



UNESCO And Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue

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1. Introduction

The **UNESCO Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue at St Andrew's College**, Mumbai was established in 2015 under the care of the Chair-holder Advocate Giuseppe Musumeci. St. Andrew's College is one of the leading colleges in Mumbai, the Economic Capital of India. It received the Best College Award for 2015-16, instituted by the University of Mumbai. This is a prestigious award as the University of Mumbai has over 700 affiliated colleges. The academic staff and students are very active in the academic, social and cultural activities of the UNESCO Chair.

We list here a few highlights of this Chair:

2. Research Undertakings of the UNESCO Chair

Apart from the regular academic and inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue programmes for peace building, it is also engaged in high level research activities. Currently it is engaged in two major research programmes, namely:

1. On the ***"Relationship between Culture and Ecology in the Context of Increasing Water Scarcity in two geographical regions in south India"***.
2. And the other is on the ***"Marginalized Seasonal Migrant Tribal Women and Children of Katkari Tribes in Maharashtra" (Western region of India)***.

The first research on "The Relationship between Culture and Ecology in the context of increasing Water Scarcity" will concentrate on the mutual interaction between Ecology and Culture as well as Culture on Ecology.

The Second Research will study the plight of children and women of Katkari tribes who are seasonal migrants in Maharashtra. There is a very high mortality rate of children among these tribes. Since they are migrants looking for work after the rainy season, they are employed in Brick Making industry. Due to the migration, the female children are given in marriage at a younger age when the girls are not ready physically bearing children. The

research will concentrate on the relationship between migration, joblessness, early marriage and child mortality.

3. Diploma Course by the UNESCO Chair

The UNESCO Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue is also running a Diploma Course for Graduate students on the subject: ***“Religion and Society, Peace and Dialogue”***.

This Diploma course is approved by the University of Mumbai. Eligibility required to register for this programme is minimum of XII Std. passed. The objective of this course is: To understand the spiritualities of various religions; To strengthen the relationship between members of different religions; To promote the principles of inter-religious harmony; To help the students to get to know other cultures and religions; To bridge the gap between various religious communities; To stem the growing mistrust between religious communities through sound knowledge of each other’s beliefs and traditions; To help the students to become aware of the transformative role they can play to promote peace and national integration.

The course shall be part time course for duration of 2 years – that will include teaching, presentations and praxis programme. At the end of the course, the dissertation has to be completed under the guidance of a postgraduate teacher recognized by St. Andrew’s College which includes also an international team of scholars. The praxis program is meant to put theoretical knowledge from the fields of Religion and Society into practice as well as engage in inductive theorizing on change, strategies and action for bringing about transformation, resolution and reconciliation in the communities, areas, regions that we work in.

COURSE CONTENT:

I Core courses (compulsory any two) (48 hrs each)

1. Religion and Society: An Introduction
2. Religion and Society: Study of Indian Religions – Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism
3. Religion and Society: Study of Indian Religions - Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity

II Electives (Any one from the following groups) (35 hrs each)

1. Society, Culture and Religion: Inter-Cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue
2. The ‘Golden Rule’ as Basis for Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue
3. Prayer in Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism
4. Introduction to Psychology of Religious Experience

III The Praxis Program (compulsory for all) (20 hrs)

4. Collaboration with Other Academic Institutions

The UNESCO Chair is also collaborating with other Post-graduate institutions in Mumbai affiliated to the University of Mumbai like the **Institute of Indian Culture, a Post Graduate**

Research Centre in Anthropology and Sociology, and Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work for the promotion of Sustainable Development for a Humane Society.

Knowing well, the importance of “water” for the sustainable development, these academic institutions are conducting a Post-Graduate Diploma course on “WATER AND SUSTAINABILITY IN A INTER-RELIGIOUS COLLABORATION FOR A HUMANE SOCIETY”.

1. The objectives of the Post Graduate Diploma Course in Inter Religious Collaboration for Sustainable Development for a Humane Society are :
 - a) To promote an integrated system of research, training, information, documentation and animation of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.
 - b) Facilitating collaboration between high level researchers and teaching staff in other similar institutions in India and other regions of the world
 - c) To facilitate the conduct of advanced research on religious, anthropological, cultural, social and economic issues.
2. The duration of the course will be one academic year, comprising 18 credits of 180 hours, including lectures, discussions, project work, workable at the rate of two hours a day of lecture time.
3. Keeping in mind the foundational aims and objectives of this Course, the subjects selected for this course as well as the Professors, may be chosen as per the changing situations in society and the corresponding needs.
4. Competent professors will be selected by the Coordinator, and their remuneration will be as per University of Mumbai rules and regulations.
5. Students registering for the course will have to pay a nominal fee fixed by the Coordinator of the course.
6. The academic heads of the three collaborating institutions will meet regularly to monitor the smooth running of the course and to ensure the academic quality of the subjects taught.

