

We are all in this together

Theological education should include environmental issues for creating a greater awareness in people on sanctity of life and environment. We need to internalise the truth that humans and the rest of creation belong together and the peaceful survival of mankind rests on the proper use and care of natural resources.

MARTIN ADHIKARY

CLIMATE change directly hits Bangladesh and will continue to do so. Low-lying Bangladesh is under constant threat of flooding and crop production failure. Millions of people are already exposed to climate change through extreme weather, rising sea levels, and river erosion.

Stability in climate, eradication of poverty, health and sanitation, and overall human development -- all are interlinked. All the other MDGs will remain elusive if the seventh one (achievement of environmental sustainability) is not achieved.

According to the Bible, man is not the owner of anything, but the manager or steward of God's creation. The Psalmist wrote: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." (Psalm 24:1, see also Acts 17:24).

The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the soil we till and the sunshine and the rain we cherish are all God's gifts. But we use these resources thoughtlessly.

According to the Genesis account of the creation of the world, man is created in God's image and likeness. This reflects on God's moral attributes of love, holiness, justice, and peace, so that man can be the vice-regent of

creation to protect, nurture, and enjoy and let others enjoy them, and praise Him.

In these scriptures, the concepts of ruling or having dominion or subduing creation, naming of the other animals, etc by man can be understood to mean having the responsible authority to care under God's sovereignty.

But we are responsible to God: we have the most dignified position under God to work as the faithful stewards of his creation.

When mankind went too far with our lust and greed, disrespecting God, He sent the deluge and destroyed all mankind except the one just man, Noah, and his family. But God renewed His creation and blessed it anew.

Classical western Christian theology was based on a dichotomy between matter and spirit, man and nature. As a result of this, man alienates from nature. One way we suffer alienation is the lack of faithful stewardship of resources. By our selfish use and abuse of resources we alienate ourselves from other people, from nature and environment and also from God and have failed the mandate of stewardship of the resources of the world.

Churches and Christian NGOs can orient people to implement the stewardship mandate.

From a historical point of view, the Church has failed in this mission. Let

me quote Martha Kirkpatrick: "The crisis state of our planet has been recognised for decades as a problem that has serious -- one might say dire -- implications for human and ecological health. For the last forty years, environmental concerns have involved scientists, engineers, lawyers, architects, urban planners, writers, poets, artists, and ethicists as well as government at all levels, businesses, nonprofits, hospitals and schools. In short, it has involved practically everyone, except the churches." (Anglican Theological Review)

Many of the environmental problems are caused by the production and consumption patterns of the rich nations, who deplete the world's natural resources, creating imbalance in the eco-system. What we need now is eco-justice. Without justice there can be no peace and harmony and no sustainable future for mankind.

Christian NGOs have been playing a good role in transforming community awareness about environmental issues and climate change. They need, however, to focus on this more. I am reminded of a Chinese proverb: "If you are thinking of a year sow a seed, if you are thinking for a decade plant a tree; and if you are thinking for a generation or even for a century make people aware."

Influencing of public opinion and policy makers on such issues are of great importance. Christian NGOs should join hands with the government and other national and international organisations to address the concerned issues. They can concentrate on empowering community people to adapt to environment degradation and climate change.

Christian NGOs and churches can organise and, or participate in inter-faith dialogues on issues like climate/environment to mutually inform each other what the different faiths/world-views have to say about these.

The very issue of climate, ecology and environment is a faith-issue, affecting the whole creation. We have faith in a creator God, who sustains His creation, renew His creation. We believe in the sustainable future, holistic growth of mankind. We need to be both God-centred as well as eco-centred the same time. Towards this end there is no alternative to a pragmatic interpretation of scripture.

For instance, let us take Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over (have dominion) the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

The original Hebrew words that I italicised in this verse respectively are *barak, parah, rabah, male, kabash*, and *radah*. All these terms must be interpreted from a godly perspective of holiness, love and justice. Man is supposed to have godly control over God's creation and harness resources for use. However, over the centuries this important scripture has perhaps been interpreted with an anthropocentric bias.

