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ECO - Justice and an Emergent Missiological Aspect

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Abstract: ***In this paper the researcher discusses about the missiological discourse happening today, the researcher strongly believes that the, focus of eco -justice must be laid on the paradigm shift from the human to the earth. In this shift, the earth is the starting point and not the human. The human is only a part of the earth. Thus, the entire creation of God, the human and the nonhuman will become the subjects in the mission of God. The Oikos of life is dominated, exploited, manipulated and destroyed. People live together with all other living beings, and all the living beings are mutually interdependent.***
The eco -justice mission engagement of the Church is to raise up all living beings as a sovereign subject, interdependent to carry out politics of life promoting security, justice and peace. The mission movements of the Church need to work for profound renewal of the ecological stewardship and spirituality of integral life. Life-centered vision is a key component of mission.[1]Recapturing the life-centeredness in the variety of religious and cultural experiences is at the root of our understanding of God, people and the humankind as well as of our spirituality and just norms that promote eco -justice.
Keywords: Church, Community, Integrity, Dignity, Justice, Responsibility, Eco -Justice, Mission, Globalization, Consumerism, Eco -Spirituality Etc.,

I. INTRODUCTION

Researcher strongly affirms that; responsible stewardship calls for an acceptance of the rights and privileges of all of God's community and creation. The Church community must see the importance of according rights to nature as well as other humans. One other aspect that has emerged in recent times is the need for us to demonstrate a responsible concern for future generations. The ecological crisis has brought people to recognize the need to protect the rights of future generations. Finally, the human beings have a responsibility towards God to honor him for the way in which he has honored us with responsibility over all of creation. All that has been said above will fall into its right perspective when one can see God as the one who invests integrity, dignity, justice and responsibility within humans. And above all, our relationship to God will show in a responsible relationship to the world.[2] So the Church has a responsibility to teach and bring about the right eco -justice attitudes within the Christian community.

A. Eco -Justice Mission as Stewardship of Creation

The responsible stewardship performed in God's love will result in practical outworking that will help develop right attitudes for living today.

1) **First**, the Church community is called to care for creation will see the need for recognition of the harmony, unity, purity, and integrity in creation. A respect for creation will elicit a respect for the rights of creation. Our care for creation will show in our love to protect, conserve and bring healing and justice to a wounded world. Ecology, have seen, implies interrelatedness, and this relatedness will show in our own feeling of hurt for a creation that has been hurt.[3]
2) **Second,** the Church is called to conserve creation's resources. It is not preserved, preserving could imply abstaining from use, whereas conserving calls for responsible use. Conserving calls for protecting in the present for future use. One may need to develop the responsibility to preserve some endangered species by protecting them, and conserve a forest by not only using it carefully for our present needs but protecting it for responsible use for generations in the future. As churches, have a basic calling to communicate a strong and enduring hope for mankind's future on the earth. This stems from the basis that Christians have a responsibility for preserving creation[4], which is a part in eco -justice.
3) **Third**, responsible stewardship calls for demonstration in responsible lifestyles. Greed and self-centeredness have caused havoc to the environment and disparity amongst humans. This continues unabated. God's people are called to a life of sharing in the world community rather than accumulating for ourselves. While this may start interpersonally, it must be realized internationally. When nations start promoting responsible use of its resources, its people automatically develop more responsible attitudes.[5]

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B. Witnessing to Christ as Safeguarding the Integrity of Creation

The reality that the earth is under threat due to human irresponsibility and the realization that the humans are not the last generation to exist on earth should force us to challenging human attitude towards the cosmos. Witnessing to Christ would mean addressing population growth, pollution, species extinction, climate change and human responsibility towards future generations. In other words, the instrumental view of the natural world, which dominated early missionary activities and still influence our economic theories, should be replaced with "holistic approaches" that honor the interconnectedness of creation.[6] In this case, the missio Dei" should be understood as the mission of the Creator (missio Creator) revealed in the cosmic Christ, under whose authority, care and influence earth and heaven now exist.

