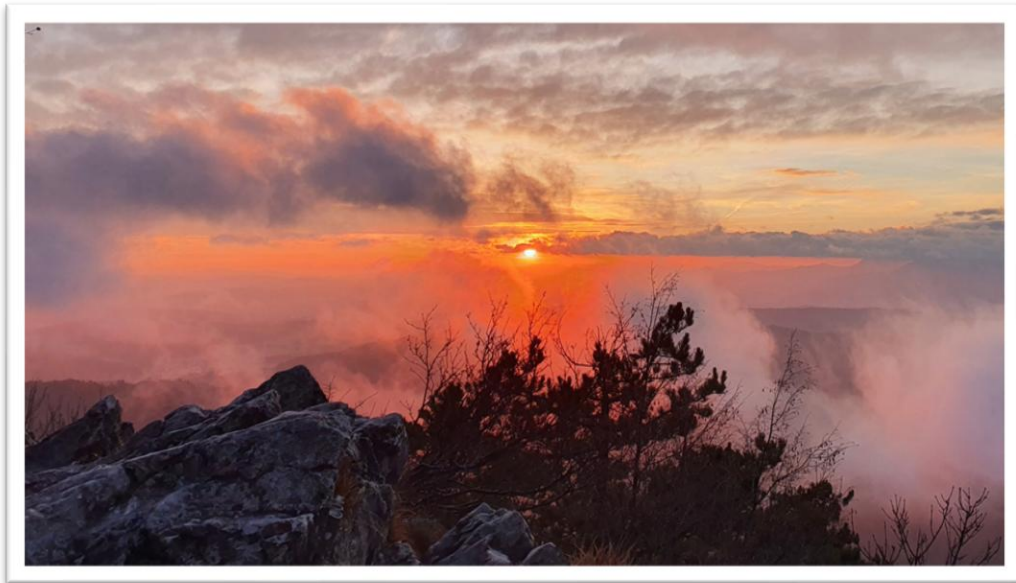


NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY

International Scientific Conference

Ljubljana, December 6th, 2025



Organization

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology
The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Faculty of Theology
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies

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Program and abstracts

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University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology

(Institute of Moral Theology and Spiritual Questions of Modern Culture; P6-0269: Religion, ethics, education, and challenges of modern society; J6-50212: The Power of Emotions and the Status of Female Characters in Different Literary Genres of the Old Testament; J6-60105: Theology and Digitalization: Anthropological and Ethical Challenges)

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Faculty of Theology

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Editor:

Ivan Platovnjak

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Organizing committee

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Editor: Ivan Platovnjak SJ

Cover image: Matej Purger

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PROGRAM

On-line: <https://uni-lj-si.zoom.us/j/98469796263>, Meeting ID: 984 6979 6263

14:30-14:35 Welcome speeches

Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ljubljana **Tadej Stegu**, PhD, Asst.

President of the Organizing Committee **Ivan Platovnjak**, PhD, Assc. Prof.

(Chairperson: Ivan Platovnjak)

Lectures

14:35-14:55 **Tone Svetelj** (USA): *Positive and Negative Sides of Secularist Relations to Nature in Charles Taylor's Thought*

14:55-15:10 **Daniel Miščin** (Croatia): *Heidegger's Hölderlin, Spirituality, and Nature*

15:10-15:25 **Erika Prijatelj** (Slovenia, USA): *Nature and the Human Mind: Psychological and Spiritual Processes in Integral Human Development*

15:25-15:40 **Wojciech Zyzak** (Poland): *Theological Foundations for Ecological Spirituality. Reflections based on Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*

15:40-16:15 Discussion and Break

(Chairperson: Tone Svetelj)

Lectures

16:15-16:30 **Đurica Pardon** (Croatia): *Your Immortal Spirit is in all things (Wis 12:1). The Eco-Theological Dimension of Biblical Wisdom Literature*

16:30-16:45 **Vicente Chong** (USA): *Retrieving the Symbol of the Heart in a Heartless World*