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Praying for an ark?

care of natural resources.

The Bible testifies to a covenant-making God, who made covenant with Adam for the care of his creation. In course of time he renewed the same with Noah. We are reminded of the chaos and disorder of Genesis 1:2 (the formless, emptiness and darkness) by the deluge in Genesis 7-8.

After the deluge, God renews the same Covenant with universal application, i.e. including all living beings: "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." (Gen. 9:17).

The affluent Western nations primarily are to blame for the environmental pollution and ecological

imbalance on a regional and global scale, while the poor and developing ones are responsible for the smaller and local versions of the same. God gave man the world as a banquet of good food and drink. Are we perhaps turning it into a huge garbage bin?

A holistic world-view is needed. Human life is not to be seen as isolated. The environment is intricately lined up with all human development. Before creating man, God created the right environment for him. So man needs to love and protect the environment, not only to consume, but also to conserve.

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Bulls will have their day

When stocks do poorly versus bonds and inflation, it has always been a great buying opportunity. It has only happened twice before in America: in the second quarter of 1932, and the third quarter of 1949. Things looked pretty grim back then, too -- in Q2 of 1932, you had the Depression, financial scandals, and the rise of Hitler.

BARTON BIGGS

AT a recent dinner this writer attended with the glitterati of some of the world's major investment institutions, about half the group believed that over the next couple of years stock markets would set new lows below those of early March.

Almost everyone agreed it would be a long time before a new global bull market emerged in the US or the rest of the world. Instead, markets would trade within a broad, painfully low range similar to the one that prevailed from 1966 to 1982, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average wandered aimlessly between 500 and 1000. Considering all the financial and economic problems the world faces, it's hard to disagree, but I do.

As the wine flowed and tongues flapped, a consensus emerged that economic growth in the developed economies would be a paltry 1% to 2% a year and that the annual returns from

stocks in the US, Europe, and Japan over the next five years would be in the mid -- single digits at best. There were some who argued that the emerging markets would provide faster growth and richer returns -- perhaps around 10% per year -- but the skeptics maintained this was unrealistic if the S&P 500 delivers only 4% to 6%. Too many of the developing economies are too dependent on exports to the big developed economies.

But there is another forecast worth considering, though it might sound Pollyanna-ish. It goes like this. The major stock markets around the world have just been through one of the most dismal 5-, 10-, and 20-year periods in history, both compared to bonds and also in real (inflation-adjusted) terms.

Let's take the US as an example. For the past five years, through the end of the first quarter of 2009, the 10-year Treasury bond had a total return of 6.2% a year, while the S&P 500 declined by 4.8% a year. For the last 10 years, the



Global economy making a comeback?

returns are also drastically in favor of bonds, which are up 6.8%, while stocks are down 3%. Bonds have now beaten stocks for 20 and 30 years, too.

The rewards have been poison for stocks, worldwide. In most major

markets, equities have had negative real or inflation-adjusted returns for the past 10 years. In the US the S&P 500, adjusted for inflation, is down more than 50% from the level of 10 years ago, and even more from the

highs of 2000. By contrast, bonds have had a small, positive real return over the past decade.

In other words, it has been much better over the past three decades to be a lender rather than an owner! This is not the way the world is supposed to work. Entrepreneurial capitalism cannot continue if it does. Way back in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that what made America great was its democratic institutions and the entrepreneurial spirit of its people.

The rewards to the high-quality fixed-income investor cannot indefinitely exceed those earned by the risk-taking owner. Equity investing is the wellspring of economic growth, and in the long run, it has to generate positive real returns and real returns that are significantly higher than those of bonds. Indeed, in the US over the 20th century, stocks had a real return of 6.9% a year versus 1.5% for bonds.

