

Christianity and Ecological Theology

*Resources for
further research*

Ernst Conradie

Study guides in religion and theology 9
Publications of the University of the Western Cape



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Christianity and Ecological Theology – Resources for further research

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Study Guides in Religion and Theology

Publications of the University of the Western Cape

The development of this series of study guides is an initiative of the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape. Its main purpose is to help produce affordable, readily available and contextually relevant textbooks which can be used for teaching purposes in the Southern African context. In addition, the aim of the series is to develop research tools which may be employed for postgraduate research projects in the region. The following volumes have appeared in this series from SUN Press thus far:

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Preface

This guide for further research in the field of ecological theology originally emerged from a course on Christianity and the environment for which I was responsible in the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape from 1995 to 2000. I am grateful to all the students who did this course over the years and who helped me to contextualise environmental debates within South African society. I hope that they found this field of study as stimulating, enriching, frightening, challenging, empowering, deeply disturbing and, in the end, uplifting, as I do.

In 1997 the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, especially through the initiative of David Field, held a summer school on “Theology, the churches and the environment”. On this occasion I read a paper entitled “Towards a Christian ecological theology: An overview of current debates and South African contributions”. This paper provided a bibliographic overview of the current debates on ecological theology and formed the first draft of the present text.

Participants at this summer school expressed a strong need for resource material that can empower local Christian communities in South Africa to respond to environmental issues. This stimulated David Field and myself to write *A rainbow over the land: A South African guide on the church and environmental justice*, published by the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches (2000). There are many ways in which this research guide draws on *A rainbow over the land*. The present text may be understood as an attempt to provide additional background, references to literature and to indicate some of the academic controversies in the field of ecological theology. I do hope that this will inspire numerous theological students to engage in postgraduate research on the many urgent and unresolved problems in this field of study. This publication should therefore be understood primarily as a research guide for postgraduate students.

A first edition of this guide for further research appeared in two volumes at the University of the Western Cape in 2001, namely *Ecological theology: An indexed bibliography* and *Ecological theology: A guide for further research*. It is in the nature of bibliographical surveys to be incomplete and in regular need of an update. This revised edition integrates the two previous volumes into a single text. The guide to the literature retains the chapter outline of the 2001 edition, but includes a number of new sections, for example in the form of a few excurses on selected topics.

I wish to express my gratitude to Xolani Sakuba for the dedicated research assistance which he has offered in terms of ongoing work on the indexed bibliography and to Andrew Warmback for the meticulous editorial assistance which he has offered towards the completion of the research guide.

**Christianity and
ecological theology:
A research guide**

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The blossoming of ecological theology

1.1 What is ecological theology?

Ecological theology may be regarded as a next wave of contextual theology. It joins liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, womanist theology and various indigenous theologies in the quest for a theology which can respond to the challenges of our time. While all theologies reflect the contexts within which they are situated, contextual theologies are, for better or for worse, attempts to articulate and address their social contexts self-consciously and explicitly.¹

Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis. Just as feminist theology engages in a twofold critique, that is, a Christian critique of sexist or patriarchal culture and a feminist critique of Christianity,² so ecological theologies offer a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. In other words, ecological theology is not only concerned with how Christianity can respond to environmental concerns; it also offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation.³

Ecological theology should not be reduced to environmental ethics as a sub-discipline of Christian ethics. Environmental ethics will tend to remain the specialised field of interest of a small group of scholars and activists. An ecological ethos touches on virtually all aspects of life and has implications for all ethical sub-disciplines (e.g. social, political, economic, business, medical, sexual, or personal ethics). Moreover, ecological theology is not only concerned with ethics but also with Christian doctrine. It is not narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology, but calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith – the trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope. Contributions to an ecological theology cover a wide range of other themes and sub-disciplines too. Almost every aspect of Christian theology has come under the spotlight: Biblical Studies, Biblical hermeneutics, the history of Christianity in its many traditions and forms of expression, Christian virtues and values, preaching, ministry, pastoral care, Christian education, Christian mission, and a theology of religions. There is also no need to add environmental concerns to the already overcrowded social agenda of local churches and ecumenical bodies. Instead, the entire life

¹ See the discussion on this notion of contextual theology in the review symposium on my essay, “An agenda for ecological theology” (Conradie 2005), published in *Ecotheology* 10:3. See also Lilburne 2001.

² Anne Carr, as quoted in the following work: Graff, AO'H (ed) 1995. *In the embrace of God: Feminist approaches to theological anthropology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, p. 7.

³ On the need for an ecological reformation of Christianity, see Nash 1996 and Chapter 6.

and praxis of the church should include an ecological dimension and vision. In subsequent chapters, each of these themes will be discussed in more detail.

1.2 A proliferation of literature

There has been a proliferation of popular and more academic publications on the need for an ecological theology over the last three or four decades. This includes a number of recent edited volumes, each covering a range of topics and consolidating many of the emerging insights in ecological theology.⁴ There are also a number of popular as well as academic journals focusing on ecological theology, most notably *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature and the Environment* (published as *Theology in Green*, 1992-1996) – which now also recognises the need to engage with religious traditions other than Christianity, while retaining a distinctive Christian focus in some of its editions. The call for Christian churches to respond to the environmental crisis has been reiterated numerous times in this vast corpus of literature (also in South Africa⁵). Most of these calls follow a simple, if repetitive, logic:

- * The seriousness of the environmental crisis is explained.
- * The imperative that Christians should respond to this crisis is stated.
- * This call is motivated in terms of the Bible, the Christian faith and Christian traditions.
- * An attempt is made to concretise a viable environmental praxis.

In the light of the vast literature on Christianity and the environment a few comments seem to be in order:

- * On the one hand, every contribution to the field is important to raise an environmental awareness repeatedly and in different and changing local contexts.
- * On the other hand, one must also raise some critical questions. What has this bulk of literature really achieved thus far? How many trees were felled in order to produce all these books? Unfortunately many books are repetitive and seldom move beyond the level of raising an environmental awareness.
- * There is no doubt that North American and West European scholars have led the field of ecological theology over the last few decades. In fact, this may be an appropriate form of contextual theology given the environmental impact of industrialised economies.⁶ Nevertheless, the many significant contributions to a Christian ecological theology that have emerged from elsewhere in the world should not be underestimated. Perhaps more important than such publications is the sometimes unarticulated ecological wisdom that has been gathered from

⁴ See, for example, Altner 1989, Barner & Liedke 1986, Breuilly & Palmer 1992, Birch, Eakin & McDaniel 1990, Bischofsberger *et al* 1988, Christiansen & Grazer 1996, Granberg-Michaelson 1987, Hallman 1994, Halter & Lochbühler 1999, Hessel 1985, 1992, 1996, Hessel & Ruether 2000, Joranson & Butigan 1984, Vorster 1987 & Wilkinson 1991.

⁵ For examples of a call for a Christian responsibility towards the environment in South Africa, see Cock 1991, 1992, Conradie & Field 2000, Conradie, Mtetwa & Warmback 2002, Field 1997, Kritzing 1992 & Robinson 1991.

⁶ McFague (2001:33) suggests that ecological theology may be an appropriate North American manifestation of liberation theology.

impoverished local communities. These insights have steadily become available to a wider audience through various publications.

- * One of the joys of entering the field of ecological theology is this wealth of literature which has emerged from around the world. This constitutes a rich mosaic of cultures, languages, local contexts, bioregions, gender perspectives and theological traditions, etc. Indigenous ecological theologies have emerged in numerous local contexts, often reflecting the geography, topography and demographics of such a context. An abundance of such indigenous ecological theologies may now be gathered from Africa, Australia, India, Latin America, New Zealand, North America, the Pacific islands, Scandinavia, South-East Asia and Western Europe.⁷ This bears witness to the remarkable catholicity of the church and the Christian faith: the power of the seeds of the gospel to take root in the soils of different lands and to bear a variety of fruits which are indigenous and nourishing, yet which can be recognised by others elsewhere in the world to be authentically Christian.

The aim of this research guide is not to repeat what has already been discussed elsewhere in the literature on Christian theology and ecology. The aim is to provide a guide, a brief orientation, perhaps an advanced introduction to this literature, something like an extensive bibliographic essay, to provide a “map” to organise various aspects of the debates, to reflect on the relevance of these debates in the South African context, and more, specifically, to provide some direction for further research in the field of ecological theology. In short, it seeks to stimulate further research that would not be a repetition of the myriad of existing contributions to the field of ecological theology.

This research guide should be used together with the index to themes in ecological theology and the bibliography⁸ where the bibliographical details for the references in this text are provided. The footnotes in this research guide are used to indicate some of the most important contributions on a specific theme and, where appropriate, some Southern African contributions to ecological theology. A few comments on the limited scope of the references in this research guide as well as the bibliography should be noted:

- * Only references to literature within the field of Christian theology are included. This implies that a wealth of literature from a philosophical or a general religious perspective is not taken into account. This also implies that references to scientific contributions on environmental destruction, analyses in the context of social theory and material on environmental education are mostly excluded or minimised.
- * There are numerous contributions to an ecological theology and ethos from religious traditions other than Christianity. These are not included here unless a specific contribution is explicitly in dialogue with the Christian tradition. Inter-

⁷ The following examples may be mentioned here for illustrative purposes: For indigenous African ecotheologies, see the contributions by Daneel 1998, 1999 (on Zimbabwe) and Gitau 2000 (on Kenya). For indigenous Australian ecotheologies, see Rainbow Spirit Elders 1997, Pearson 1997, 1998. For indigenous Indian ecotheologies, see the edited volume by Nehring 1994, also Watson 2004. For examples of an indigenous New Zealand Christian ecotheology, see Cadigan 2001, McPhail 2001 & Miskotte 1997. For an indigenous Arctic Christian ecotheology based on the notion of “to touch the earth lightly”, see Kristiansen 1993, 2000. On an indigenous Indonesian ecotheology, see Borrong 2005.

⁸ For earlier versions of this bibliography, see Conradie 1993, 1995, 1998, 2001. For other helpful bibliographies on ecological theology, see Engel, Bakken, & Engel 1995 & Sheldon 1992.

religious publications are included if there is a specific focus on conversations with contributions from Christian theologians.

- * Only references to Christian literature which specifically address environmental concerns are included. There is obviously an abundant wealth of other Christian literature on almost every topic which may make passing references to environmental concerns and which may prove valuable for further research in ecological theology. The indicated literature therefore provides little more than a starting point.
- * Where references are made in the “research guide” to publications which are not included in the bibliography (which also focuses on literature in the field of Christianity and ecological theology), the full bibliographic details for such references are provided in the footnotes.
- * This guide to the literature, together with the indexed bibliography, focuses on publications from the period 1970-2005, during which Christian ecological theology has flourished. The year 2005 also saw the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. The entries on Christianity in this encyclopedia would certainly supplement this guide to the literature, but obviously does not provide an integrated argument.⁹
- * Although there is a large corpus of literature on Christianity and ecology available from numerous websites, such material was largely excluded from this survey due to the more fluid nature of this form of publication.
- * While the bibliography contains references to any relevant literature, this research guide contains only references to material to which I had direct access. Since I am only able to read publications in Afrikaans, Dutch, English and to some extent German, there is a bias in the literature which I consulted towards publications in English. This implies a significant but necessary limitation to the scope of this guide. I recognise that a number of publications in the field of ecological theology have emerged from Latin America in Spanish and Portuguese, while a corpus of literature has also been published in French, Italian, Greek and various Scandinavian languages.
- * Unfortunately, the references, like the index to the bibliography, do not differentiate between two contributions of an author which were published in the same calendar year. This would have been extremely difficult to monitor precisely given the way in which a bibliography expands on an ongoing basis. In most cases, the context should be sufficient to determine the relevant literature.

This guide may also be understood as a research companion to the more popular book, *A rainbow over the land: A South African guide on the church and environmental justice*.¹⁰ Although there are many ways in which the two texts overlap with one another, this research guide is an attempt to provide additional background, references to literature and to indicate some of the academic controversies in the field of ecological theology. It also offers a more detailed exposition of an agenda for ecological theology in

⁹ See Taylor 2005. The entries to this encyclopedia which focus on Christianity are not included in the indexed bibliography, given the policy here to only refer to relatively substantial contributions. References to such entries mention only the surname of the author of a particular entry and the page numbers in Taylor (ed) 2005.

¹⁰ Conradie & Field 2000, published by the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches.

a Christian context, following a recent article on the same topic which was published in the journal *Ecotheology*.¹¹

This contribution should therefore be understood primarily as a guide to the literature, a bibliographic essay, an agenda for further research, and in some sections also as a more detailed discussion of particular themes.

¹¹ Conradie 2005.