The Goal of God's mission is to bring about shalom to the entire created order. Although Darrell L. Guder argues that "Shalom envisions the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God's demanding care and compassionate rule," biblical witness emphasizes holistic peace and justice on earth."[7] In fact, biblical shalom is inclusive; in the coming Kingdom, lions, humanity, snakes and other species will live in perfect harmony (Isa 11:6-9; cf. 65: 25). Like any other biblical theme, the consummation of shalom carries strong ecological implications.

C. Earth's Integrity as a Foundation of Eco -Justice Mission

The worsening ecological crisis deserves missiological and eco - justice responses. The growth of the Church in the global South is celebrated as indicative of the success of mission Dei. Yet it is in the global South where the ecological injustice is worsening every passing day. This situation underscores the value of developing missiological reflections that address the growing number of Christians on one hand and the earth's death on the other. As Marthinus Daneel rightly argues, Christian ecological mission springs from a "spiritual mandate" to heal, liberate and care for earth after the pattern of the loving Creator. In this regard, the mission of the Creator compels us "to reach out in eco -justice mission regardless of the disheartening realities of the global situation."[8] situation the mission is to take care of the environment so that the environment may take care of us.

D. Eco-Church Management as Eco - Justice Mission

The primary objective is to define the Eco-Church fellowship and to play an active role in the spiritual, environmental revolution and to encourage an eco-friendly lifestyle. Christians, at least in part, seem to be responsible for the present environmental crisis, primarily because of their misunderstanding of the scripture. Jesus Christ, our savior, guide, and mentor, tells us to repent, love God and our neighbor. The concept of neighbor includes the whole creation. Just as the people meet Christ in our human nature, the people can meet Christ in every part of creation. In all aspects of its life, the Eco-Church fellowship will strive to re-establish the fundamental spiritual relationship of humanity with God, the earth and all its creatures.

A basic tenet of its evangelism is found in 2 Corinthians 5:19 which reads, "*God is reconciling the whole world or cosmos through Christ*." To encourage the churches to incorporate ecological justice and concerns in their order of worship and include both advocacy and direct action for social and ecological justice and the integrity of creation in mission activities. The Church should encourage the active participation of our fellow Christians, and all people of good will through prayer, partnership, and involvement, which will help humanity to return to an eco-friendly lifestyle.[9]

The churches can tie up with other organizations which work towards waste management. So, simple and natural way of living can help to sustain and enhance good qualitative life on earth.[10]

E. Eco -Justice Mission of Advocacy and Diplomacy towards Ecological Debt

The following are the statements and solutions of ecological debt: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12).

1) The era of "unlimited consumption" has reached its limits. The era of unlimited profit and compensation for the few must also come to an end. Based on a series of ecumenical consultations and incorporating the perspectives of many churches, this statement proposes the recognition and application of a concept that expresses a deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself. It begins with expressing gratitude to God, whose providential care is manifested in all God's creation and the renewal of the earth for all species. Ecological debt includes hard economic calculations as well as incalculable biblical, spiritual, cultural and social dimensions of indebtedness.[11]

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2) The earth and all of its inhabitants are currently lacing an unprecedented ecological crisis, bringing us to the brink of mass suffering and destruction of many. The crisis is human-induced, caused especially by the agro-industrial-economic complex and culture of the global North, which is characterized by the consumerist lifestyles of the elites of the developed and developing worlds and the view that development is commensurate with exploitation of the earth's "natural resources", is all of creation a sacred reality that ought not to be co-modified. Yet the Northern agro industrial-economic complex, especially in the current era of market globalization, has used human labor and resourcefulness, as well as the properties of other life to produce wealth and comfort for a few at the expense of the survival of others and their dignity.
3) Churches have been complicit in this history through their own consumption patterns and through perpetuating a theology of human rule over the earth. The Christian perspective that has valued humanity over the rest of creation has served to justify the exploitation of parts of the earth community. Yet, human existence is utterly dependent on a healthy functioning earth system. Humanity cannot manage creation. Humanity can only manage their own behavior to keep it within the bounds of earth's sustenance. Both the human population and the human economy cannot grow much more without irreversibly endangering the survival of other life forms. Such a radical view calls for a theology of humility and a commitment on the part of the Church to learn from environmental ethics and faith traditions that have a deeper sense of an inclusive community.[12]