16:45-17:00 **Rok Bečan** (Spain): *The Natural Contemplation of Evagrius Ponticus*

17:00-17:15 **Ivan Platovnjak** (Slovenia): *Contemplating the Goodness and Beauty of Nature as a Path to Ecological Conversion*

17:15-17:45 Discussion and Break

(Chairperson: Erika Prijatelj)

Lectures

17:45-18:00 **Workineh Kelbessa** (Ethiopia): *Oromo Ecotheology and Its Impact on the Environment*

18:00-18:15 **Ahmet Taşkın** (Türkiye): *"Loving the Created for the Sake of the Creator": An Islamic Contribution to Ecological Spirituality*

18:15-18:30 **Arokiaraj Joseph Patrick SJ** (India): *Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Spirituality and Ecological Healing*

18:30-18:45 **Jagadeeswaraiah Murala** (India): *Nature, a Divine Manifestation: Spirituality of Nature, an Indian Perspective*

18:45-19:00 Discussion

19:00 Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

The conference aims to foster a deep and fruitful dialogue between the natural and human sciences, between faith and science, between spirituality and care for creation. The central question of the conference is: How do we understand and live the spiritual dimension of nature in today's world, marked by ecological crisis, secularization, and spiritual searching?

We live in a time when nature is facing relentless exhaustion: climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and consumerism threaten our common home. At the same time, modern humanity – despite technological advances and scientific progress – remains spiritually hungry, seeking connection with something greater, with the sacred, with a sense of meaning that transcends mere utility.

Therefore, the time has come for a profound and integral reflection on the relationship between nature and spirituality. A time to connect biblical, theological, religious, philosophical, and psychological understandings of nature with the practical and experiential expressions of spirituality emerging in the contemporary human experience.

Over the past decades, scientific discourse on the relationship between nature and spirituality has expanded, particularly in the following areas:

- Theological frameworks, such as those offered by Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*, which calls for ecological conversion, a renewed spirituality, and the pursuit of integral ecology;
- Philosophical approaches, including phenomenological accounts of natural experience by thinkers like Henry David Thoreau, Martin Heidegger, and Charles Taylor;
- Psychological research, which highlights the positive effects of nature on mental health, particularly within the field of ecopsychology;
- Sociological analyses, focusing on contemporary spiritual movements connected to nature;
- Interreligious dialogue, which increasingly emphasizes a shared ethical and spiritual foundation for the care of creation.

Despite these contributions, a number of essential and urgent questions remain:

- How can we recover the spiritual and mystical dimension of creation in Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives—beyond a merely ethical appeal?
- How can we theologically reflect on the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, creation and the presence of God, without slipping into pantheism?
- How can we philosophically deepen our understanding of nature as a subject of relationship, not merely as an object of exploitation?
- How can we psychologically ground humanity's need for nature and recognize the natural environment as a space of spiritual transformation?
- How can we, in the spirit of interreligious dialogue, develop shared spiritual foundations for ecological ethics and reverence for the world as sacred?

ABSTRACTS

Tone Svetelj, PhD, Asst. Prof, Hellenic College; Boston College, USA, tsvetelj@hchc.edu

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Abstract: Charles Taylor argues that modern secular society has a conflicted relationship with nature, experiencing "cross-pressures" between opposing forces. Positively, secularism allows people to find genuine meaning in nature through their senses, emotions, and personal authenticity without requiring religious beliefs. However, dominant secular thinking treats nature mainly as a tool or resource, viewing it mechanically rather than recognizing its deeper value. In the "immanent frame" (secular worldview), values become personal preferences rather than objective truths, making it difficult to explain why nature matters beyond individual utility. This proves problematic for environmental policy, which gets trapped in cost-benefit calculations. Additionally, modern thinking's human-centeredness makes granting nature independent value difficult. Taylor suggests secular thinking can stay "open" to deeper meanings or become "closed." Modern people thus feel nature's profound importance but lack adequate concepts to express or defend it—a tension that continues in today's environmental crises.