PART A

Environmental degradation:

A theological assessment

CHAPTER 2

Discourse on “the environment”

2.1 Perceptions and interpretations regarding “the environment”

In the popular imagination (especially in South Africa) there are several conflicting perceptions on what an environmental awareness entails.¹ The environment means different things to different people. Some focus on “nature out there”, namely the relatively unspoilt beauty of the South African countryside. Others are anxious about global environmental catastrophes. Some are primarily concerned with a healthy working environment for employees. Others are worried about limited resources or may be involved in a daily struggle to sustain themselves. Some focus on the ongoing task of managing natural resources, for example in businesses, farms or in local government services. Others regard environmental disasters simply as a news item or a point of social conversation.

These different perceptions on the environment are exacerbated by various forms of resistance against environmental agendas.² The nature conservation policies of the apartheid era provoked the suspicion that conservation boils down to the establishment of game reserves for a privileged few, often at the expense of the dislocation of local people. Many urban blacks view issues of nature conservation as a concern of the white middle class,³ the hobby of an affluent, leisured minority who would like to preserve the environment for purely aesthetic reasons and who seem more concerned about wildlife than about the welfare of other human beings. The primary concern of others is the day-to-day struggle of surviving in overcrowded, squalid, unhealthy conditions. Others fear that attention to environmental concerns may divert scarce human and financial resources from the more pressing issues of poverty, hunger and employment and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.⁴ Indeed, finding employment now may seem far more urgent than

¹ See Conradie & Field 2000:8.

² See Conradie & Field (2000:8f) for a discussion of these forms of resistance.

³ In 1991 Frank Chikane, the former general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, expressed a similar scepticism regarding the priority of the environment on the social agenda of the church:

To most of us who come from countries which are ravaged by senseless wars, characterized by gross violations of human rights and by massive poverty and unemployment, the introduction of the item of the integrity of creation on our agenda seemed like a conspiracy by those who benefit out of our poverty and oppression, to divert and diversify our struggle for justice in our situations. It seemed like some people wanted to keep us busy with seemingly abstract concerns about the misuse of biotechnology rather than the real issues of land dispossession and racism, sexism, economic exploitation (classism), political oppression, and denial of the right of religious freedom and the use of religion as an instrument of oppression (quoted in Niles 1992:36).

⁴ From within the Latin American context, Leonardo Boff (1995:12) quotes (but then also refutes) the following argument:

Ecology is a luxury of the rich. It is a product of the northern hemisphere. These people have despoiled nature in their own countries and have robbed the colonized peoples of the entire world, and after all

the long-term environmental impact of mining, manufacturing, business, farming, forestry or fishing. Yet others may suggest that a concern for the environment may hamper technological progress, entrepreneurship, and a better standard of living for all.

For many South Africans environmental concerns remain fairly remote and distant. Environmental concerns seem all too long term, almost imperceptible and unrelated to our daily lives and aspirations. For the urban middle class environmental issues seem distantly rural, all too serious and gloomy and stand in the way of an enjoyment of life and its many pleasures. Some regard environmental problems as less serious and are confident that technological solutions will in due time become available to resolve existing environmental concerns. Others argue that environmental problems may indeed be serious, but that all of us are caught up the web of modern society. "What can we do?" they ask themselves, "We simply need cars, electricity, water, oil, refrigerators, cleaning products, batteries, etc, etc." Yet others are annoyed by the campaigns of radical environmental activists. They do not want to jump on any green "bandwagon".

Within the context of Christian communities a different form of resistance against environmental agendas may be encountered. Many Christians would question whether the environment should really be regarded as a priority on the social agenda of the church. Should the church not be engaged in far more urgent issues such as poverty, unemployment, education, housing, health services, crime and now, most pressingly, the HIV/AIDS pandemic? Other Christians feel that the church should primarily be concerned with the message of salvation: that Jesus Christ came to save human beings from the devastating impact of human sin and to reconcile us with God. The "vertical" relationship with God is more important than a "horizontal" concern for the environment. From a different angle, other Christians dismiss environmentalism as being "New Age". They feel uncomfortable and threatened and fear that working with others towards a "green" agenda may compromise their faith. In some extreme forms of Christianity, people even argue that one should oppose efforts to ameliorate poverty, prevent war, or clean up ecological damage, for this is to oppose God's will and delay the final judgement.⁵

In the light of such confusing perceptions, there is a need to obtain some clarity on the use of terms such as the "environment", "nature", "ecology", the earth / Earth and "creation". The meaning of each of these terms has become widely contested.

Although Christians often use the word "creation" to refer to the earth or the cosmos, this term clearly has a religious emphasis. It articulates the Christian faith in God as Creator. The English term creation may refer both to the act of creating (*creatio*) or to the created order as the product of God's creative work (*creatura*). Although Christians live within the created order and are called to nurture it, creation itself is the work of the Creator, not of human beings in the first place.⁶

that are now claiming a safe ambience and ecological reserve for the preservation of a species in the process of decline.

⁵ Ruether 1992:84.

⁶ On the confusion of the categories creation and nature see the helpful essay by Hall 2005. He suggests that both terms offer a redescription of the category of "Welt" (Gadamer).

The word “ecology” should preferably be used in the more limited sense of referring to the scientific disciplines which study the functioning of various ecosystems, although the adjective “ecological” may also be used to describe the health of ecosystems.

There is considerable confusion regarding the use of the term “nature”. Rosemary Ruether identifies at least four distinct senses of this term in Western theology: “1) as that which is ‘essential’ to a being; 2) as the sum total of physical reality, including humans; 3) as the sum total of physical reality apart from humans; and 4) as the ‘created’ world apart from God and divine grace”⁷ (see also the distinction between the natural and the “supernatural”).

The focus of the discussion here will be on the notion of the “environment” instead of the generic term “nature” in order to indicate that ecological theology is not only concerned with nature, in the sense of “nature out there”. Despite the anthropocentric shortcomings of the term “environment” (literally “what surrounds us”), a concern for the environment cannot be reduced to nature conservation or the preservation of endangered species.

However, it should also be noted that the term “environment” lacks, for example, the concreteness of a rhino, a yellow wood tree, or Table mountain. Furthermore, it suggests something in which we live, but which is apart from us, rather than the home we inhabit and of which we form an integral part. This does not help to prevent a harmful alienation between humans and the rest of nature. The term environment also fails to capture the blooming buzzing confusion of creatures in dynamic interaction with one another that is so typical of the earth community.⁸ Many therefore simply prefer to speak of the earth, or often earth (without the definite article) or Earth (with a capital).⁹ The notion of “earth” is suggestive of the earth community of which we as humans form part. It is perhaps more concrete and more evocative compared to the somewhat sterile notion of “environment”. This sense of Earth as a single community of life is often inspired by the pictures of the “blue planet” taken by astronauts from outer space.¹⁰

2.2 Towards an integrated view of the environment

In the light of these conflicting notions of the environment, it is important to develop an integrated approach to environmental concerns. There are especially three initiatives which may be noted in this regard:

a) It is important to realise that the word “environment” does not only refer to the world of non-human nature. It includes at least the following aspects:

⁷ Ruether 1992:5.

⁸ See Bouma-Prediger 2001:13-17.

⁹ See, for example, Rasmussen 1996.

¹⁰ Moltmann (1989:79) comments: “It is helpful to see modern scientific and technological civilization, this colossal human project, not simply from inside but also from outside. Seen from inside, modern civilization rises up over nature and dominates it with a thousand arms, holding it firm in its ‘grasp’ with ten thousand hands. With motorways and railroads, great cities and industrial areas, human civilization girdles the earth like a web. Human beings seem to be on top and the earth underneath. But it looks quite different from outside. The pictures which rockets and satellites have taken of the earth show that humankind live in, not on this earth. With its atmosphere and biosphere, the constant incursion of solar energy, the regular revolutions of the earth, stable temperatures and regular shifts of temperatures, the earth is like one living organism, an open system which breathes in energy and regulates itself.”

- * The biophysical environment, including water, air, soil, plants and animals;
- * The built environment, including houses, offices, urban planning;¹¹
- * The social environment, including civil society, communities and local neighbourhoods;
- * The economic environment, including the ownership of land, ownership of the means of production, access to capital and to employment opportunities;
- * The political environment, including systems of governance and rules for management;
- * The cultural environment, including customs, crafts, music, art, drama and dancing.¹²

Human beings construct their own social, economic and political environments. This also implies that we have choices in the way in which these environments are constructed. At the same time, the human environment depends entirely on the biophysical environment, on natural resources and life-support systems. It is helpful to observe how these biophysical, social, economic and political aspects of the environment are related to one another in multiple ways. Economic scarcity may lead to the unsustainable use of natural resources, which would exacerbate such scarcity in the long term. The topography and climate of the environments in which we live shape our ways of living, our forms of housing, our outdoor activities and our psyche. It is, vice versa, precisely such social practices, most notably in the form of the global culture of consumerism, which have led to the degradation of ecosystems. The struggle for political control over scarce resources has elicited numerous violent conflicts – which have led to environmental destruction and the allocation of such scarce resources for military purposes and for the sake of security. This may well lead to a vicious downward spiral of destruction. In the context of the ecumenical movement, the interrelatedness of the political quest for democracy, the economic quest for justice and development, the social quest for reconciliation and peace and the ecological quest for sustainability has been captured in the call for “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”.¹³

b) The “environment” may be understood in terms of a number of concentric circles, starting with our own bodies as being part of the environment, the environments in which we live, the environments in which we work, the environment as “nature out there” and global environmental concerns such as nuclear threats, atmospheric change, ozone depletion, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity.¹⁴

There is an urgent need in South Africa to counter a popular perception that environmental issues boil down to nature conservation. In this way a concern for the environment is reduced to “nature out there”, to the preservation of endangered species in game reserves, to wildlife issues, to an appreciation of the unspoilt beauty of some of South Africa’s countryside. It is crucial to bring the environment closer to home – to the cities where people live and work. Endangered species have to be protected in wilderness

¹¹ For the use of this term in Christian ecological theology, see especially Gorringer 2002.

¹² In the context of environmental education in South Africa, these dimensions of the environment have been integrated with one another on the basis of a helpful diagram. See Conradie & Field (2000) for a more detailed discussion.

¹³ See Chapter 11 for a more detailed discussion in this regard.

¹⁴ See Conradie & Field (2000:12f) for an assessment of various environmental problems (with specific reference to the South African context), following this model of concentric circles.

areas precisely as a result of urban, industrial and agricultural “developments” using up all the other available land. Nature conservation in wilderness areas is in this sense only an emergency measure which leaves the primary problem untouched. This emphasises the need to locate environmental concerns within the mainstream of economic activities (industry, commerce, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, services, etc). The environmental impact of each of these sectors of the economy needs to be assessed.

Moreover, environmental concerns should be related to people's living conditions. Economic activities take place precisely because consumer goods and services are in demand as a result of the lifestyles and cultural patterns of ordinary people.¹⁵ It is necessary to reflect on the environmental impact of the food we eat, the resources we consume, the various forms of energy we use, the transport we need, the consumer goods we require, the cleaning products we use, the waste we generate, etc. The full life cycle of each of these aspects should be investigated, namely in terms of production, distribution, consumption and waste management.

The environment is even closer to us than that. Our own bodies form part of the environment in which we live. We are living in the earth and form part of the earth. Nature is part of our daily lives. We experience it in the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat and the clothes we wear. That environmental problems are far closer to home than we could ever have imagined, is vividly expressed in Jürgen Moltmann's comment that we carry the symptoms of the ecological crisis around in our own bodies.¹⁶

c) In recent ecumenical literature the Greek metaphor of “oikos” (house) has been widely used to develop an integrated understanding of the social agenda of the church. This metaphor refers to the “whole household of God”. It expresses a concern for the well-being of all forms of life in this one household of God.

In many such ecumenical contributions the etymological link between economy and ecology, both deriving from the Greek *oikos* (household) is mentioned.¹⁷ The discipline of economics reflects on appropriate laws or rules (*nomoi*) for the household, the art of administering the global household.¹⁸ The science of ecology gathers knowledge on the “logic” (*logos*) of the same household, that is, the incredibly intricate ways in which ecosystems interact to ensure the functioning of the biosphere. The term “ecojustice” captures the need for a comprehensive sense of justice which can respond to both economic injustice and ecological degradation. The word *oikos* is also the etymological root of *oikoumene*, the whole inhabited world. “Ecumenics” therefore means treating the

¹⁵ For a critique of a consumerist society from a Christian environmental perspective, see the discussion in Chapter 5.

¹⁶ Moltmann 1989:75.

¹⁷ See, especially, Clifford 2002, 2006, Cobb 1992:55f, Conradie 2002, 2005, George 1990, Hessel & Nash 1996:6f, Meeks 1989, Mudge 1999, Müller-Fahrenholz 1995, Rasmussen 1994, 1995, 1996 & Raiser 1991:79-111, 1997:49-51. See also the doctoral thesis by Warmback (2006) who explores resources for the construction of an “oikothology”, drawing especially from the earthkeeping initiatives in the Anglican diocese of Umzimvubu in South Africa.