F. Eco -Justice Mission of the Church and Sustainable Economy

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness, not only persons but the entire created order. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. (Col 1: 19-20). The Church should work for a godly, just and sustainable economy which enables men, women and children to flourish along with all diversity of creation. One should be open to all models. One may accept one model as the starting point, but should be open to learning from the others as well, thus broadening and deepening our commitment to the renewal of God's creation.[13] So the sustainable development of ecological resources is also an important mission of today's Church.

1) *Monastic Model:* Ascetic or monastic model is the oldest form of the Church's responses aimed at integrating some concerns relating to ecology as well as the crisis created by the misuse of the natural environment. Living in harmony with nature and keeping her needs to a minimum, the monastic communities proclaimed the message that the earth is the Lord's and that it should not be indiscriminately used to satisfy human avarice and greed. It was also a powerful protest against a wasteful lifestyle that is devoid of any responsibility to the world of nature. The Indian philosophical tradition culminated in an organic, holistic and spiritual world view and renunciative way of life. Hence, reduced consumption is an obvious outcome of the philosophy. There emerges, thus, a pattern which is eco-friendly and sustainable.[14] This model is one of the traditional models in Indian context.
2) *Liberative Solidarity Model:* According to this model, the Church must be in solidarity with the weaker part of the whole creation.[15] The ecological liberation approach is based on the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. Bringing about the kingdom of God is an active process of removing the sources of oppression and working towards the day when God's justice will reign in the human and non-human world. The Church must recognize and challenge the sinful socio-economic and political systems that oppress the earth, its environmental systems and its people. The Church in solidarity with the weak, with that part of the creation that is victimized, seeks the renewal of the whole creation. The Church has to declare its solidarity with the with the groups like Chipko,[16] 18 Appico, Narmada Bachavo Andolan, National Fish workers" Forum, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangh, etc. struggling for ecological justice.[17] Today's Church can adopt this model to build a good eco-friendly atmosphere.

G. Promotion of Eco- Spirituality

Ecological awareness acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings and "the embeddness of individuals and societies in the cyclical process of nature".[18]

The earth is not a mass of raw material, but a living and self-organizing system "with a complex interweaving of living and nonliving systems throughout the biosphere".[19] The earth is the handiwork of God and it reflects God in all its dimensions. "It seeks to build sustainable human communities and specially to foster a sustainable economy that respects, not exploits the earth resources".[20] The nature, not only manifests God, but is also "a locus of his presence". This call of God to experience Him in the nature does not veil the "infinite distance between God and the things of this world".

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Recognizing the divine presence in nature will lead us humans to cultivate "ecological virtues" like tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow humans and all living beings, and a universal fraternity as experienced by Francis of Assisi. A Christian eco-spirituality will acknowledge the pre-eminent place of humans in God's plan of salvation. As the bishops of Japan observed: "To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope".[21]

Eco-spirituality that emerges from the awareness of the immanent presence of God takes us to the deepest and cosmic dimensions of the Christian sacraments (Baptism, Lord's Supper). For instance, the symbolism of water in the celebration of the sacrament of baptism also reminds the Christian community of its responsibility to ensure that water is not polluted. Consequently, the sacrament of baptism, a sacrament of initiation into the Christian community, will also be an initiation into the wider cosmic community. In this way, responsibility to keep water clean in one's locality, responsible use of water and water-saving projects would actually form part of our Christian commitment.[22] The word that was in the beginning with God (Jn 1:1) manifests in and through the incarnation the capacity of nature, human nature, to reveal the divine and thereby strengthens the bond between God, humans and the world.[23] Earth spirituality includes responding to false interpretations of the heritage, but with repentance from exploitation.[24]