5. International Cooperation

The rationale of such project is:

Water has been rightly called the “Blue Gold” given its value to us. However, differently from gold, water has an intrinsic value, as it is essential for life from a biological to a cultural and symbolic point of view. When astrobiologists look for planets suitable for human beings to living in, they search first and foremost for vestiges of water, such as is the case now in research about the possibility of life in Mars. The importance of water for life has been acknowledged in every culture, religion, social form of life. In a majority of religious rituals we find the usage of water, in baptism, in ablutions, in consecrations, in purifying baths. Water is indeed associated with purity, with washing away stains and sores, with sanitation; but

also with flux, with movement, with change, with the dynamic aspects of reality. Its symbolism is very strong and very meaningful for societies from ancient times to the present day. Greek philosophers asserted the importance of water as the primordial element, such as Thales of Miletus, and as representing flux and change such as in Heraclitus of Ephesus. Major civilizations have grown in the margins of great rivers in different times in all regions of our planet such as Mesopotamia, the Mississippi, the Indus, the Yang-tse, the Danube, Volga, the Amazon, the Nile, the Congo, just to mention some of many more. Similarly, great cities have developed as sea harbors, important for navigation and for fishery, accounting for the prosperity of these centers. Water is thus a source of life and of riches in almost every way we can understand this term.

However, water has become scarce. At least drinkable, usable water for human beings has become scarce for the first time in a scale unheard of in previous times. Of course, different peoples inhabiting deserts or very arid regions have learned to live with scarcity of water, they have developed their own ways of dealing with this situation, their own techniques, and we certainly can learn from them. Nevertheless, shortage of water seems to affect us all at present times.

This requires urgent measures. The first step, as always, is the need for an enhancement of the conscience of this situation. This scarcity has not always been so evident especially for common people and for people living in regions where this scarcity is not so immediately apparent. So, people, beyond scientists and government officials, have to learn that shortage of water even if not affecting directly a specific community, should be a major concern for us all. The need of a systemic environmental balance in our planet must be prevalent. This is, of course, an issue that depends essentially on education at all levels, not only formal education at schools and other learning establishments. It depends on the family, on society, on all sorts of activities such as sports and arts that can help at enhancing this conscience. We have a responsibility for the education of the future generations. For educating them in order that they may give a central value to their own responsibility for the planet in a way that did not happen in the past.

The second step goes in the direction of an urgent development in the technological level of different measures that can prevent the aggravation of this problem and offer alternatives, such as irrigation, desalination, depollution and capture of rain water to mitigate the shortage situation. The combined effort of scientists and the allocation of funds for research in these areas will certainly achieve results. But, technology must be seen as a means to attain an end: a new international policy that can mitigate water shortage and make water supplies accessible to everyone.

The third step refers to decision-making and concerns essentially the political world. Science and technology can provide the instruments for change in practices and the overcoming of crucial situations of shortage of water supplies; however, the decision of how and why to apply these instruments, the establishment of priorities and the consideration of short and

long term issues depends of decisions made by governments These decisions should reflect the interests of different countries taking into account international consensus and cooperation. Of course, in an economically globalized world such as we live, in these decisions do not affect just one country but affect the whole planet and thus a consensus among countries is essential. Agencies such as UN-Water, in fact a UN inter-agency, have an essential role in this process since they are the privileged stances for this kind of discussion and negotiation, that is, for consensus building and for more lasting decisions. However, we all realize that it is not enough to make decisions, but they have to be implemented, enforced and the results aimed at must be achieved and submitted to evaluation leading to new decisions and to the whole cycle pointed out. It must be a permanent process. Otherwise, we will have failed to do what is urgently needed. The test of the validity and correctness of the decision-making is in its results. The best intentions are not enough.

We come now exactly to what contemporary thinkers like Jürgen Habermas¹ have been calling attention for decades. Technical rationality with its aim at achieving practical results must be subordinate to rationality aiming at discussion and consensus building on how to use technical results. But, the relation can only be understood dialectically and rationality aimed at discussion must show that it can actually go beyond the discussion level and lead to the concrete use of technology for the results it has defined. Critical, discursive rationality establishes consensual values and defines rights and duties for societies and individuals. However, it must not remain at a conceptual level alone, but must be effective in what it proposes to achieve.

Some of these ideas and proposals have as their starting point the “*Séminaire International: Éthique et Spiritualité de l’Environnement*” that took place in Rabat, Morocco from 28 to the 30th April 1992. The perspective inaugurated there was to articulate ethical, political, technological and religious point of views on the subject of the relevance of water for the planet². The religious point of view is particularly relevant since it can, through the exercise of spirituality, point the way to the values that should give us the guidelines for our action as citizens, as policy makers, as scientist, as human beings. The programme of this *Séminaire* included a variety of papers dealing with this subject in an interdisciplinary perspective, but having the perspective on spirituality as an articulating subject. There were three main blocs: (1) anthropological and philosophical perspective; (2) spiritual perspective; (3) scientific and ethical issues. But, these three main blocs should be seen as leading to an integrated discussion towards which spirituality serves as the guiding principle. This perspective was extraordinarily original and innovative and it remains in many ways an inspiration.