Keywords: Charles Taylor, secularism, nature, environmental policy, cross-pressure

Daniel Miščin, PhD, Professor/PhD, Asst. Prof., University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Croatia, dmiscin@ffrz.unizg.hr

Heidegger's Hölderlin, Spirituality, and Nature

Abstract: The lecture explores how Martin Heidegger, in his readings of Hölderlin's hymns *The Rhine*, *The Ister*, and *The Only One*, reshapes the notion of spirituality through the experience of nature. For Heidegger, Hölderlin's poetry does not describe nature but reveals it as a site of the divine—the place where earth, sky, mortals, and gods form the *Geviert*. Spirituality thus ceases to be inward or moral transcendence and becomes a way of dwelling in the openness of Being. The lecture argues that Heidegger's Hölderlin offers a framework for rethinking spirituality as a mode of inhabiting the earth, where the forgotten unity of nature, thought, and the sacred is restored.

Keywords: Heidegger, Hölderlin, spirituality, nature, Geviert

Erika Prijatelj, PhD, Asst. Prof., Hellenic College, USA; Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Erika.Prijatelj@teof.uni-lj.si

Nature and the Human Mind: Psychological and Spiritual Processes in Integral Human Development

Abstract: This paper explores how natural environments shape human well-being through psychological and spiritual processes. Building on Marc Berman's research, it argues that 'green spaces' and 'blue spaces' reduce mental fatigue, enhance attention, and support emotional and physiological calm. These environments also foster social connection and experiences of awe and

meaning, highlighting nature's role in cultivating cognitive clarity, emotional steadiness, and interior spiritual life. By integrating empirical findings with a holistic view of the person as body, mind, and spirit, the paper shows that nature is both restorative and formative for integral human development.

Keywords: nature and well-being, human mind, cognitive restoration, spiritual life, psychological processes, integral human development

Wojciech Zyzak, PhD, Prof., Pontifical University of John Paul II Cracow. Theological Faculty, Poland. wojciech.zyzak@upjp2.edu.pl

Theological Foundations for Ecological Spirituality. Reflections based on Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter Laudato si

Abstract: The presentation analysis theological foundations for ecological spirituality based on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato si. These foundations can be found in the very heart of the history of salvation. It's great stages are: the creation of the world and mankind; the original sin; redemption through the incarnation, the death and the resurrection of Christ; the history in the epoch of the Church; and the fulfilment by God in the eternal and glorious Kingdom. The man, as a rational creature, takes part in the power of God and that's why, the human activities in favour of amelioration of his life's standards answer to God's plans. At the same time, the more man's power grows, the more his responsibility for the world increases. In this perspective one should consider the incarnation of the Logos, which is not only the beginning of the full raising from the bondage of sin for mankind, but its sense is to bring all creatures to the participation in the divine life of the Trinity, or to the relation with it. The salvation of man is a goal, but not the unique and not the whole of the incarnation, in which the inclusion of the whole universe in the ultimate plan of God is the question. That's why, God-Man is the cornerstone of heaven and earth, the terminal point of the whole universe. One can express the development of the world towards Christ so, that its gradual progress finds in him the summit. The Church is a historical and social sacrament of the divinization of the world. Christ in his salvific incarnation redeems, saves and divinizes the whole man and with him and through him the whole universe. This mission of the cosmic recapitulation is important for the Church and for every Christian. So, the task of the Church is to transform the world into God's Kingdom. Also in this perspective one should see the Christian ascetic effort and the whole incarnational spirituality.

Keywords: ecological spirituality, incarnational spirituality, recapitulation, acsetism

Đurica Pardon, PhD, Asst. Prof., Catholic University of Croatia, Croatia. durica.pardon@unicath.hr

Your Immortal Spirit is in all things (Wis 12:1). The Eco-Theological Dimension of Biblical Wisdom Literature

Abstract: Biblical wisdom offers insights that guide humanity toward a sustainable life in harmony with creation. Analysis of Sirach 16:26–17:14 and Wisdom 11:24–12:1 shows that wisdom literature is simultaneously theological, anthropological, and ecological. It leads to knowledge of God and the world as a locus of divine manifestation, while shaping humanity's vocation within

creation. Biblical wisdom fosters a spirituality that goes beyond intellectual grasp of religious devotion and responsibility to God, embracing an ecological spirituality grounded in moral duty and the cultivation of harmonious relationships with other creatures. Thus, a wise and spiritual life is expressed through concrete practices that nurture balance with the environment.