¹⁸ See the discussion on appropriate house rules for planetary living in McFague 2001. On the connection between God's economy and the themes of *Torah* and *diakonos*, see Meeks 1989:75-98.

inhabitants of the household as a single family, human and nonhuman together, and fostering the unity of that family.¹⁹

These considerations are best situated in the context of the whole work of God (creation, providence, redemption, completion) which has traditionally been described as the “economy of the triune God” (*oikonomia tou theou*), from which the term “economic trinity” has also been derived. Christians understand themselves to be members of the “household of God” (Eph 2:19-22), while Christian communities live from the conviction that the whole household (*oikos*) belongs to God and has to answer to God’s economy.

On this basis, the notion of the whole household of God may serve as a theological root metaphor for current discourse on a wide variety of theological themes. It has been employed for an anthropology of stewardship (the *oikonomos*)²⁰ or one of being “at-home-on earth”,²¹ a soteriology and an ecclesiology focusing on the way of becoming members of the “household of God” (Eph 2:19-22),²² an eschatology expressing the hope that the house which we as humans inhabit (the earth) will indeed become God’s home,²³ a pastoral theology toward the edification of the household (*oikodomé*),²⁴ and an ethics of eco-justice,²⁵ homemaking, hospitality²⁶ and sufficient nourishment.²⁷

¹⁹ Raiser 1997:49.

²⁰ Larry Rasmussen (1994:118) observes that “if English had adopted the Greek word for steward (*oikonomos*), we would immediately recognise the steward as the trustee, the caretaker of creation imaged as *oikos*.”

²¹ There are numerous contributions toward a theological anthropology that focus on the need for humans to recognise that they are “at home on earth” (for an overview, see Conradie 2005:6-7, 26-40). For a critical engagement with such discourse, while staying with the root metaphor of the household of God, see my *An ecological Christian anthropology: At home on earth?* (Conradie 2005).

²² For brief comments on the soteriological and ecclesiological dimensions of the metaphor of God’s household, see Meeks 1989:33-36. Meeks speaks of God as “the Economist” to describe the way in which God is redeeming the world (through the *nomoi* of Torah and gospel) and its implications for the economy.

²³ See especially my *Hope for the earth* (Conradie 2000 / 2005) which employs the distinction between “house” and “home”, suggesting that the earth is the house which we as humans inhabit, but that it is not our home yet. Christian hope may be interpreted as the hope to be at home with God, on earth as it is in heaven.

²⁴ In his stimulating study, *God’s Spirit: Transforming a world in crisis*, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz has developed these insights through the notion of “ecodomy”, derived from the Greek word *oikodomé*. Ecodomy is the art of inhabiting instead of dominating the earth, our house. Müller-Fahrenholz subsequently calls on Christian congregations to become ecodomy centres and to form ecodomy networks and covenants which can respond to the demands of the contemporary world. The calling of the church is to become partners in God’s ecodomy. Müller-Fahrenholz (1995:109) explains: “In its literal sense this term refers to the building of the house, but its meaning can be extended to any constructive process. So the apostle Paul uses the word for the building up of Christian communities. He calls his apostolic mission a service to the *oikodomé* of Christ (2 Cor. 13:10). He reminds members of Christian communities that they should behave towards each other in the spirit of *oikodomé* (Rom. 14:19). They are called to use their specific gifts and talents (charisms) for the *oikodomé* of the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:21), just as they are reinforced and strengthened by the pneumatic energy of this body.”

²⁵ The term “ecojustice” is often used in ecumenical discourse to capture the need for a comprehensive sense of justice that can respond to both economic injustice and ecological degradation. It is for example employed in the important study document on *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* produced by the Justice, Peace and Creation team of the World Council of Churches (2005) – in which the household of God also operates as the theological root metaphor. See the discussion below in Chapter 3.4.

²⁶ See Raiser 1991:109-111.

From these observations there has emerged what may now be called an "oikos"-theology. The root metaphor for this theology is the whole household of God. It is primarily concerned with the health of all forms of life in this one household. It is thus able to integrate a variety of concerns, including the following:

- * The integrity of the biophysical foundations of this house (the earth's biosphere);
- * The economic management of the household's affairs;
- * The need for peace and reconciliation amidst ethnic, religious and domestic violence within this single household;
- * A concern for issues of health and education;
- * The place of women and children within this household; and
- * An ecumenical sense of the unity not only of the church, but also of the human community as a whole and of all of God's creation, the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*).²⁸

It should be clear that the household of God as a root metaphor for ecological theology has considerable strengths. It will appeal to those who treasure a sense of homeliness, but perhaps also to those, for example in Africa, who have been denied a home: (environmental) refugees, the homeless, those who were forcibly removed from their ancestral homes (also under apartheid in South Africa), street children, battered women and girls for whom home is a dangerous place and all those who have not found a place where they can feel at home (whether they live on a rubbish dump or in a luxurious mansion). It may also be applicable to countless species whose habitat has been invaded for the sake of human interests. Clearly, although the earth does not provide a home for all yet, the yearning of Christian hope is that all God's creatures will find a lasting home in God's household.

Like all metaphors, the motif of the household of God has certain limitations. Since any household is a social construction, it can easily be employed to serve the interests of patriarchs (the proverbial *paterfamilias*), possessive parents, the propagation of preconceived "family values", the restriction of slaves, women and children to the private sphere, or the domestication (!) of emancipatory struggles.²⁹ We should also remind ourselves that many a dictator has tried to portray himself as a "family man". In pluralist industrial societies the influence of the household is often restricted to the sphere of the private or to recreation after hours. The use of the *oikos* metaphor may therefore unwittingly reinforce the marginalisation and privatisation of Christian witness in society.

Alternatively, the inclusiveness of the notion of a household may be expanded to such an extent that it has no boundaries – unlike any particular household. If a household can offer no sense of belonging inside and can exclude nothing on the outside, then it would become virtually meaningless and would no longer offer any sense of being at home. The household with its fenced vegetable and fruit garden epitomises the human need for

²⁷ See the eloquent description of what "home" entails by Meeks (1989:36): "Home is where everyone knows your name. Home is where you can always count on being confronted, forgiven, loved, and cared for. Home is where there is always a place for you at the table. And, finally, home is where you can count on sharing what is on the table."

²⁸ Raiser 1997:49.

²⁹ The crucial question is therefore how *oikos* and *polis* (political power and rule) are related to one another and how both of these are related to *kosmos*. See Meeks 1989:8.

surrounded social and moral space. Indeed housing typically precedes life.³⁰ In ecological theology it is the earth itself (the biosphere) which is typically portrayed as a household. However, it is not clear what the “house” within which such a household is located would mean in this case. Michael Welker observes that the image of earth as a house does not take the self-productive activity of the earth into account satisfactorily. If anything, the earth is portrayed in the creation narratives in Genesis not as a house but rather as an active empowering agent which brings forth life.³¹

2.3 Conclusion: The need for a multi-disciplinary approach

These three approaches towards an integrated view of the environment also indicate the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to address environmental concerns. The environment has become a concern in virtually every conceivable academic discipline, including astrophysics, chemistry, geology, geography, biochemistry, evolutionary biology, botany, zoology, medicine, agriculture, forestry, ichthology, nature conservation, ecology, engineering, economics, politics, management, law, education, language, the social sciences, the fine arts, philosophy, ethics and theology. It has become obvious that such a multidisciplinary approach is required to understand the logic of our planetary household (ecology).

Within Christian theological discourse on the environment such a multi-disciplinary approach is also needed. Ecological theology offers one avenue to overcome the widespread fragmentation of theological sub-disciplines. All theological disciplines may facilitate reflection on the challenges posed by environmental degradation. Moreover, all Christian traditions and churches, situated in a variety of local contexts have to contribute to this task, precisely in order to respond to the varied needs of each local context. Likewise, all theological traditions, operating with a wide spectrum of theological root metaphors and soteriological symbols may provide helpful resources in this regard.

³⁰ Moltmann 2003:113-114.

³¹ Welker 1999:41.

CHAPTER 3

Environmental degradation: An ethical assessment

3.1 The emergence of an environmental awareness

We have by now witnessed three or four decades of environmental conscientising, outcries, statistics, analyses, programmes and movements. The media regularly feed us with stories about environmental disasters. We are confronted with daunting statistics about deforestation, the extinction of species, global warming, population growth and insurmountable waste dumps. Despite this huge effort and although the global community has made some progress on issues such as acid rain and ozone depletion, we have not been able to turn the tide of consumption, pollution, increasing human population, atmospheric change, deforestation, over-fishing, and the exploitation of non-renewable resources.

Since the early 1970's numerous studies have accumulated evidence of regional and global environmental disasters. This has stimulated the emergence of an environmental awareness, especially since the publication of the famous "Limits to growth" report.¹ The earlier emphasis was on a variety of environmental problems, including the following:

- * The world's increasing population;
- * The scarcity of resources and energy supplies (this was particularly important in the light of the oil crisis in the 1970's);
- * The potential danger of nuclear war (for example during the "cold war");
- * The protection of endangered plant and animal species;
- * Several issues around animal experimentation, animal farming and other forms of cruelty against animals;
- * The problem of soil erosion;
- * The problem of (industrial) pollution in its more visual forms;
- * The management of urban waste;

These environmental problems intensified during the following decades. Not only have the number and extent of these problems increased, but also their "quality", that is, their potential danger for the future of life on earth. These environmental hazards include the following:

- * The impact of atmospheric change, especially global warming;
- * The hazard of ozone depletion;
- * The problem of acid rain and air pollution;
- * The management of highly toxic forms of waste, including nuclear waste;
- * The virtual destruction of rainforests and other ecosystems;
- * The rapid loss of biodiversity;

¹ See Meadows, DH et al 1972. The limits to growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind. New York: Universe Books.

- * The salination of soil; and
- * The virtual collapse of some fishing industries due to persistent over-fishing.

From the mounting evidence on environmental degradation it has become clear that the very building blocks of life itself (air, water, soil, energy) are threatened as a result of environmental destruction.² The ecological crisis therefore cannot merely be regarded as an addendum to the already long social agenda of the church. Most environmental problems may be related to the pollution of air, water and soil, often in interaction with one another. It has become increasingly clear that, "The future isn't what it used to be." Or: "If current trends continue, we will not!"

These global environmental concerns cannot be discussed here in any detail. There are numerous technical and more popular publications that may be consulted on aspects of the environmental crisis. Likewise, there are numerous publications that discuss environmental concerns in sub-Saharan Africa and in South Africa,³ also with specific reference to the environmental impact of apartheid.⁴

3.2 Conflicting environmental assessments

The relative importance of environmental destruction on the international agenda has often been disputed. In both affluent and in poorer countries there is a reluctance to prioritise the environment on socio-political agendas. Economic concerns around growth, debt, poverty and unemployment often seem to require more immediate attention. While the environment is clearly a global issue that affects everybody (most notably in the form of atmospheric and climate change), environmental politics is

² In the words of Thomas Berry and of Brian Swimme:

Our entire society is caught in a closed cycle of production and consumption that can go on until the natural resources are exhausted or until the poisons inserted into the environment are fed back into the system (Berry 1988:57).

We are soaking all life forms with poisons, changing rivers into lethal sewage, and hurling million tons of noxious gases into the respiratory system of the Earth (Swimme 1995:74).

³ See, for example, the following publications for a general overview:

Bond, P 2002. *Unsustainable South Africa: Environment, development, and social protest*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Cock, J & Koch, E (eds) 1991. *Going green: People, politics and the environment in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Huntley, B, Siegfried, R & Hunter, S 1989. *South African environments into the 21st century*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau / Tafelberg.

Fuggle, RF & Rabie, MA 1992. *Environmental management in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.

McDonald, DA (ed) 2002. *Environmental justice in South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Whyte, AV (ed) 1995. *Building a new South Africa. Volume 4. Environment, reconstruction and development*. Johannesburg: International Development Research Centre.

Yeld, J 1997. *Caring for the earth: A guide to sustainable living*. Stellenbosch: WWF South Africa.

⁴ See especially Cock & Koch (1991) above, as well as the following publications:

Durning, A 1990. *Apartheid's environmental toll*. Worldwatch Paper 95. Washington: Worldwatch Institute.