¹ J. Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1968.

² *Éthique & Spiritualité de l’Environnement*, Séminaire International, Rabat-Maroc, 28 au 30 Avril, 1992, Louis Rey, Directeur de la Publication, Guy Trédaniel, éditeur, Editions de la Maisnie, 1994.

In our present context, Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si* brought in a central reference for this reflection since it articulates environmental issues emerging from our present dramatic situation of which he gives many examples with deeper ethical and religious issues. We can quote the encyclical as saying precisely that water is "indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems". He goes on to show how in the world's major religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism water is always a central principle. We should be however very critical of manipulative competitions that see water as "the blue gold" and as a "saleable commodity", considering instead that it is a common good to be shared by all. Images of the worship of water at the river Ganges and of several water shrines in India are representative of this view.

In this sense I point out especially to Cardinal Paul Poupard's contribution to the Rabat seminary, « *Éthique et spiritualité des rapports entre la créature, son Créateur et la création* », as providing the central guidelines for the discussion of these key issues in an ethical and spiritual perspective. In Cardinal Poupard's paper it is shown in a magisterial way how spirituality establishes the most solid ground for solidarity and moral responsibility without which any discussion of these issues will not go further. In emphasizing the relation between Creator, creation and creature, Cardinal Poupard, makes clear the transcendent dimension of environmental ethics.

We therefore propose a truly interdisciplinary and international discussion, having a great diversity of approaches but also converging to the central issues of our collective responsibility on environmental issues and the scarcity of water.

Methodology:

Comparative study between the work done at PUC-Rio and at the UNESCO Chair leading to strategic planning for both institutions on basis of what each can learn from the other.

Although there are many strong differences between Mumbai and Rio de Janeiro both cities also face big challenges in environmental issues.

Intended Actions:

PUC-Rio has an *Interdisciplinary Center for Environmental Studies* (NIMA – *Núcleo Interdisciplinar de Meio Ambiente*) which will be the university unity responsible for the planning and execution of the project.

Organize a two day *workshop* with the participation of specialists from Mumbai and PUC-Rio in either of the two cities in order to plan the future development of common research.

Use Distance Learning for the development of a *Permanent Forum* for the discussion of the relevant issues.

Concerning Environmental Education:

- Propose the creation of a specific discipline on *Environmental Ethics* or *Ethics and the Environment*

- Disseminate environmental issues in different disciplines in an interdisciplinary perspective since these issues apply to many different areas from Chemistry and Civil Engineering to Social Work and Geography.

Expected Results

Develop joint research projects between PUC-Rio and the Archdioceses of Mumbai on sustainability and water resources.

Enhance awareness, especially on young students, of the importance of a rational usage of water resources.

Develop teaching material for Environmental Education.

Establish a Permanent Forum for discussion of Environmental Issues and for sharing experience.

6. Organizing International Symposium

UNESCO & Cardinal Paul Poupard Chair has been organizing several International Symposiums on relevant and current themes. Prominent international scholars are invited to participate in the academic activities. To cite a few examples: During the Academic Year 2018-2019, an international symposium was organized on the subject, *"A New Utopia: Promoting Dialogue for a Humane and Sustainable Society"* at St. Andrew's College. A few other Symposium held by the UNESCO Chair:

"The Role Of Education To Foster Religious Harmony", during 2017-2018.

"Family and Nation Building", during 2016-2017.

"Relevance of Religion", during 2015-2016.

"Impact of Media on Religion and Culture", during 2014- 2015.

"Care for the Earth" during 2013-2014.

"Significance of Life and Death in Three Major World Religions", during 2012-2013.

"Water: Issues and Challenges" during 2011-2012.

7. Publication of an International Journal by the UNESCO Chair

The UNESCO Chair has been publishing an International Journal on "Ethics and Society: An International Journal – Religions and Cultures for Peace and Harmony". The main aim of the journal is to publish articles, reviews and informed discussions on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues. The journal welcomes original papers from both academicians and practitioners dealing with inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues. All the articles published in this journal are peer-reviewed by the subject experts before publication.

8. Conclusion

The **UNESCO Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue at St Andrew's College**, Mumbai is engaged in promoting academic activities especially among the College youth of India. It is also undertaking relevant research to

provide information to build a just and humane society. It is promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious harmony in the pluralistic country of India. It is undertaking and collaborating with other academic institutions for “Water Conservation” and sustainable development as envisaged by the UNESCO and collaborating with the national governments.