Keywords: biblical wisdom, biblical spirituality, human ecology, ecological spirituality, harmony with creation

Vicente Chong, PhD, Asst. Prof., Boston College, Clough School of Theology and Ministry, USA. vicente.chong@bc.edu

Retrieving the Symbol of the Heart in a Heartless World

Abstract: In this paper, I will explore the heart as a symbol that connects nature and spirituality. Pope Francis said that the world has lost its heart. By using this expression, Francis meant that humanity has lost the sense of interconnectedness that makes us human. Such interconnectedness includes our relationship with nature and the poor. Hence, our current ecological crisis is largely due to an anthropological crisis, that is, the loss of our human heart. Therefore, I argue that we need to retrieve the symbol of the heart to face our ecological situation. Thus, in my lecture, firstly, I will explain the heart as a symbol of the entire human person. Secondly, I will look at two Biblical texts that speak about the heart. Finally, I will suggest some practical implications of these theological reflections for our spiritual life.

Keywords: heart, symbol, human person, pope Francis, interconnectedness

Rok Bečan, PhD candidate, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid (Spain), rok.becan@rkc.si

The Natural Contemplation of Evagrius Ponticus

Abstract: Evagrius, the philosopher of the Egyptian desert, stands as a pivotal figure in the development of the tradition of spiritual progress from praxis (ascesis) to theology (mystics). At its core lies *theoria physikē*, a synthesis of classical systematic (meta)physics (Aristotle) and Hellenistic thought (Stoicism, Plotinus), interwoven with biblical exegesis and understood as the universal book of God. Its principal themes include the sapiential contemplation of beings and the organic intelligibility inscribed within the *logoi* of creation as a just and providential means. Rather than a cosmology, this is an integral philosophical, psychological, and spiritual system, markedly distinct from scientific philosophy grounded in modern physics. Here, nature is conceived both as an object and a spiritual quality that facilitates and ordines the experiential journey toward God.

Keywords: natural contemplation, Evagrius Ponticus, systematic spiritual theology

Ivan Platovnjak SJ, PhD, Assc. Prof., Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Ivan.Platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

Contemplating the Goodness and Beauty of Nature as a Path to Ecological Conversion

Abstract: This lecture examines the contemplation of the goodness and beauty of nature as an essential dimension of holistic Christian spirituality, within which ecological spirituality emerges as both a natural and necessary component. Drawing on biblical texts, the patristic and medieval theological tradition (Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas), as well as modern theologians (von Balthasar, Ratzinger, Pope Francis), the contribution demonstrates that the beauty of creation leads the human person toward wonder, gratitude, and inner transformation. Pope Francis, especially in *Laudato si'*, emphasizes that ecological conversion is not an optional task but a constitutive element of Christian spiritual life, which recognizes the world as God's gift. Contemplation of nature thus becomes a spiritual act through which the human person enters into communion with God and the created world and from this experience develops a responsible, reverent, and sustainable relationship with creation. The goodness and beauty of the created world thereby become a path toward mature and actively loving Christian discipleship.

Keywords: Christian spirituality; ecological spirituality; contemplation of nature; creation theology; beauty of creation; *Laudato si'*; theological aesthetics; ecological conversion

Workineh Kelbessa, PhD, professor, Department of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. workinehkelbessa@yahoo.com

Oromo Ecotheology and Its Impact on the Environment.