Ramphele, M & McDowell, C (eds) 1991. *Restoring the land: Environment and change in post-apartheid South Africa*. London: Panos.

caught up within the tensions between the North and the South,⁵ between the First and the Third World, between industrialised and “developing” countries, between economic centres and peripheries.⁶ These tensions all too often result in mutual accusations. One way of characterising such disputes is in terms of the tension between population and consumption:

- * Some argue that the increasing human *population* poses the most serious threat to the environment. Several major environmental problems are indeed linked to a human population which exceeds the carrying capacity of ecosystems. Such problems include deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, the depletion of wildlife stocks and poaching. This implies that the impoverished countries of the “Third World” carry a special responsibility to curb their ruinous birth rates.⁷ In response, it has often been argued that the poor are not the cause but the victims of these forms of environmental destruction. The real cause is related to the injustices of the present dominant macro-economic order. This concern is expressed in a famous comment from Indira Ghandi: “Poverty is the biggest polluter. If you are interested in us not polluting, help us to get rid of our poverty.”⁸ Moreover, while European countries have “exported” their “excess” population to their former colonies, there are case studies which indicate that population growth in African countries have coincided with the improved management of land.
- * Others therefore argue that the most serious environmental problems are caused by the gluttonous *consumption* of those in the affluent economic centres. Such high levels of consumption lead to a range of environmental hazards such as industrial pollution, mountains of garbage, toxic and nuclear waste, acid rain, ozone depletion and global warming. They argue that the affluent have achieved their standard of living by depleting their own environmental resources as well as those of the countries which they colonised. Some also fear that attention to ecological concerns may divert scarce human and financial resources from the more immediate justice issues of poverty and hunger.⁹

These observations suggest a classic dilemma: To provide for the basic needs of the powerless, it seems that some further industrial development and economic growth is indeed necessary, with the inevitable impact of a further depletion of non-renewable resources.¹⁰ Another way of characterising this dilemma is the tension between “feeding people” and “saving nature”.¹¹ There is nevertheless a growing recognition in affluent

⁵ For Christian literature on the tensions between the “North” and the “South” on environmental issues, see especially the volume edited by Hallman (1994) and the contributions by De Santa Ana 1998, Granberg-Michaelson 1992, Hessel 1992, 1996, Niles 1989, 1992 & Rasmussen 1996.

⁶ For the distinction between the economic centre and the economic periphery, with explicit reference to the impact of both centre and periphery on the environment, see the contributions by Nürnbergger (1987, 1999).

⁷ In South Africa the launching of birth control programs primarily aimed at underprivileged women have left a legacy of deep suspicion among the African population. This suspicion builds on the established patriarchal system that values large families. See Ackermann & Joyner 1996:122. See also Kinoti 2002 & Mugambi 2001:49.

⁸ Quoted in Granberg-Michaelson 1992:9-10.

⁹ Hallman 1994:4.

¹⁰ See Boff 1995:21-29, also Field 1996:153-154.

¹¹ See Rolston, H 1997. Feeding people versus saving nature? In: Gottlieb, RS (ed): *The ecological community: Environmental challenges for philosophy, politics and morality*, 208-228. London & New York: Routledge.

and impoverished countries alike that all other dimensions of human existence (issues of agriculture, forestry, business, governance, education, health and social life) are dependent on a healthy bio-physical environment.

These different assessments of the place of environmental issues on global agendas continue to lead to tensions at an international level. The environment has, not surprisingly, become *a site of struggle in international politics*.¹² These tensions continue to simmer in several major international meetings and reports which address environmental issues. These include the world conference on the environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the “Brundtland” commission) on *Our common future* (1987), the “Earth Summit” organised by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992,¹³ and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002.¹⁴

3.3 The victims of environmental degradation

The recognition of the need for a healthy environment requires, especially from the point of view of Christian ethics, a specific focus on the victims of environmental degradation. Although environmental degradation affects all human beings, it does not do so equally. There is a growing consensus that the victims of environmental degradation are also the victims of socio-economic injustice. These include various groups of marginalised people¹⁵ on the economic periphery: indigenous peoples (who often become environmental refugees),¹⁶ women,¹⁷ children,¹⁸ the poor,¹⁹ mine workers,

¹² Tim Cooper (1990:94) explains this problem neatly:

Recent debate in international forums on environmental concerns has highlighted a tension between industrialised and low-income countries. The latter fear that as countries address environment problems the poor will suffer unduly. Growth through industrialisation has brought an end to malnutrition and squalor for millions. When the world’s poor hear affluent nations calling for restrictions on consumption, many are understandably sceptical. Too easily it appears as if the rich are denying opportunities to those who remain poor.

David Hallman’s (1994:4) assessment of the problem is similar:

Development workers in both South and North have looked with suspicion as environmental concerns rose on the agenda of Northern countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and international bodies. They saw the North having achieved a materially rich standard of living at the expense of the environment in Northern countries and in many Southern ones which they had colonized, not to mention the damage to the global atmosphere. Now those industrialized nations wanted to impose restrictions on development so as to protect their own life-styles. There was also a sense that Northerners were attracted to the environment as the new issue of the day. Further, people in the development community feared that attention to ecological concerns would divert scarce human and financial resources from the more immediate justice issues of poverty and hunger.

¹³ A large number of environmental organizations gathered in downtown Rio for a ‘92 Global Forum at the same time that the “official” UNCED conference took place in 1992. This brought thousands of people together from all over the world for two weeks of presentations, debates, discussions, exhibitions, celebrations and prayer on the issues of sustainable development. The World Council of Churches played an important role in this regard. For an assessment of the Rio Earth Summit and Agenda 21 in Christian literature, see especially Granberg-Michaelson 1992, also Hallman 1994, Obermann 1998 & Pasztor 1993.

¹⁴ For Christian literature in preparation for the WSSD, see Conradie, Mtetwa & Warmback 2002, Keenan 2002, Mtetwa 2002 & Warmback 2002.

¹⁵ On the notion of margins and marginalisation, see Field 2003 & Rieger 2004.

¹⁶ All over the world, for example in Aboriginal, African, Indian, Latin American, Native American, Philippine, and Pacific contexts, indigenous peoples have been the victims of colonial conquests and

factory workers, farm workers and people of colour.²⁰ Many people accept employment in dreadful environmental conditions which pose grave dangers to their health, for example through exposure to toxic gases and pesticides. Environmental injustices are indeed aggravated by practices such as exploitative economic policies, racial, ethnic and religious polarisation, gender discrimination and class inequalities. The world's poor may therefore be regarded as the most threatened beings on earth, especially if the millions of deaths amongst the poor are considered.²¹

It is not only human beings who are the victims of environmental degradation though. The victims include all other forms of life. Not only individual specimens but also whole species are victimised as a result of the destruction of ecosystems. Some liberation and feminist theologians have argued that the notions of solidarity with the victims and liberation for the poor, oppressed and marginalised should also include a concern for the most vulnerable and threatened part of creation, namely other animals, plants, insects, the soil and micro-organisms. As Sallie McFague suggests, the "new poor", the latest manifestation of poverty which exacerbates the predicament of poor human beings, is nature itself.²² Lorna Hallahan therefore calls for "a theology from the dung heap" which does not start "with our desire for transcendence in God, nor in the mystic glory of gorgeous nature, nor with authority of the institution of the church. We start by naming as our inspiration that which gives us an apprehension of godforsakenness – the

"development" projects which sooner or later have driven them from their ancestral land. Many tribes have become environmental refugees or have been relocated to "tribal homelands" to allow for new industrial initiatives or even for the development of nature conservation areas. Numerous contributions have indicated the marginalised position of indigenous peoples and the problem of environmental refugees. See, for example, the contributions of Cooper and McKay in Hallman 1994. See also Wright & Kill 1993:31-48.

¹⁷ Women and children are often the victims of environmental destruction. As soil deteriorates, women have to farm longer hours in backbreaking toil to harvest food from barren soil. They often have to walk long distances to fetch water and firewood. Women are often exploited to work in environmentally hazardous conditions for low wages. There are numerous stories of women engaging with the effects of environmental destruction all over the world. The impact on environmental degradation on the plight of women in Africa has been well documented. See Ackermann 1997, Ackermann & Joyner 1996 (on South Africa) Getui 2000, Hinga 1996 (on the Agikuyu in Kenya), Kabugumila 2001 (on Tanzania), Moyo (on Lake Chilwa in Malawi), Mvududu 1996 (on Zimbabwe) and Phiri 1996 (on the Chisumphi cult in Malawi).

¹⁸ Children suffer most from diseases like diarrhoea due to a lack of potable water and inadequate sanitation. In deforested rural communities, girls and women expend increasing energy and time to collect firewood. See Wright & Kill 1993:31-48.

¹⁹ See especially Boff 1994, 1997, Boff & Elizondo 1995, Dussel 1988 & Wright & Kill 1993.

²⁰ There is an empirical correlation between the victims of environmental degradation and race groups. In the United States this correlation is often described with the notion of "environmental racism". See especially Sindab 1993 (on the National Black Church Environmental and Economic Justice Summit, 1-2 December 1993, Washington D.C.), also Miller-Travis 2000 & Rasmussen 2004. This ecological dimension of racism has only recently surfaced on the agenda of black theologians. See Cone 2001 & Hoyt 1996. There is no doubt that a similar analysis applies in Southern Africa as well (see the literature cited above), albeit that black and African theologians have not yet addressed this concern specifically. See the contribution by Nolan 2002 though.

²¹ See Boff 1997:110.

²² McFague 1993:165.

exploited planet and our overlooked and downtrodden neighbours.”²³ The notion of liberation may indeed be broadened to include liberation for the whole of creation.²⁴

For the sake of an environmental awareness in countries such as South Africa, it is crucial to grasp that environmental problems are deeply intertwined with the typical problems which the poor and marginalised in South Africa experience in their everyday lives:

- * *In general*, the poor and marginalised are driven to live in physical conditions that are of a bad environmental quality (and which are therefore “open” for occupation). The poorest often live (and work!) on urban waste dumps. Others accept employment in dreadful environmental conditions with grave risks to their health.
- * *In rural areas* in South Africa, the scarcity of clean drinking water and firewood are environmental problems at their very roots. Deportation under apartheid led to over-population and thus to overgrazing, soil erosion and exhaustion and a depletion of water supplies. Many resort to poaching and forms of deforestation as a survival strategy. This causes further environmental damage and increases poverty, leading to a vicious circle.²⁵
- * *In urban areas*, people are often the victims of environmental degradation caused by nearby industries. Townships in South Africa were often precisely located on land that was not in demand. At the same time, people living in townships are also the cause of some environmental problems. Most of the problems which people experience on a daily basis are indeed environmental problems – even though these are seldom recognised as such. These environmental problems include the health hazards of air pollution (from nearby industries, vehicles or the burning of coal), the impact of toxic waste from nearby industries, unsafe drinking water, noise pollution (from airports and highways), overcrowding (a localised form of over-population), a lack of basic infrastructure, sanitation and hygiene, a high incidence of contagious diseases, inadequate waste disposal, the visual ugliness of stinking and rotting garbage in many poor neighbourhoods, regular floodings or landslides, deforestation following the cutting of trees in the neighbourhood for firewood and the the struggle for political control over ever scarcer resources.²⁶

3.4 Environmental justice or ecojustice

There can be no serious commitment to social and economic justice which does not include an ecological responsibility and vice versa. The well-being of human beings is inseparably linked with that of all life on earth. Environmental degradation is not a separate concern from poverty, deprivation and economic exploitation, but often a manifestation thereof.²⁷ This calls for an understanding of the interconnectedness of the

²³ Hallahan 2004:121.

²⁴ See Boff 1995, Daneel 1991 & McFague 1993.

²⁵ See also the apt title of the essay, “I am too poor to care for nature”, on the rural poor in Malawi by Ott 2002.

²⁶ See the following excellent article on South African cities: Lawson, L 1991. The ghetto and the greenbelt. In: Cock, J & Koch, E (eds) 1991. *Going green. People, politics and the environment in South Africa*, 46-63. Cape Town: Oxford University Press. From an African perspective, see Samita 2000 (on Nairobi). From a Latin-American perspective, see Gudynas 1995. See also the discussion in Conradie & Field 2000:18f.

²⁷ Nash 1996:11.

different manifestations of violence (whether political, military, industrial, domestic, gendered, racial, ethnic, or structural). C.S. Lewis' comment of decades ago is still appropriate here: what we call human power over nature is actually the power exercised by some people over others, using nature as a tool.²⁸

The term "ecojustice" is often used in ecumenical discourse to capture the need for a comprehensive sense of justice that can respond to both economic injustice and ecological degradation.²⁹ Dieter Hessel defines "ecojustice" in the following ways:

A combination of ecology and social justice, "eco-justice" refers to the interlocking web of concern about the earth's carrying capacity, its ability to support the lives of its inhabitants and the human family's ability to live together in harmony. It highlights the interrelatedness of such pressing issues such as world hunger and world peace, the energy crisis and unemployment, appropriate technology and good work, biblical stewardship and feminist consciousness, radical justice and pluralistic community, life-style choices in response to poverty and pollution.³⁰

Eco-justice provides a dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity and the struggle for social and economic justice. It emerges through constructive human responses that serve environmental health and social equity together – for the sake of human well-being with otherkind.³¹

In subsequent contributions Hessel has identified the following four basic norms for an ethics of ecojustice:

- * solidarity with other people and creatures – companions, victims and allies – in earth community, reflecting deep respect for creation;
- * ecological sustainability, that is, environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish and that utilize ecologically and socially appropriate technology;
- * sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing – distributive justice – which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or "fair" consumption; and
- * socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the good of the commons.³²

The Environmental Justice Networking Forum in South Africa (EJNF) has also adopted the struggle for environmental justice as its point of departure. The struggle for environmental justice seeks to challenge the abuse of power that results in the situation that poor people have to suffer the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed

²⁸ See Rasmussen 1996:42.