II. RESTRUCTURING THE ECONOMY

The ecological crisis of the planetary system has destructed the economy. The earth is sick and wounded. Human beings, especially with the advent of the industrial revolution, have proven that they are exterminating angels, veritable demons of the earth. The Church should act as a catalyst in building up a new sustainable economy.[25] Building a new economy involves phasing out the old industries, restructuring the existing ones, and creating new ones.

A. Strengthening Church Leadership: An Eco-Mission Perspective

The mission statement the Church should seek to create awareness among all people about environmental and ecological concerns and thereby to care for God's creation. It endeavors to encourage people to refrain from abuse of nature's resources and to strive to keep the earth a habitable place for all. It can encourage the Church to incorporate ecological concerns in their order of worship and include both advocacy and direct action for social and ecological justice and the integrity of creation in mission activities. It encourages the active participation of all people of good will through prayer, partnership, and involvement, which will help humanity to return to an eco- friendly lifestyle.[26] The Church must seek to create awareness among all people about environmental and ecological concerns and thereby to care for God's creation.

B. Churches Unique Gifts to bring the Environmental Movement

When churches join in the broader environmental movement, it brings gifts and insights to the larger cause.

1) Churches have stressed the global justice components of the ecological crisis, remembering people around the world, and working in a mission partnership with a variety of leader.
2) Through the theological principles of eco-justice and the integrity of creation, churches extend the ecological cause beyond human needs and goals.
3) Churches bring a hopeful and compassionate perspective. The Church should lift up the good news that a different way of life a just and sustainable society can be a better way of life for us all.
4) Churches can encourage respectful conversation among groups that are often in conflict. As respected institutions in their communities, congregations that embody the diversity and conversation can be a setting that fosters understanding and dialogue.[27]

C. Salvation is Ecological Healing

The salvation is not only for bringing people to Christ, it is also the healing of the creation and ecological redemption.

1) *Cosmic Scope of Redemption:* The eco-missiological vision for salvation as cosmic shalom, is encompassing all of creation. This is of great significance for mission, given that in practicing Christians have often reduced the Gospel message to one of personal reconciliation with God on a spiritual level. Liberation theology has broadened the concept of liberation to include justice and peace, fruits of reconciliation between humans. But the eco-missiology insists that the circle be widened further, and that the welfare of the creation be included as a missiological concern. It is the approach of the World Council of Churches" covenant for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.[28] 30 The cosmic Christ is the heart of eco-mission in today's context.

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2) *Reconciliation is the Heart of Mission:* Given that relationship is the governing metaphor of eco-theology, and that sin is a perversion of human relationships with God and creation, it follows that reconciliation is the heart of the mission of God and, as a result, the mission of the Church. In the well-known passage in 2 Corinthians 5 Paul makes several significant claims about reconciliation. It rings total renewal to humans; it is God's doing; God reconciles us through Christ, in whom the whole world is also reconciled; and the Church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation.[29] The creation has an intrinsic value missiology offers a basis for seeing creation as more than „natural", or merely our environment. Instead of being merely a backdrop for the divine or human drama the cosmos has intrinsic value. A despoiled earth deeply affects God who creates and indwells it. Careless exploitation of the world around us is ruled out if one can see creation as a sacrament of God's presence, as reflecting the glory of God, or even as the self-expression of God. An ecological approach to mission means that it may be entirely appropriate for a Church to maintain a section of a highway, helping to keep a part of God's beautiful creation. It may mean that Christians appropriately choose to worship God on some occasions, through the act of tree-planting. It gives some foundation for arguments against the needless extinction of species. Most importantly, it elevates the status of the environment to something worth defending, caring for and enjoying simply because it is the intrinsically valuable expression of the creativity of God.[30] The ministry of reconciliation towards earth is one among the relevant mission of the Church.