The same relationship is true in other countries. Over the long run, stocks in the UK, Canada, and most European countries also have returned around 5% a year more than Treasury bonds, and in Australia, Germany, and Japan, the -premium earned over bonds has been around 7%. For raw returns, the three best stock markets in the 20th -century were Sweden, Australia, and the US, in that order.

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and inflation, it has always been a great buying opportunity. It has only happened twice before in America: in the second quarter of 1932, and the third quarter of 1949. Things looked pretty grim back then, too -- in Q2 of 1932, you had the Depression, financial scandals, and the rise of Hitler.

In 1949, investors expected a post-war slump, tax rates were sky-high, and communism loomed on the horizon. In both cases, the next five years saw a violent bull market in the S&P 500, which outperformed bonds by more than 20%. The lesson of history is clear. The world has just seen one of the greatest bull markets in government bonds ever, accompanied by massive leveraging of the financial system and the bursting of the technology and housing bubbles, climaxing in the most severe recession since the 1930s.

A brutal bear market has left stocks cheap in Europe and Japan, slightly undervalued in the US, and fairly priced in emerging markets. Now, heavy stimulus programs will result, inevitably, in higher inflation, which will crush government bond prices. All of this means that over the next five years stocks are the place to be. It's good to be an owner again. Remember buy low (stocks), sell high (bonds).

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The chilli bomb is here



WHAT'S that flying through the air? A bird? A plane? Superman? No, it's a vindaloo grenade. Indian scientists told the BBC they were putting bhut jolokia (ghost chilli) into weapons.

This is stuff is much spicier than most restaurant curries, but not as hot as my uncle Ernie's chicken madras, the creation of which requires nuclear fission and could easily trigger a chain reaction leading to planet-wide meltdown.

But the concept of curry grenades is definitely appealing. If you have to die, at least it's a natural death: "Gravely wounded by a flying chicken tikka masala he limped to the front

line where he was finished off by a double-vindaloo he caught full in the face."

It's intriguing to speculate as to where this could lead, especially with US President Barack Obama campaigning to disarm nuclear weapons around the world. If they go, what would be left but for nations to have international geopolitical food fights?

Japan, after being convicted of being Very Naughty Indeed during World War II, was ordered by the world community to promise never to develop military gear. But it does have one super-powerful weapon: wasabi, that neon green stuff that blows the top of your head off.

And what about the British? A single teaspoon of Coleman's Mustard is enough to bring tears to the eyes of a statue. A jar of the yellow rocket-fuel could easily bring down a battalion of troops. Especially since French mustard is mild and fussy and American mustard has the same Scoville (spici-

ness) rating as water.

When I was young and stupid (as opposed to old and stupid) I sat down with some like-minded friends and we brewed up the hottest chilli sauce we could think of. South Asian chilli burns your mouth, English mustard brings agony to your nose and eyes, and wasabi blows the back of your head off. So we mixed all three and put it in our mouths. It blew our entire heads right off. We were so happy.

And therein lies a mystery. Why do men like pain? Psychologist Paul Rozin says guys are biochemically designed to suffer extreme risk at regular intervals. They evolved to fight sabretoothed tigers. These days there are no tigers to fight, so men unconsciously create similar feelings of pain and fear and horror through eating chilli, trying extreme sports, riding roller coasters, and of course, getting married.