Abstract: This paper explores Oromo ecotheology and its impact on the environment. The Oromo people, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, cherish the natural ecosystem in which they live. Waaqa (God) is believed to be the creator of everything in the world. Ayyaana mediates the relationship between Waaqa and human beings. All living things are inherently influenced by the harmonious relationship between Waaqa and the Earth. Waaqa requires humans to coexist responsibly with other living things on Earth. Although human beings are endowed with the intelligence to understand cosmic events, they are not superior to other creatures, nor can they plunder other creatures at will. This paper argues that a deep understanding of the worldviews of such people as the Oromo of Ethiopia is absolutely fundamental in terms of solving the world's environmental crisis. Oromo ecotheology can be a potential source of ecological wisdom and provide long-term practical strategies for ecologists and environmental ethicists.

Keywords: Ecotheology, Environment, Oromo, Waaqa, Ayyaana, Saffuu

Ahmet Taşkın, PhD, Asst. Prof., Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir, Türkiye. ataskinn@gmail.com

Loving the Created for the Sake of the Creator: An Islamic Contribution to Ecological Spirituality

Abstract: This presentation explores the theological and mystical foundations of ecological spirituality through the dictum of the thirteenth-century Turkish Sufi Yunus Emre: "*Love the created for the sake of the Creator.*" In Emre's vision, love is not an ethical command but a relational participation in divine reality. All beings are loved as manifestations of the Beloved, revealing a cosmology in which creation is a living sign of God's presence.

Emre's insight gains theological depth when viewed through the Māturīdī tradition, in which the universe is grounded in *ḥikmah*—divine wisdom and purpose. For Emre, this wisdom that reason

perceives as divine order becomes divine love that the heart embraces. By placing Emre's synthesis of reason and love in dialogue with the ecological spirituality of *Laudato si'*, this presentation hopes to contribute an Islamic theological perspective on ecological spirituality grounded in divine love.

Keywords: nature, spirituality, ecological crisis, Yunus Emre, Māturīdī theology, religion

Arokiaraj Joseph Patrick, PhD, Department of Philosophy, Loyola College, Chennai, India.
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Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Spirituality and Ecological Healing

Abstract: Raimon Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision offers a compelling response to both our current ecological crisis and the spiritual poverty that characterises much of contemporary life. His non-dualistic framework challenges the Western dualistic thinking that separates mind from matter, human from nature, and sacred from secular – divisions that have both enabled environmental destruction and impoverished our spiritual understanding through otherworldly detachment.

Panikkar's innovative framework integrates three fundamental dimensions of reality: cosmos (nature), theos (divine), and anthropos (consciousness) as mutually indwelling aspects of a single, unified reality. This perspective repositions humans not as separate controllers of nature, but as conscious participants in cosmic evolution. From this understanding, environmental concern transforms from an external moral obligation into a practice of cosmic self-care, while environmental action itself becomes a form of spiritual practice.

Drawing from his unique East-West intellectual heritage, Panikkar demonstrates how non-dual awareness can simultaneously heal both planetary destruction and spiritual alienation. This approach offers practical pathways where contemplative development naturally generates ecological commitment, creating an integrated response to the interconnected crises of our time.

Keywords: cosmotheandricism, ecological spirituality, Raimon Panikkar, environmental theology, nature mysticism, intercultural dialogue

Jagadeeswaraiah Murala SJ, PhD, Asst. Prof., Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy, Loyola College, Chennai, India. muralajagadish@gmail.com

Nature, a Divine Manifestation: Spirituality of Nature, an Indian Perspective

According to Indian spirituality the entire universe is a manifestation of the Divine. Humans are part of this universe along with other beings. Since the universe is a manifestation of the divine the whole nature is looked upon as holy. Worship of nature (trees, rivers, mountains) is common in Indian philosophy because of this spirituality.

The manifestation of the Divine is expressed in the Scriptures like Rgveda, which is dated about 1500 BC in a hymn called *Nāsadiya-sūkta*. The divine from which the universe emerged is described as non-describable leading the seeker to have an experience of non-duality with the divine.

The metaphysics of well-known Indian Schools like Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika and Vedānta express this profound relationship between nature and the divine. Ultimately, the seeker gets liberation (*mokṣa*) by realizing oneself as the divine.



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