D. Socio-Eco Justice: An Integral part of Church' Eco -Justice Mission

It should be clear that the vision of eco-missiology leads directly to the inclusion of eco-justice in the mission of the Church. Mission must see the connection between human exploitation and environmental exploitation. To speak about eco- justice means that in the quest of that good society which is most productive of justice and joy, the people must take into account not only the psychological, social, and historical dimensions of human existence but also give attention to the biological, natural, and the cosmological setting of life.[31] The cry of the oppressed (social justice) and the travail of nature are one and the same. This makes the integrity of creation a socio-political and therefore, a theological concern.[32] Preparing natural fertilizers by every simple method, like compost manure, work towards encouraging its congregations at least learn eco-friendly lifestyle and to produce simple kitchen gardens in their houses and Church premises. Impart the benefits of using organic food products to live a healthy life free from cancer and genetic disorders.[33]

The Church should come forward to dialogue with them and associate with those organizations to effectively work together towards healing the agricultural land which is enslaved and suffering due to the disastrous intervention of human beings. The Church has the prophetic mission to liberate the land and the people of the land from the control of the exploiting powers and enable them to reveal their quality of giving life in its fullness.[34] The Church" attention is often drawn to the fact this generation is now in the informational age. The cyber culture has opened new possibilities for humans to continue their production process without serious damage to the earth.[35] The Church should raise the voice against all kinds of injustice towards earth. Eco-Justice, as faith practice, understands there can be no social justice without ecological justice; both are interrelated, so eco-justice tackles both.

1) *Social Justice as Eco -Justice Mission:* Justice is actualized in just relationships. Unequal partnerships and patterns of dominion are unjust. It is obvious that the human relationship with nature today is not that the equal partners, but of domination and exploitation. Unjust treatment of the planet by humans is one of the principal causes of the ecological crisis. Poverty is also a source of socio-ecological degradation, and the alleviation of poverty by the poor through their struggle for justice is an ecological concern. Justice in relation to ecology has a comprehensive meaning. Negatively, it is placed against economic exploitation and unjust control of natural resources.[36] "One can no longer see ourselves as rulers over nature bit must think of ourselves as gardeners, caretakers, mothers and fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-workers and friends of a world that while giving us life and sustenance, also depends increasingly on us in order to continue both for itself and for us".[37]
The Jubilee Year, in this context, reminds us that in order to achieve social justice and liberation of the poor, their environment has to be protected. In other words, there can be no social justice sans eco-justice.[38] The Church needs to speak of both social justice (poverty) and eco- justice (environment). Henryk Skilimowski states, "If cosmic web embraces us all, if it is woven of the strands and then justice to the cosmic web means justice to all its elements to all brothers and sisters of creation."[39] To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, then, for the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of eco-justice.

E. Eco-Praxis is Central to an Ecological approach to Eco Justice Mission

An ecological approach to mission is integrally connected to the eco-praxis,[40] the reflective practice of environmental commitment. There are two reasons for this.

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1) **First**, ecology itself requires the interconnection of reflection and action. The ecological mission of the Church cannot preach God's self-expression in creation without practical commitment to nurture and defend creation. What is more, the practice and the reflection will enrich and guide each other.
2) **Second,** eco-theology is a form of liberation theology, extending liberation beyond the poor of the earth to the "poor earth" itself. The social solidarity of early forms of liberation theology has been enlarged to include solidarity with creation.[41]

F. Applying Eco-Justice Hermeneutics of Norman C. Habel

The important contributions of Norman C. Habel towards eco-justice principles that guide the people in the interpretation of the Bible. They are:

1) The Principal of Intrinsic Worth the universe, the earth and all its components have intrinsic worth or value.
2) The Principle of Interconnectedness The earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
3) The Principle of Voice The earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
4) The principle of Purpose The universe, the earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
5) The principle of Mutual Custodianship The earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse earth community.
6) The Principle of Resistance The earth and its components not only differ from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.[42]