²⁹ This term was coined by William Gibson (see, Gibson 1985, 1989, 1996) and popularised by Dieter Hessel (see, Hessel 1985, 1992, 1996). Hessel (1996:19, 22f) identifies the following basic norms for an ecojustice ethics: solidarity with other creatures, ecological sustainability, sufficiency and socially just participation. See also the ecojustice principles identified in Habel 1998. Nash (1996:10) warns that this term may be narrowed to an anthropocentric concept that expressed concern only for the environmental dimensions of intra-human justice.

³⁰ Hessel 1985:12.

³¹ Hessel 1996:18.

³² Hessel 1996, 2001:203-204.

of others.³³ In the National Environmental Management Act (107 of 1998), the South African government also emphasised the link between environmental protection and issues of social and economic justice. The subtitle of the discussion document, *The land is crying for justice*, produced in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 also reflects this concern for environmental justice.³⁴ It explains the notion of environmental justice in the following words:

Concerned citizens all over the world have come to the conclusion that the current economic dispensation is exploiting people and the biophysical environment alike. It is indeed crucial to comprehend the link between economic injustice and environmental destruction. The struggle for environmental justice seeks to challenge the abuse of power that results in the situation that marginalised people have to suffer the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed of others, especially the powerful. It seems clear to us that the present economic order perpetuates the unequal access to natural resources and contributes towards environmental destruction.

Christian discourse on environmental degradation has to rely on scientific evidence in order to determine the extent and scope of such degradation. It can supplement such scientific evidence through an ethical assessment that is based on core Christian convictions on God's justice. To see the world through God's eyes may help to open one's eyes for the victims of environmental degradation. It is indeed a matter of seeing the problem. Seeing also requires discernment, that is, the need to discern the roots and the fruits of such environmental degradation. This is the topic of the next chapter.

³³ Information brochure of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum.

³⁴ See Conradie, Mtetwa & Warmback 2002.

CHAPTER 4

The economic roots and fruits of environmental degradation

4.1 The economic roots of environmental degradation

Human settlements have had an adverse effect on the natural environment at least since the earliest agricultural revolutions.¹ It is therefore a fallacy to regard the environmental crisis as a purely modern phenomenon. Since the earliest settlements human beings have used their intelligence and tools to alter the natural environment. The negative impact of humans on the environment was at first limited. This changed when the shift from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies took place in three different contexts, namely China, Meso-America and the Middle East, from approximately 10 000 BCE. These agricultural revolutions led to food surpluses, population growth and clearly demarcated territories with organisational structures.² From these settlements the first major civilisations emerged.

The rise and fall of such civilisations may have been closely linked to environmental factors. As a result of the land being over-utilised, the human population either declined or emigrated to new lands. This allowed the land to recover, species to evolve and new ecosystems to come into existence to replace the old ones. Ecological abuse is therefore not new; it is just that it has never happened on a global scale before.³

In the past the abuse of the environment was limited by four factors:

- * Religious and philosophical ideas which placed limits on the exploitation of the non-human world;

¹ See Rasmussen (1996) for a discussion of the environmental impact of three crucial economic revolutions, namely the agricultural, the industrial and the information revolutions. He draws on the following important study:

Ponting, C 1991. *A green history of the world: The environment and the collapse of great civilizations*. New York: Penguin.

² On the ecological impact of the agricultural revolutions, see Rasmussen 1996:53f & Northcott 1996:42f.

³ Moltmann (1989:64-66) comments on this link:

There are many investigations of the connection between land and civilization which show that, for example, the cultures by the Euphrates and Tigris, the Roman cultures in North Africa, the Maya culture in Yucatan and others collapsed because the land was exploited recklessly and short-sightedly and the fertility of the soil was steadily destroyed. Emigration and the "deportation" of people became necessary, to save both the ground and human beings. It was especially the great empires which exploited their granaries and fertile provinces to feed their great cities and armies and also devastated them through pillaging.

Ingemar Hedström (1990:111) adds in more evocative language: "All the great civilizations of the world began with the felling of the first tree ... the majority of them disappeared with the felling of the last tree." However, as Dubos (1994) points out, there are other examples where lands have remained fertile despite thousands of years of cultivation.

- * A lack of sophisticated technology;
- * The still limited size of the human population;
- * The limited geographical distribution of human societies.

The limited environmental impact of earlier civilisations has more recently taken on proportions that threaten the very survival of life on earth. This is the result of a series of historical transformations such as the emergence of modern science, the development of ever more sophisticated technologies, industrialisation, urbanisation and the rise of Industrial capitalism. The present environmental crisis is closely related to the lasting impact of the industrial revolution, supported by its use of sophisticated and extractive forms of technology, the consumption of stored energy such as fossil fuels, and the emergence of business corporations.⁴

Since the time of the industrial revolution these developments literally transformed the world, including non-Western countries. It has led to a previously unheard of production of manufactured goods, a surplus of goods and ever increasing levels of consumption (of energy and non-renewable resources) and of pollution. Together with the rise of industrial capitalism, this led to the far-reaching commodification of the goods of nature.⁵ Although the global community is now in the midst of a third (namely the information) revolution, the current global economy is still based on the agricultural and the industrial revolutions. There has, in fact, been an increase and not a decrease in the sheer volume of manufactured goods (which now requires much less labour to produce), raw material and energy.⁶

This enormous *production* of goods has indeed led to an astonishing creation of wealth. It also led to a drop in infant mortality rates, an increased life expectation and thus to a dramatic growth in the human population. These spectacular advances have opened up immense possibilities for enriching the quality of human life and well-being.⁷ However, this production of wealth has not brought wealth to most of the world's population. This unequal *distribution* of wealth is partly the result of the lasting legacy of colonialism, which provided colonising countries access to new sources of raw materials, cheap labour, new markets and a convenient opportunity to "export" its existing population surplus. At the same time, it has also caused impoverishment for many, the exclusion of indigenous peoples, a drastic depletion of resources, massive pollution and the destruction of the habitats of numerous species.

⁴ See Rasmussen 1996:55.

⁵ See Northcott 1996:48-56.

⁶ Rasmussen 1996:68f.

⁷ The production of immense wealth has not necessarily brought well-being for those who share in the economic and medical benefits of industrial capitalism. Northcott (1996:82) comments:

Indigenous pre-modern peoples lived a life of material sufficiency but their wealth in human goods – communal feasting, leisure time, ritual, play and sheer joy – far exceeded the availability of these goods in many sectors of modern societies. The very life qualities which modernisation tends to corrode or reduce – long-term relationships, stable families, communities of place, meaningful leisure, co-operative games, religious rituals, care for the local environment – are those which so-called primitive cultures have in abundance. Modern problems of meaninglessness, stress, employment insecurity and the diseases of affluence such as heart disease are almost unknown in many traditional societies.

4.2 The limits to economic growth

The logic behind most industrial societies is one of sustained economic growth. Growth is seen as the key to create sufficient wealth for a growing world population. The size of the proverbial cake must be enlarged – otherwise any discussions concerning the cutting and distribution of the cake would remain meaningless. The classic economic question as to how to sustain people's livelihoods in the face of a scarcity of resources received a simple answer in this paradigm: by producing more and more.

The famous "Limits to growth" report (1972) expressed the first reservations regarding the feasibility of sustained economic growth. It analysed the availability of energy, the use of non-renewable resources and the increasing human population.⁸ Unlimited growth is simply not possible on a finite planet. A finite planet cannot sustain continuous, expanding demands on its resources.⁹ In an excellent early article, Larry Rasmussen pointed out that three limitations to sustained economic growth may be distinguished, namely *economic* limits (the use of renewable and non-renewable resources), *social* limits (the degree of social change that is possible in a short period) and *biospheric* limits (the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the waste products of economic production).¹⁰

The notion of limits to growth led to fierce debate amongst economists and futurologists. In a helpful summary of current economic debates, Ekins and Jacobs point out that there are different notions of growth:¹¹

- * Growth of the economy through biophysical throughput (which they argue has to retract to ensure sustainability);
- * Growth of production as measured by GDP (which they argue does not provide a sufficient indication of human welfare because it does not take voluntary work and environmental inputs into account);
- * Growth of human welfare (which may be increased in a sustainable way).

It remains clear that continued economic growth and a significant expansion of the number of affluent economies are barely possible. This is not simply due to an insufficient work ethic, a lack of technological know-how or an inefficient and wasteful management of resources – as is often assumed uncritically. It is also due to the limited available resources, the history of colonisation, the availability of new markets, the control over existing markets by powerful companies and access to cheap labour – while still controlling the means of production).¹² In a subsequent report, entitled *Beyond*

⁸ See Meadows, DH et al 1972. *The limits to growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.

⁹ The notion of limits to growth is explained in quite a lucid way in the following story about Ghandi:
After Ghandi led India to independence someone asked him whether India will now try to reach the same standard of living as England. His answer was: "It took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve its prosperity; how many planets will a country like India require?" Quoted in Granberg-Michaelson 1992:17.

¹⁰ Rasmussen 1975.

¹¹ Ekins, P & Jacobs, M 1995. *Environmental sustainability and the growth of GDP: Conditions for compatibility*. In: Bhaskar, V & Glyn, A 1995. *The North, the South and the environment. Ecological constraints and the global economy*. London: Earthscan Publications.

¹² For a discussion of the limits to growth debate in Christian discourse, see Cobb 1992:7-19f, Hallman 1992:109-126, McDonagh 1990:38-66, Nash 1991:40-63, Peters 1976 & Wielenga 1995.

limits to growth, Meadows and others maintain that sustained economic growth cannot but have disastrous environmental consequences in the longer term.¹³

The notion of “limits to growth” is of special importance within the context of the debate on population and consumption. There is a growing consensus that environmental impact (E) should be measured in terms of population (P), affluence (A) and technological force (T). This is expressed in the following formula: $E = P \times A \times T$.¹⁴ The clear implication of this formula is that the global population of 6.6 billion (end of 2006) simply cannot aspire to the present standards of affluence enjoyed by many middle-class citizens in the North and by the elite in countries of the South. This is due to the basic scarcity of resources and the fact that Western affluence was built on resources and labour from its colonies and the availability of relatively cheap forms of energy, especially from fossil fuels. This implies that wasteful consumption and population growth must necessarily be addressed together. The real limits to the earth’s carrying capacity preclude both unlimited growth in human population and an increased consumption of the earth’s resources. Von Weizsäcker subsequently argues that the North must act first to reduce the environmental impact of current levels of consumption.¹⁵

4.3 The environmental fruits of the present global economy

The notion of “limits to growth” is particularly helpful to indicate the environmental impact of the *production* of wealth. The environmental impact of the *distribution* of wealth is of equal concern. This requires an assessment of the present global economy. The present production of wealth is still sufficient to meet the basic needs of the world’s current human population. The fact that many people suffer from poverty, malnutrition or famine is a function of the maldistribution of wealth. This has serious environmental consequences too.

South African theologian Klaus Nürnberger argues that this environmental impact can best be understood in terms of the distinction between economic centres and economic peripheries.¹⁶ He shows how many environmental problems (for example various forms of pollution, waste, the unsustainable use of resources) are directly related to the levels of consumption prevalent in pockets of affluence, especially in First World countries, but increasingly also in small groups of elites in Third World countries. Although the poor are often not the cause but the victims of environmental destruction, a number of environmental problems (such as population growth, deforestation, desertification and the depletion of wildlife stocks) are nevertheless typically related to a context of poverty.

The environmental crisis is a function of the global economic system. What is at stake is the economic basis of the late-capitalist industrial civilisation itself. Any analysis of the global economic system is certainly highly complex and open to dispute. There are numerous issues relating to the global economy that are often analysed and subjected to

¹³ Meadows, DH, Meadows, DL & Randers, J 1992. *Beyond the limits: Confronting global collapse, envisioning a sustainable future*. Post Mills: Chelsea Green.

¹⁴ See Martin-Schramm (1997) for an excellent discussion in this regard.

¹⁵ Von Weizsäcker 1993:101-108.

