transformation integrates **faith, justice, and ecology**, the very heart of Catholic Social Teaching.

## 3. The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor: Everything Is Connected

At the heart of *Laudato Si'* and Catholic Social Teaching lies the conviction that **everything is connected**. Social injustice, environmental destruction, and spiritual emptiness are not separate crises, they are one broken story.

When the poor suffer, creation suffers. When creation suffers, the poor suffer even more. When creation is exploited, the poor suffer first and most. When the poor are oppressed, creation is often sacrificed.

As *Fratelli Tutti* teaches: “We are all brothers and sisters, sharing one common home. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself” (*FT* 8).

Deforestation, pollution, climate change, and extractive industries are not just environmental issues, they are moral and spiritual crises.

To respond faithfully, we must practice **Integral Ecology**, a vision where the social, economic, cultural, political, and ecological dimensions of life are intertwined. It demands **solidarity with the poor, option for the vulnerable, and participation in caring for our common home**.

Thus, “Everything is connected” becomes not just a phrase, but a **principle of life**, reminding us that **justice for the Earth is inseparable from justice for the poor**. To live this interconnectedness is to live the Gospel, to recognize Christ present in every creature and person.

#### **4. Systemic Transformation through a Renewed Relationship with Creation**

**Systemic transformation** begins with **ecological conversion**, a change of heart that reshapes communities, institutions, and systems. Pope Francis calls this “a community conversion,” where “the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us” (*Laudato Si'* 217).

This transformation means:

- Moving from exploitation to communion with creation.
- From possession to participation.
- From individualism to interconnectedness.

Through the lens of **Catholic Social Teaching**, this transformation calls us to:

- **Solidarity:** to stand with those most affected by environmental degradation.
- **Subsidiarity:** to empower local communities to protect their ecosystems.
- **Stewardship:** to manage creation responsibly and gratefully.
- **Participation:** to include all people, especially the marginalized, in decision-making.

When we renew our relationship with creation, we begin to see the world as **sacrament**, revealing God’s presence in all things. This renewal transforms our **economics, politics, and spirituality**, inspiring new ways of living where our economies serve life, our technologies respect limits, and our communities protect the vulnerable. We begin to see the Earth not as a resource to be exploited, but as a sacrament of God’s love.

True **systemic transformation** is not only political or social, but also **spiritual, prophetic, and incarnational**. It is when **faith, justice, and ecology converge** to join Christ in His mission to “make all things new” (*Revelation 21:5*).

## CONCLUSION

Dear friends, ecological justice is a call to ecological conversion and a prophetic Hope. The future of our planet depends on the depth of our conversion. The world does not need more consumers; it needs **guardians of life**. The Church does not need mere reformers; it needs **prophets of transformation and hope**, not prisoners of apathy.

**Ecological justice** calls us to that prophetic mission, to heal the wounded Earth, defend the poor, and transform unjust social, economic, political, cultural, and religious systems.

As Pope Francis exhorts us in *Laudato Si*, “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (*LS 217*).

In the spirit of **Catholic Social Teaching**, let us renew our relationship with creation, to see the face of Christ in every creature, hear God’s voice in the wind and the waves, and rise to build a new world where everything is truly connected, a world of **justice, peace, and love for all creation**.

## References

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