G. Practical Suggestions to the Churches

1) Churches to encourage the need to reduce, recycle and reuse and to be centers for recycling.
2) Churches and Christian Institutions to adopt methods of being eco- friendly and to conduct programs and camps to be organized for different age groups to conserve energy, respect environment and to opt against consumerism.
3) Para-liturgical celebrations, meditations and inter-religious dialogues that highlight the creative nature of God and the presence of God in nature and through meaningful celebrations of World Earth Day, World Environment Day.
4) Special campaigns drive to promote preservation of life-sustaining water, air and land, preservation of bio-diversity, and planting trees.
5) To encourage Christians to take up ecological issues with state, parliamentary representatives and with the media.

III. CONCLUSION

Having raised the consciousness about the crimes against creation and the ecological needs of our planet, as well as the Gospel message of restoration for all of creation and the Church is ready to consider our commitment to serving earth as servants of Christ. If one discovers during the season of creation a renewed sense of service, one need to consider how our ministry extends to creation, to our kin in creation and to earth as our home in creation. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to minister to creation. The creation mandate to dominate the earth is found in Genesis 1:26-28. That mandate has been one of the factors in our alienation from the earth. The Church now returns to Genesis two were the first commission of God to serve and sustain earth is announced. Pursuing eco-justice, or justice for the earth, is another important dimension of our ministry to creation.

Many ecologists argue that, a priori, nature and the diverse parts of nature have a right to survive and a right to justice. All of the natural world has intrinsic value and therefore ought to be given the appropriate respect and rights. Where the rights and integrity of creation have been violated, the earth cries out for justice. Creation groans, but that cry is often not heard by those who are abusing the earth. The Church is called to hear the cries of the earth and speak against the injustice done to our parent, our kin, and our home. The healing of the earth begins with recognizing that the stewards are working with our kin, our mother and our God in this process. For our God is a God who heals, a God whose healing Spirit penetrates creation and renews the very ground from which life emerges. Christ, the wounded one, heals not only human spirits, but also life forms. The Church is to be a "pilot plant" that God enables to bring "substantial healing" to humankind's broken relationships with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation.[43] The sin and unfaithfulness to God can result in devastation of the land. Restoration of the land is linked to repentance (2 Chro 7:13- 14; Joel 2:12-14, etc.). "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt 5:4-5).[44]A healing ministry with earth may involve a range of practical programs and environmental activities. This mission brings the message that there is good news for earth.

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The Gospel of Christ is for all creation; all things are being reconciled and restored. This mission, however, involves more than preaching this message at creation. It involves working with the cosmic Christ, the groaning Spirit and creation itself in finding ways to halt the destructive forces at work against creation and reviving, where possible, the innate processes of renewal that restore creation.[45] Salvation means creation healed, and the faith community is hopeful because God has promised it will be so. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay."[46] The purpose of creation is not returned to the lost paradise, but to march towards the new heaven and new earth (Isa 65:17-25; Rev 21:1-5).[47]

The mission and ministry to creation may also be viewed from our position as children of the earth and kin of creation. Human beings are indeed creatures of earth, born of its elements and connected will all our kin on earth to its center its soul. The humans all have a common biological origin, a common parent. There is an impulse in earth, however, that seems to be more than the biological impulse to nurture, and the human beings are born of earth. Giving birth is itself an act of nurture with earth sustaining and bonding with future lives.

Therefore, the message of liberation has cosmic dimension and our eco -justice mission today should take the whole cosmos seriously. Eco-protection measures the depth of spirituality. The ethics degenerate into codified precepts and mechanical behavior if it does not express a form of spirituality of integrity or mysticism. The Spirit sleeps in stone, dreams into flowers, awakens in animals, sustain an ecological mysticism.[48] This vision of nurturing the nature extends to all aspects of life on earth and indeed to earth itself results in completion of Eco -Justice mission of the Church.