¹⁶ For an explanation of this model, see Nürnberger 1987 and especially 1999.

critique in literature on Christianity and the environment. These issues include the following:

- * The environmental legacy of colonialism and new forms of colonialism;
- * The accumulation of capital and the role played by money systems in neo-liberal forms of capitalism;¹⁷
- * The environmental impact of globalisation;¹⁸
- * The environmental impact of economic inequalities and unemployment,¹⁹ of both poverty and affluence;²⁰
- * The environment impact of financial systems, tax systems and tax incentives;
- * The environmental impact of the international debt crisis and the jubilee campaign in response to that;²¹
- * The role of international financial institutions, especially the Bretton Woods institutions (notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund);²²

¹⁷ In addition to many critiques of capitalism, for example by Duchrow 1995, 1997 & Gorringer 1994, see the article on money by Goodchild 2004. For a South African theological assessment of economic systems and their underlying ideologies, see the many contributions by Klaus Nürnberger, and especially the following work: Nürnberger, K 1998. *Beyond Marx and the market*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. See also the study document, *The oikos journey* published by Diakonia Council of Churches (2006). At its 24th General Council, Accra, Ghana, July 30 – August 13 2004, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches stated the following on neoliberal capitalism:

9. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:
 - unrestrained competition, consumerism, and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth is the best for the whole world;
 - the ownership of private property has no social obligation;
 - capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;
 - social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people, are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.
10. This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry.

¹⁸ See the volume of essays (e.g. by Finn, Maggay, Oberhänsli, Petrou, de Santa Ana, Tulloch, Vischer and Wilson) edited by Julio de Santa Ana (1998). See also the contributions by Burke 2001, Douglass 1997, Duchrow 1997, Fortman & Goldewijk s.a., Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995, Grey 2003 & the document *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (AGAPE) (WCC 2005). See also the discussion in Chapter 11.4 on ecumenical discourse on globalisation.

¹⁹ See Geitmann 1998, Nürnberger 1999 & Wilson 1998.

²⁰ See the essays in Boff & Elizondo 1995, De Santa Ana 1995 & MacGarry 1995, also Boff 1994, 1995, 1997, Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995, Nürnberger 1987, 1999 & Schut 1997.

²¹ For a discussion in Christian literature of the environmental impact of international debt, see especially Cobb 1994:69-88, Duchrow 1995:69f, Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995:11f, MacGarry 1993, 1995 (with reference to the Zimbabwean context) & McDonagh 1990:9-37, 1994:67f, 1998, 1999:24-61. See also Chapter 4 of the document on *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:26-36) on just finance.

²² See the study document on international financial institutions produced by the World Council of Churches (2001), entitled *Lead us not into temptation*. It identifies ten ideological traps and temptations which churches have to confront in their dealings with such financial institutions. See also Cobb 1999 & Duchrow 1995:69f.

- * The environmental impact of international trade and finance, the General Agreement in Tariffs and Trade (GATT, 1994-5) and the policies of the World Trade Organization;²³
- * The environmental impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes;²⁴
- * The role of trans-national companies.²⁵

In the context of Christian theology most of these issues are discussed in more detail in literature in the field of economic ethics – sometimes with allusions to environmental concerns – and are therefore simply listed here and not explored in any further detail. Further references to the relevant literature may be multiplied easily.

4.4 The debate on sustainable development

The present global economic order is largely based on the premise of sustained economic growth. In response to the recognition that there are indeed limits to economic growth, the notion of sustainable development is widely regarded as a key concept to redirect the global economic order towards an alternative that is more sustainable in terms of the earth's carrying capacity. It serves as the dominant conceptual framework for government policies, business and industry. The United Nations' Commission of Environment and Development (chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland), in its report *Our Common future* (1987), adopted the following widely used definition of sustainable development:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- * The concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- * The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.²⁶

The value of the notion of sustainable development is that it serves as an important corrective against expansionist notions of economic growth. It reminds us that economic growth is not sustainable and simply not possible in a world where resources remain limited. However, the notion of sustainable development remains problematic. Some critics regard the notion of sustainable development as an attempt at the greening of global capitalism, as a euphemism used by entrepreneurs for "business as usual",

²³ See Cobb 1994:89-110, Finn 1996:147-194, McDonagh 1994:16-37 and Chapter 3 of the document *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:17-25) on just trade.

²⁴ For a discussion in Christian theology of the environmental impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa, see especially All Africa Council of Churches (1997: Module 5), Balleis 1992, MacGarry 1993, 1995, Owens 1997 & Sowunmi 1994.

²⁵ Many ecumenical contributions on this issue draw on the following work: Korten, DC 1995. *When corporations rule the world*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. See also Berry 1999:117-135 & McDonagh 1994:93-102.

²⁶ In the National Environmental Management Act (107 of 1998), the South African government adopted a similar definition of sustainable development, i.e. "development that meet the needs of the present while not compromising the needs of future generations."

namely an emphasis on economic growth, qualified by a few environmental cautions. When faced with a choice between development and a sustainable environment, the interests of developers and entrepreneurs (who can often provide short-term economic gain in terms of employment) regularly seem to receive a priority. The underlying development paradigm, with its strong emphasis on economic growth and market expansion serves primarily the interests of powerful corporate-driven, market-oriented economic forces.

Others observe a tension between economic growth and ecological sustainability. They argue that it cannot address social inequalities or the root causes of environmental degradation. The notion of sustainable development does not escape from conceptual contradictions (similar to sustainable growth).²⁷ The notions of sustainability and development (assuming unlimited economic growth) are in contradiction with one another. It would not help to make destructive forms of development more sustainable. Instead, the sustainability of natural ecosystems should be regarded as the point of departure.²⁸ In this vein, Leonardo Boff concludes that sustainable development is an oxymoron that leads to confusion; it does not symbolise a new way of looking at the world.²⁹

The underlying problem is that the notion of sustainable development does not escape from the ambiguity of the notion of development itself. The UN definition of sustainable development seems to assume that the meaning of “development” is evident and that such development now has to become more sustainable. To put the problem in proverbial terms: Development discourse is based on the assumption that it is better to teach a person how to fish in the river or lake than to give him (or her) a fish to eat. The problem is that indigenous knowledge has been lost and must be retrieved through education and training in innovative ways. This requires financial resources in order to obtain a fishing rod and other gear. Once this is in place, one needs to ensure access to the fishing waters and fishing permits amidst other powerful role players and international regulations. Once all of this is in place, one may be confronted with the problem of overfishing: the fish which is caught have become smaller and smaller.

This problem is made more complex by the often destructive impact of development aid. Moreover, several Christian critics have argued that such “development” has failed to bridge the gap between the affluent in the centres of economic power and the impoverished on the economic periphery.³⁰ In ecumenical literature on development the

²⁷ For a discussion of the notion of sustainable development in Christian literature, see especially Béguin-Austin 1993, Christiansen 1991, Daly 1997, Freudenberger 1996, Hallman 1994, McClean 1994, Obermann 1998 & Rasmussen 1996:127f. For African contributions, see Antonio 1994, Arigbebe 1997, Conradie 2002, De Gruchy 2002, Esteva 1997, Field 1998, Kamaara 2002, Kritzinger 1991, 1994 & Mtetwa 2002.

²⁸ See Boff 1997:101.

²⁹ Boff 1997:67.

³⁰ The following article provides a very helpful summary of the debate on the failure of development to address economic inequalities and environmental sustainability:

Sutcliffe, B 1995. Development after ecology. In: Bhaskar, V & Glyn, A 1995. *The North, the South and the environment. Ecological constraints and the global economy*. London: Earthscan Publications.

Using metaphors of travelling, Sutcliffe shows how earlier debates focused on the “vehicle” (the respective roles of the market and the state, viz. the systems of capitalism or socialism) and the “route” (the question whether the socio-economic system would ensure that development is of mutual benefit) required for development but assumed the possibility and necessity of development. More recent debates centre

role of institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation and instruments such as Structural Adjustment Programmes and trade barriers has often been criticised in this regard. The argument is that this has made it difficult for poorer nations to participate in such a way that builds up their people and local communities. Many have argued that the underdeveloped countries had been made underdeveloped by the very success of the (over)developed ones. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson summarises this “failure of development” in the following way:

Growth itself was not growing. Even when wealth for some was successfully created, poverty for many more was increasing more rapidly. The “underdeveloped” world was not “catching up” with the developed world. In many respects the gap between the rich and the poor was growing wider, rather than being narrowed.³¹

This “failure of development” has led to many attempts at redefining development, for example at a smaller, more human scale through localised community development done through community structures, cooperatives and self-help groups instead of large scale development projects based on industrial technologies.³² There are many examples of such development projects in the African context which are self-consciously concerned with issues of sustainability.³³ Several alternative models for development have emerged through the leadership of people such as Cabral, Nkrumah and Nyerere in Africa. Many of these alternative paths have flourished for a while, and then collapsed through the pressures of global political and economic forces. Such failures have left African countries in a precarious position, subject to global economic forces over which they have little control, growing debt burdens, and unfavourable trade rules. More recently, African heads of state have sought to place Africa once again on the global development agenda through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).³⁴ International development discourse has been shaped more recently by the eight Millennium Development Goals identified by the United Nations. Ecclesial and theological discourse would therefore have to engage with appropriate policies which could address such goals.³⁵

around the very “destination” of development and the validity of the “map” itself. Two distinct critiques of development emerged in this debate, namely the welfare critique (the question whether development can actually produce human welfare) and the environmental critique (the question whether development can be environmentally sustainable). He also discusses the need for an integrated model of development that will focus on “sustainable human development” and shows that a redistribution of economic power remains crucial to ensure both the goals of sustainability and of equity. However, such development is not in the interest of the “driver”, namely the powerful minority who has monopolised political and military power to control economic wealth.

See also the contributions in Christian literature by Esteva 1997, Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995 & Granberg-Michaelson 1992.

³¹ Granberg-Michaelson 1992:3.

³² There is a wealth of literature from the perspective of Christian theology on development debates from within the South African context alone. The Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa has, for example, published several volumes, all edited by Renier Koegelenberg, in this regard. Since these contributions do not focus overtly on ecological concerns, such literature is not reflected in this guide for further research.

³³ See the many contributions by Daneel (e.g. 1996), also Arigbebe 1997, Conradie & Field 2000:97-116 & Mukusya 2001.

³⁴ For an assessment of NEPAD in publications in the field of ecological theology, see De Gruchy 2002.

³⁵ See, for example, the statement by the Evangelical Church in Germany 2005.

There is wealth of literature on development themes in Christian theological discourse. Since such contributions are not always related to ecological concerns, such contributions cannot be discussed here in any detail. It should at least be clear that development is a highly contested term and that there are conflicting notions of what “development” entails. The implication is that any notion of sustainable development cannot and will not find the necessary conceptual clarity unless these debates on development are resolved. The ongoing debates about development indicate that such conceptual clarity is elusive, to say the least. The legacy of the “failure of development” cannot be cured simply by adding the adjective “sustainable.” It may be possible to redefine the notion of sustainable development. The revised World Conservation Strategy, for example, described sustainable development as “improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.”³⁶ However, such redescrptions cannot escape from the legacy of discourse on the notion of “development”. As long as there remain confusion on the aims and methods of development, it would not be sufficient to add the adjective of sustainability in this regard. The notion of sustainable development may function as a corrective to the excesses of global capitalism, but as long as it remains a function of this system, it will not be able to offer a viable alternative.

4.5 In search of economic alternatives to global industrial capitalism

The critique against the models of sustained economic growth and of sustainable development has urged several Christian ethicists to investigate alternatives to the current global economic order. Some have boldly proposed an alternative economic vision which would ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and a sustainable use of resources.³⁷ Neither socialism nor industrial capitalism can provide the parameters for such a new economic order since both these paradigms assume the necessity of sustained economic growth while they may differ on the mechanisms required to ensure a fair distribution of wealth.³⁸ Many Christian contributions have stressed the need for an economic system in which wealth is not measured as an economic commodity only.

One influential proposal in ecumenical discourse is that the notion of “sustainable community”, instead of sustainable development, may serve as the root metaphor for an alternative economic vision.³⁹ What does such a vision for a *sustainable community* entail? In general, it implies the nurturing of equitable relationships both within the human family and also between humans and the rest of the ecological community. Larry

³⁶ See its report, *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (Gland, Switzerland: International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1991).

³⁷ See amongst others, Cobb 1992, Cobb & Daly 1994, Daly 1991, De Santa Ana 1995, Duchrow 1995, Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995, Johnston 1998, King & Woodyard 1999, Mieth & Vidal 1997 & Nürnberger 1998, 1999. Herman Daly’s work as an economist calling for a steady state economy instead of a growth model has played a particularly important role in Christian discourse on a sustainable economic system. For an explicit discussion of a steady state economy in relation to Christian convictions, see Daly 1991.

³⁸ See, for example, Cooper 1991:71f.

³⁹ On the notion of sustainable community, see Cobb 1992:34-53, 1994:45-68, Mudge & Wieser 2000, Rasmussen 1996 and especially Wellman 2001. For a critical analysis of this notion, see Conradie 2000, 2002 and Van Hoogstraten 1999. See also Clifford’s use of the term “sustainable oikos” (Clifford 2002, 2006).