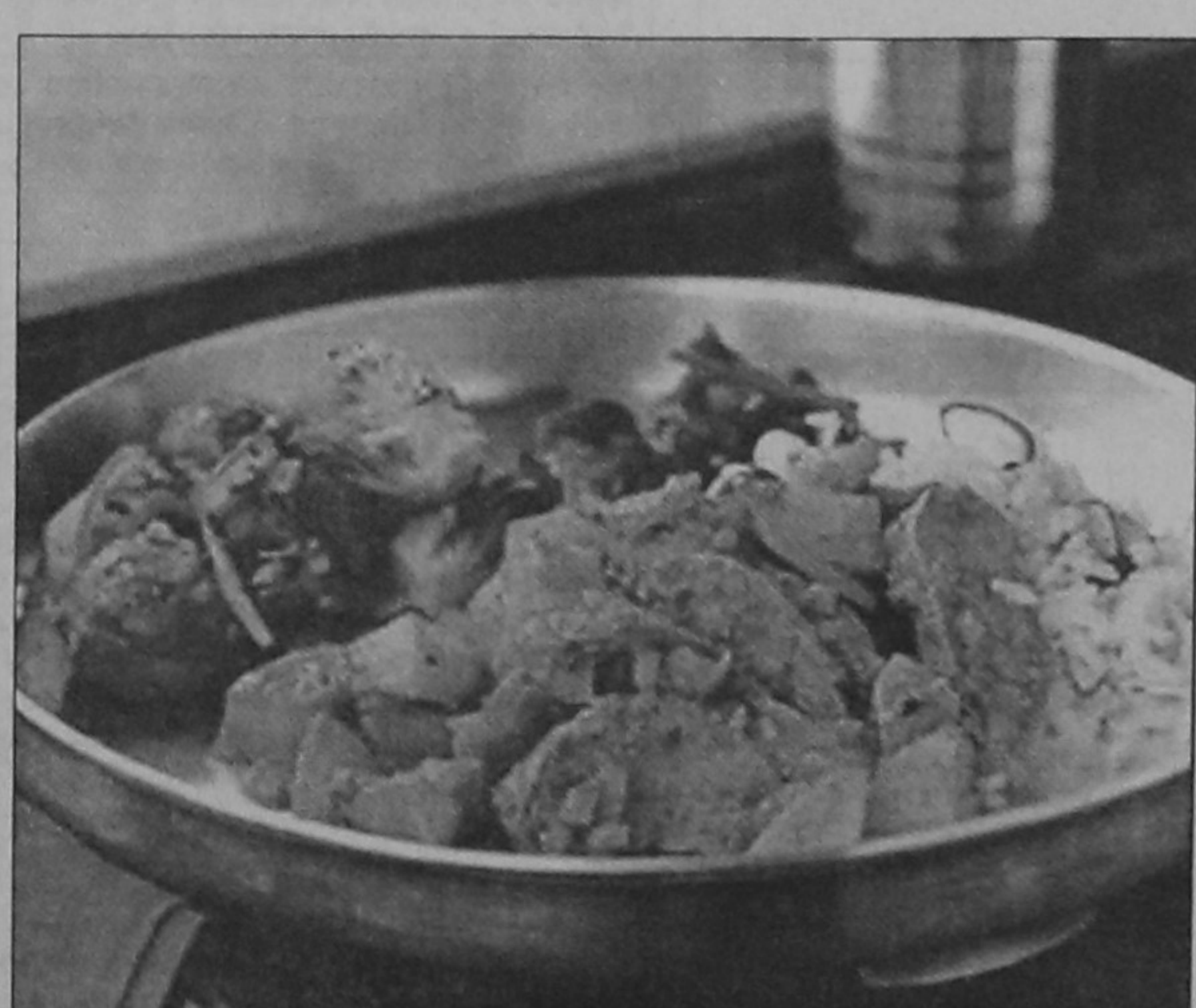
A knowledgeable reader from the law enforcement sector told me that chilli-based weapons are already

available on the international market, but laws on using them differ from place to place. In the Philippines, everyone carries some sort of pepper spray; men, women, children, and even some of the more sophisticated household pets.

They can also be used in India and South Korea. "But in Hong Kong, a chilli-based spray would be classified as armaments under chapter 238 of the Firearms and Ammunition Ordinance. Possession is punishable by 14 years in prison," my ex-police source said.

If the United Nations weapons inspectors ever tasted my Uncle Ernie's curry, they would lock him up for life. This would probably be a good thing for all concerned. If North Korea's Kim Jong-Il gets to him first, this planet would be in big trouble.

For more on how to turn your food into explosives, visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com



State of the art edible explosives.