FOOT NOTE

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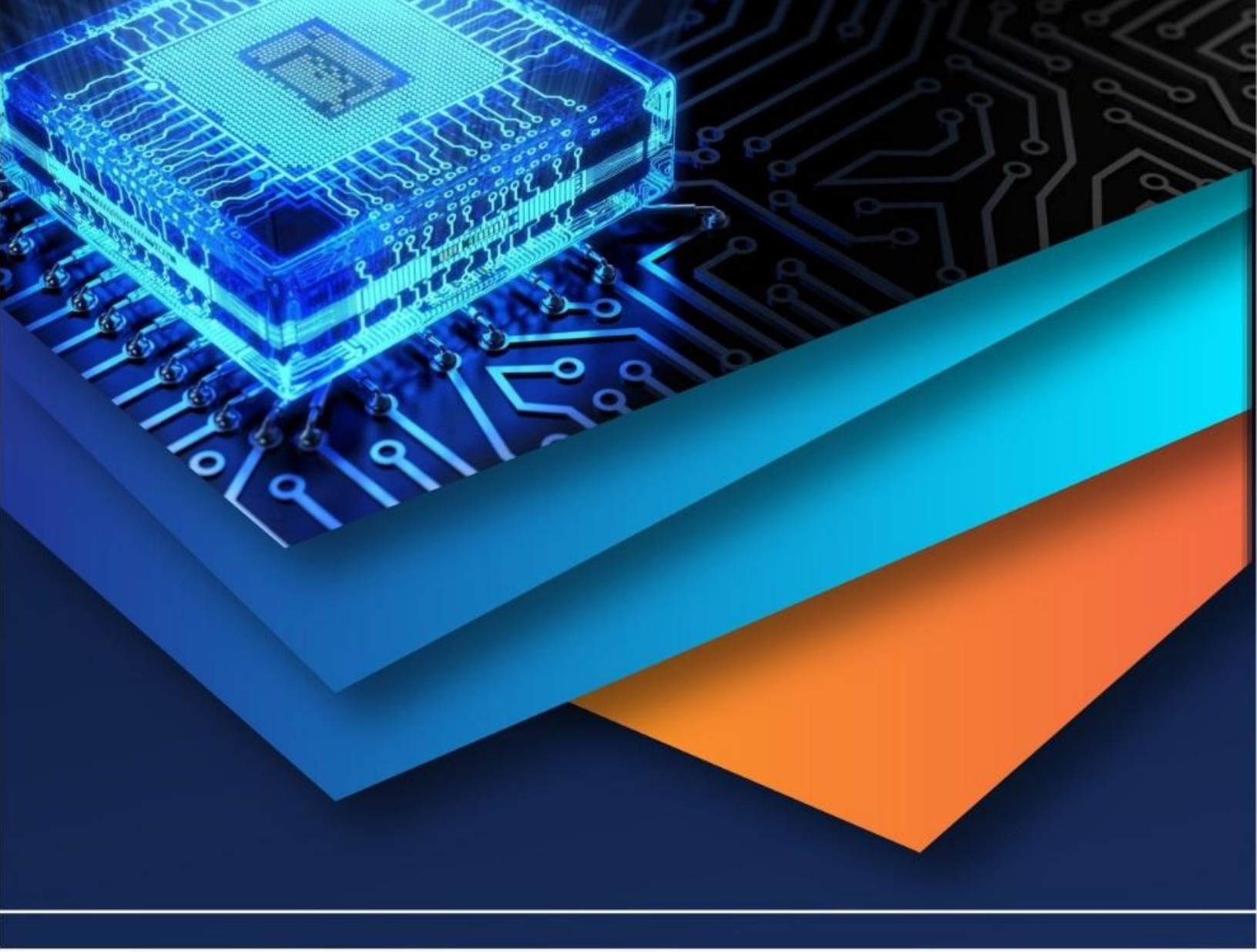

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