Rasmussen identifies the following connotations of the notion of sustainable community:

- * It is *ecologically sustainable*. Unlimited material growth on a finite planet is simply not possible. We can only survive on this planet if we follow its household rules, not ours. This means that renewable resources are consumed no faster than they can be renewed, that non-renewable resources are consumed no faster than renewable resources can be found and that wastes are discharged at a rate no greater than they can be processed by nature or human devices.
- * It provides *sufficient sustenance* for all. While some live in relative luxury, more than a billion people are not able to obtain a calorie-adequate diet (the World Health Organization's definition of the poverty-line). A sustainable community implies that such people should gain access to energy, resources, work and land in order to obtain sufficient sustenance and their fair share of the earth's resources. This calls for a new sense of what is "enough" or satisfactory (*satis* = enough). We need to adopt a lifestyle based on the virtue of simplicity, of being content with what is sufficient.
- * It calls for a *working together in community*. In a sustainable community wealth is defined as the well-being of the whole community. This requires a sense of caring for one another and not just of gaining material prosperity. All economic activity, including paid and unpaid labour, should be conducive to community well-being.
- * It requires *participation by all*. This means both the right and responsibility to share in work for the common good of the community. Human dignity requires a dispensation where people will not be excluded from work but will participate in decisions pertaining to their work and to what is best for their community.
- * It *respects diversity*. A sense of community does not imply rigid conformity or monotonous identity, but calls for an appreciation of community. True community arises out of the interaction of different people with a variety of gifts, abilities and personalities. It is through relationships of mutual dependence amongst such diverse people that individualism is overcome and community emerges. A respect for diversity also reduces the potential for conflict that destroys both the human community and the rest of creation.⁴⁰

In 1993, soon after the Rio "Earth summit", the World Council of Churches convened a meeting to discuss the problem of a sustainable economic order. This consultation formulated the following parameters for a new economic order:

- * The *yardstick for a healthy economy* must be changed from that of economic growth (e.g. GDP) to a contribution towards sustainability itself.
- * A choice must be made for an *appropriate scale of production* and consumption so that the earth's ecosystems (and the poor) are not overburdened. This implies the creation of a limited set of boundary conditions within which the market should operate, with specific reference to the maximum use of resources and the maximum allowable emission of pollutants. (These constraints are similar to the limits imposed by the international community on slave trade and child labour).

⁴⁰ Rasmussen (1996:114) comments: "Nature depends on diversity, thrives on differences, and perishes in the imbalance of uniformity. Healthy systems are highly varied and specific to time and place. Nature is not mass-produced." See also Rasmussen in Taylor 2005:380-381.

- * There should be a *shift from a “flow” to a “stock” orientation* in order to improve economic and natural stocks. This can be supported and encouraged through tax reforms.
- * The underlying goal of national economies should be shifted from *maximising growth* or output towards *minimising the throughput of resources*. This requires a balancing of wealth and population through a redistribution of wealth and policies on population growth.⁴¹

One of the key questions in this ongoing debate is how the global economy can ensure both the eradication of poverty and deprivation and the sustainability of ecosystems. This question will remain one of the key issues for many “developing” countries and for the international community as a whole. Christian discourse on an appropriate economic vision may offer an important contribution in this regard, especially given the apparent inability to conceive viable alternatives to industrial capitalism. At the same time, such Christian discourse has to recognise that any economic vision will have to be translated into the language of policy making in order to establish a viable economic system.

4.6 The global economy as a confessional issue?

In their assessment of the present global economy, several Christian theologians have argued that the dominant assumptions of the global economy are in conflict with the Christian faith in God as Creator and Saviour. Bob Goudzwaard, a Dutch economic ethicist, has argued that the quest for economic growth and material progress has become idolatrous, in that people in industrial societies have become so obsessed with becoming more affluent that they are motivated more by this than by any relationship with God. When the finiteness of economic categories such as human needs, the market and economic growth is denied, such categories become ideological and even idolatrous.⁴² Likewise, Herman Daly argues that the surplus economic wealth produced through industrial growth is idolatrous, environmentally destructive and is used to enslave and to coerce others.⁴³ Hans-Dirk van Hoogstraten refers to the free market economy as a “deep economy” and analyses the ideological and deeply religious character of current economic theory and practice. He even suggests that it has functionally replaced a belief in the trinity.⁴⁴

Christian churches have not always recognised this idolatrous tendency of a faith in the “saving power” of global capitalism. In response, Ulrich Duchrow has suggested that the global economy may have become a confessional issue for churches.⁴⁵ Representatives of ecumenical bodies such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WRC)⁴⁶ and the World Council of Churches (WCC)⁴⁷ have also

⁴¹ Béguin-Austin 1993.

⁴² Goudzwaard 1984, 1989. See also Cooper 1990:74f, Jensen 1979, Van Erkelends 1989 & Van Hoogstraten 1989.

⁴³ See Cobb & Daly 1994 and Daly 1979, 1980, 1991.

⁴⁴ Van Hoogstraten 1989, 1999.

⁴⁵ See Duchrow 1987, 1995, 1996, 1997.

⁴⁶ See the volume of essays in volume 46:3 of the journal *Reformed World*.

⁴⁷ See the following contributions from the World Council of Churches on the global economy.

suggested the possibility that we may have reached a new *status confessionis*. This would imply that we have reached a point where the gospel itself is at stake as a result of idolatry and heresy within the church.⁴⁸ This would require a new confession of the Christian faith in opposition to the reigning ideologies. Since this is not necessarily the case, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, at its assembly in Debrecen, Hungary in 1997, proposed a *processus confessionis*, that is, a “process of recognition, education, confession and action regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.”⁴⁹

A consultation on the impact of globalization in Central and Eastern Europe was held in Budapest, June 2001 and organised by the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation in conjunction with the Conference of European Churches. The message of this consultation was “Serve God, not Mammon!” It raised the following challenging question: “Will the churches have the courage to engage with the ‘values’ of a profit-oriented way of life as a matter of faith, or will they withdraw into the ‘private’ sphere?” It suggested that “This is the question our churches must answer or lose their very soul.” It asked churches to help their members to rediscover the Christian virtues of self-restraint and asceticism and to “propagate these values in their societies as a way of countering individualism and consumerism, and as an alternative foundation for economic and social development.”⁵⁰

A subsequent consultation on “The economy in the service of life”, held at Soesterberg in the Netherlands, 15-19 June 2002, analysed the ways in which globalisation affects European societies, and identified the challenges posed for churches in this regard. A letter from Soesterberg to the churches in Western Europe contains an explicit critique of economic globalisation:

The gospel promises life in all its fullness for all people and the whole creation (John 10:10). This promise was incarnated in Jesus Christ. Nobody is excluded from God’s household of life. The Christian community reflects this vision for the sake of the whole world. Guided by this vision, we strive for an economy in the service of life. Market and money should enable the exchange of goods in order to satisfy human needs and contribute to the building of human community. Today, however, we see a growing domination of real life by private financial and corporate interests. Economic globalization is guided by a logic which gives priority to accumulating capital, unbridled competition and the securing of profit

Mulholland, C (ed) 1988. *Ecumenical reflections on political economy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

World Council of Churches 1992. *Christian faith and the world economy today*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

⁴⁸ See the excellent article by Möller (1996) who argues that the impact of the current global economy should not be regarded as a *casus confessionis*. Although there can be no doubt about the ethical challenges that global capitalism poses, a *status confessionis* can only emerge in a situation where the gospel itself is at stake and where it is necessary to maintain the unity of a church threatened by heresy. He suggests that the declaration of a *status confessionis* can only hamper communication and impair the openness that the confessing process requires.

⁴⁹ See the essays by Opocensky (1997), Goudzwaard (1997) and Douglass (1997) in a document entitled *Processus confessionis: Process of recognition, education, confession and action regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction* (1997), Background Papers No. 1 of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:49). See this document for a number of other ecumenical consultations on globalisation as an issue of faith.

in narrowing markets. Political and military power are used as instruments to secure safe access to resources and protect investment and trade.⁵¹

Following a request from the Bretton Woods institutions, a number of encounters between the World Council of Churches and these institutions were organised in 2002 and 2003. The request had come in response to a WCC background document entitled *Lead us not into temptation: churches' response to the policies of international finance institutions*. During the encounters, the WCC emphasised that poverty eradication can be achieved only by addressing injustice and inequality, the roots of which lie in the present unjust economic order.

At its 24th General Council, Accra, Ghana, July 30 – August 13 2004, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches offered the following statements in this regard:

16. Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another.
19. Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.
21. Therefore we reject the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system, or any other system, which claims there is no alternative.
22. We believe that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God's covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.
23. Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation.
25. Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

These statements offer perhaps the most incisive critique of the economic roots of the environmental crisis in current ecumenical discourse.

⁵¹ Quoted in *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:50).

CHAPTER 5

The ideological roots and fruits of environmental degradation

5.1 Introduction

Environmental destruction is primarily the result of the violation of the limits to economic growth on a finite planet. The economic roots of the environmental crisis begs the question why these transformations occurred when and where they did. If the environmental crisis is the product of economic processes, what cultural, philosophical or religious conditions stimulated and / or legitimated such processes? An attempt to uncover the very roots of the environmental crisis is crucial in our collective efforts to resolve the crisis.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the underlying problem is related to an *economic system* where resources are used in an unsustainable way. This economic system is based on the emergence of ever more *sophisticated technologies* which allow for the extraction of such resources. The technologies themselves have resulted from the emergence of *modern science* which has allowed for such a truly amazing range of technological applications. This begs the question why modern science emerged where it did and when it did? In most analyses the ideological roots of the environmental crisis is traced back to the dominance of the worldview that may simply be described as *modernity*. One may go one further step back by raising the question: Why did the modern worldview emerge where and when it did? In the next chapter we will address this question with reference to the famous critique of Lynn White who traced the roots of the environmental crisis back to *religious* views on the place and role of human beings in the earth community. He emphasises the legacy of the Hebraic worldview, as expressed in the subsequent Christian tradition, in this regard and concludes that Christianity bears a “huge burden of guilt” for environmental destruction.

In this chapter I will focus, firstly, on the role played by cosmologies and worldviews in this regard. Secondly, I will investigate the legacy of modernity and the ideologies that shape the cultural patterns (with specific reference to the culture of consumerism) which continue to undergird unsustainable economic practices leading to environmental destruction. Finally, I will offer some theological reflections on the cultural and ideological roots of environmental destruction.

5.2 The role played by worldviews and cosmologies

In attempts to uncover the ideological roots of the environmental crisis, the influence of *worldviews* and of *cosmologies* has become widely recognised. Both these terms call for further clarification.

There is an extensive theoretical literature on the notion of worldviews. For the purposes of the discussion here, worldviews may simply be described in terms of what Peter Berger and others have called the “social construction of reality”. The roles which religious beliefs, social values, moral visions and social institutions play in the formation of worldviews have also been widely recognised. In discourse in the field of ecological theology, the social impact of such worldviews has been subjected to critical scrutiny.¹ In the discussion below I will return to the critique of modernity which is typical in such literature.

It may be helpful here to explore the relationship between worldviews and cosmologies somewhat further. While the emphasis in the notion of worldviews may be on the *social construction* of reality, cosmologies focus on an understanding of the cosmos within which societies are situated. Cosmologies provide answers to the questions which people ask about the nature of the cosmos, about its origins and destiny and about the place and role of human beings in the cosmos. Cosmologies are based on existing human knowledge about the cosmos and typically draw on the best available science in a particular culture. However, cosmological questions cannot be answered by science alone, since they wonder about the very origins and destiny of the cosmos. Cosmologies express views about reality as such, but also construct views on Ultimate Reality, on that which may transcend the cosmos itself. Cosmologies are therefore typically influenced and structured by religious beliefs. They are typically expressed in the form of cosmological narratives. As Larry Rasmussen notes, storytellers of all cultures seem to refuse to stop short of telling the cosmic story itself, however pretentious that may seem.² With an astonishing sense of comprehensiveness, they tell stories about the cosmos as a whole. They provide us with stories of the origin and destiny of the universe and of the place of humanity within the cosmos. They answer the questions asked by children and adults alike: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I belong? What am I doing here? What will happen to me when I die? These cosmologies provide a sense of belonging, a sanctuary, precisely because they dare to express the inexpressible: the whole of reality. Or, in the words of Thomas Berry:

For peoples, generally, their story of the universe and the human role in the universe is their primary source of intelligibility and value. Only through this story of how the universe came to be in the beginning and how it came to be as it is does, a person comes to appreciate the meaning of life or to derive the psychic energy needed to deal effectively with those crisis moments that occur in the life of the individual and in the life of the society. Such a story is the basis of ritual initiation throughout the world. It communicates the most sacred of mysteries. ... Our story not only interprets the past, it also guides and inspires our shaping the future.³

Cosmologies locate human life within a cosmic order across which the moral fabric of society is often woven.⁴ Every model of the cosmos conveys an ethos as well as a

¹ See especially the volume of essays edited by Tucker & Grimm 1994. See also Snyder (1995) for one evangelical attempt to construct a plausible ecological worldview.

² Rasmussen 1994:176.

³ Berry 1988:xi.

⁴ Barbour 1989:128.

mythos.⁵ The relation between cosmos and ethos is therefore dialectical: the way in which a cosmos is structured reveals something of the community's ethos but the constructed cosmos also shapes the community's ethos.⁶ Creation stories are recalled and celebrated in worship and ritual because they tell us who we are and how we can live in a meaningful world.⁷ There seems, therefore, to be an inextricable link between cosmologies and a system of moral values,⁸ even though the relationship between cosmos and ethos is quite complex.⁹ Cosmologies provide a sense of identity, orientation and order. They explain why things are what they are (symbolic-cognitive) and how things should be (normative). They address the inner depths of the human soul (emotive) and motivate people to action (conative).¹⁰

The classic task of religious cosmologies is to provide a sense of the whole and of where we fit into it, a frame of reference with ultimate explanatory power, absolute legitimacy, moral cohesion and cosmic scope. When cosmologies lose their grasp of the whole, that leads to a loss of a sense of identity – with very serious moral consequences. Thomas Berry articulates this concern eloquently:

It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. We have not yet learned the new story. Our traditional story of the universe sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purposes, and energized action. It consecrated suffering and integrated knowledge. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there ...¹¹

⁵ Brown 1999:2.

⁶ See Brown 1999:10f.

⁷ Barbour 1989:146, also De Lange 1997:31-32.

⁸ Rasmussen 1994:178. Gunton (1993:15-16) observes that, from the days of Plato, a concern with cosmology (the way things are) and ethics (the way humans live) was closely related to one another. Kant and Hume argued persuasively against the naturalistic fallacy: there is no *necessary* relationship between the order of nature (*Kosmos*) and a particular (moral) order of society (*polis*). For a critique on the naturalistic fallacy in several ecological theologies (e.g. those of Ruether, Berry & Swimme) which find ethical implications in the reconstruction of the story of the universe in contemporary science, see De Lange 1997:107-114 & Van de Beek 1989. Nevertheless, in most cultures cosmos and polis are merged into what Stephen Toulmin (1990:67) calls a single "cosmopolis". On the modern separation between cosmos and polis, see Toulmin 1990 and also Ellis & Murphy 1996. Gunton (1993:19) concludes that, "It is generally held in the modern world that there is no link between cosmic and social order." Nevertheless, in most cultures cosmos and polis are merged with one another. Phil Hefner's (1993:188) assessment of this dialectic is perhaps more discerning. He argues that

All values finally receive their validity from their being rooted in and being in harmony with the way things really are. Although we may not derive our oughts from our experience of the is, the ought would have no real substance if it were not rooted in the is. We want to know that our actions are in harmony with the fundamental character of reality. Ultimately that is what grounds both the mandates and the prohibitions of our moralities (also quoted in De Lange 1997:112-113).

⁹ On the complex relationship between cosmology and ethics, see Barbour 1989:128f, Brown 1999:2f, De Lange 1997, Ellis & Murphy 1996 & Rasmussen 1994:178.

¹⁰ De Lange 1997:27.

¹¹ Berry 1988:123.

For Berry morality is therefore closely linked with cosmology. Without a unifying story of the universe, no set of common moral values towards a “global ethic” (Hans Küng) would be possible.¹² Berry concludes with reference to the Western world: “An integral story has not emerged, and no community can live without a unifying story.”¹³ Berry’s own suggestion is that the integrated story of the universe as reconstructed by contemporary science should be widely popularised. With cosmologist Brian Swimme he has written an influential book, *The universe story: From the primordial flaring forth to the ecozoic era*.¹⁴ In numerous further contributions Berry has commented on the ecological moral of this story.¹⁵ His lead in this regard has subsequently been followed by several leading scholars in the field of ecological theology, including Leonardo Boff, John Haught, Sallie McFague, Jürgen Moltmann, Jay McDaniel, Sean McDonagh, Larry Rasmussen, Rosemary Ruether and many others.

The role played by (religious) cosmologies has also been recognised by a number of indigenous, often pre-modern theologians, also in the African context. African theologians such as Emmanuel Asante, Gabriel Setiloane and Harvey Sindima have retrieved the ecological wisdom in indigenous cosmologies (without specific reference to contemporary discourse on theology and the sciences).¹⁶ Other contributions have explored the Hebraic and Hellenistic cosmologies which shaped the biblical roots of Christianity.¹⁷

It is not necessary to explore these contributions here in any further detail since they will be addressed in later chapters. Instead, in the attempt to uncover the ideological roots of the current environmental crisis, it is important to focus on the the dominance of a Cartesian-Newtonian, mechanistic view of reality in the Western world.

5.3 Modernity and its discontents

In most analyses the ideological roots of the environmental destruction caused by current global economic systems are traced back to the worldview of modernity. The origins of the destructive current global order lie in the great social changes of “modernity” that swept through Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. The environmental crisis is indeed a crisis striking at the very foundations of modernity.

The historical and philosophical background to the emergence of modernity is necessarily highly complex. The rise of modernity is related to a number of other ideological developments which are often analysed in contributions to ecological theology.¹⁸ These include the following:

- * The rise of colonialism following various voyages of exploration and conquest;

¹² See Küng (1990) on the quest for a global ethic. See also my contribution (Conradie 1997) on cosmology and an ecological ethos within the South African context.

¹³ Berry 1988:130.

¹⁴ See Berry 1978, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1997, 1999. See also Swimme 1986, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998.

¹⁵ See Swimme & Berry 1992.

¹⁶ See Asante 1985, Setiloane 1995 & Sindima 1989, 1990.

¹⁷ See Boersema 1997 for a study on the cosmologies expressed in the Hebrew Torah and the Hellenistic Stoics.

¹⁸ See the contributions in ecological theology by Field 1997, McFague 1997:67f, Northcott 1996:40-84, Ruether 1992:173-201, Wilkinson 1991:113f & Wright & Kill 1993:49-59.

- * The emphasis on human dignity, creativity and supremacy amongst Italian Renaissance humanists;¹⁹
- * The dualism of René Descartes, separating the world of thought and the world of matter;
- * The new confidence in the ability of human reason that developed during the intellectual climate of the European Enlightenment as an age of reason instead of authority in the 18th century (as epitomised by Immanuel Kant). This suggested that humanity had limitless potential to control and manipulate the world of nature.
- * The emergence of modern empirical science “putting nature to the test” (Francis Bacon²⁰), the development of ever more sophisticated forms of technology, and the myth of progress elicited by that;²¹
- * The integrated, mechanistic and deist model of the universe portrayed by Isaac Newton;
- * The notion of Thomas Hobbes that human beings are basically selfish and competitive;
- * The influential political ideals of equality and liberty expressed during the French Revolution and in the American Constitution;
- * The economic system proposed by Adam Smith in which the market regulates the economy with relatively little government interference;
- * The rise of industrial capitalism;
- * The cultural elitism of the male European middle class and its quest for political and economic power.

The dominance of modernity coincides with the emergence of a number of other related ideologies. In numerous contributions to a Christian ecological theology a cultural critique of ideologies such as androcentrism, anthropocentrism, classism and racism may be found.²² Such contributions uncover the structurally similar logic of domination underlying these ideologies. Such domination is based on the postulation that there are significant differences in terms of species, gender, race and class. Moreover, such forms of domination in the name of difference often reinforce one another.

This critique of ideology is especially typical of ecofeminist discourse. With ecofeminist critics such as Carol Christ, Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Ynestra King, Caroline Merchant, Judith Plant, Charlene Spretnak, Starhawk, Karen Warren and others,²³ ecofeminist Christian theologians have argued that the patriarchal domination and exploitation of women and the human domination over otherkind are interconnected. The domination of males over females in the Western tradition has historically been extrapolated in the form of a dominance over and exploitation of nature (the rape of the earth). In ecowomanist theologies, the correlation between the exploitation of nature and violence

¹⁹ See Bauckham 2002, 2006:33f.

²⁰ See Bauckham 2006:37f.

²¹ See, for example, Northcott 1996:57-70.

²² Martin-Schramm & Stivers (2003:17-23) identifies the following constellation of attitudes, embedded in Western culture, which have undergirded environmental destruction: anthropocentric attitudes, hierarchical attitudes, dualistic, dominating, and atomistic / individualistic attitudes.

²³ Given the focus on a *Christian* ecological theology in this guide to the literature, the contributions of these critics are not discussed here in any detail.

against women becomes focused on the defilement of black women's bodies in the context of slavery.²⁴

Other contributions have explored the viability of alternative worldviews, with reference to notions such as holism,²⁵ humanism,²⁶ postmodernism²⁷ and romanticism.²⁸

In addition to the ideological *roots* of environmental destruction, it is also possible to speak of the ideological *fruits* which are related to the affluence produced by the current global economic order and the desire to have access to such affluence. A number of new ideologies are often analysed and subjected to critique in contributions to ecological theology. These include the following:

- * The myth of progress: the deeply ingrained faith in the ability of science and technology to satisfy the insatiable demands of humanity for progress and to ensure continuing material prosperity;²⁹
- * The bias towards *industrialism*: the belief that industrial processes should be the chief or most characteristic influence shaping society;³⁰
- * The rise of a global consumerist culture,³¹ tourism³² and the role played by the advertising industry in this regard.

Given the immense environmental impact of the now global culture of consumerism, a few further comments in this regard may be in order.

5.4 Excursus: A theological critique of consumerism

Although the environmental crisis affects natural eco-systems more directly, it is not primarily a crisis pertaining to nature but to the dominant and increasingly global economic system and the cultural values supporting it. The environmental crisis is a deeper, *cultural crisis in nature and wholly of nature running fully against it*.³³ It is a pathological sign of cultural failure and bankruptcy.

²⁴ See Williams 1993.

²⁵ For South African contributions on holism, following the early suggestions of JC Smuts, see Olivier 1987 & Schoeman 1990. See also Boff 1997:31-42.

²⁶ See the volume of essays edited by Derr, Nash & Neuhaus (1996) on the notion of Christian humanism and the indexed bibliography for further references.

²⁷ For theological reflections on ecology and postmodernism, see especially Cobb 1992, 1995 and the various contributions by Catherine Keller, e.g. 1996, 1997.

²⁸ For a critique of the disenchantment and re-enchantment of nature (in romanticism), see McGrath 2002.

²⁹ For a critique of this myth of progress, see especially Moltmann 1989:53f.

³⁰ See Cooper 1991:75f.

³¹ For a theological critique of consumerism, see, for example, the thorough report to the Norwegian Bishops' Conference, entitled *The consumer society as an ethical challenge* (Church of Norway 1995). See also the contributions by Bartholomew & Moritz 2000, Budde 1997, 2002, Childs 2000, Clapp 1998, Conradie & Pauw 2002, Gunton 1993, Hallman 2000:19f, Kavanaugh 1991, Mathewes 2004, McFague 2001:81-97, Miller 2003, Schut 1999, Simon 2003 & Swimme 1996. See also the study on the effects of a culture of affluence in the South African context by Du Toit 1985.

³² See Bartholomew & Moritz (2000:10-11): "... tourism is consumerism writ large, naked and unashamed, and to feed the insatiable need of tourists whole nations are converting themselves into vast emporia, havens of everything under the sun that can be bought." In response, tourism may be contrasted with pilgrimage: pilgrims bring back blessings whereas tourists take back souvenirs!

³³ Rasmussen 1996:7.

The root causes of the environmental crisis are not merely related to a lack of information and education. It is a liberal fallacy that information and education forms the main clue to moral action. To address the environmental crisis will therefore demand much more than what science and new technologies may offer. It is less a problem of know-what or know-how than of know-why and know-wherefore.³⁴ The crisis that we have to face is therefore not primarily an ecological crisis but a cultural crisis. The problem lies not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the human heart, in the collective psyche. Not surprisingly, it is a crisis that remains lurking beneath the surface as a silent but pervasive fear for the long-term future of life on this planet.

This cultural crisis clearly has to be dealt with at its ideological roots. This is why an analysis of the consumer society and its culture of consumerism is so crucial. Any such analysis will necessarily be complex. It will have to take several (positive) aspects of the consumer society into account, including the need to make material goods available for consumers, the resulting culture of prosperity, the beneficial interaction between humans following the impulse to trade goods, the impact of such trade on people, the resulting trade in opinions and values and the way in which large shopping malls have become cultural entertainment centres. A discussion of these aspects would be beyond the present focus.³⁵ A critique of consumer societies typically focuses on the negative consequences of consumerism on people, on the fair distribution of material goods amongst earth's present human population, on the availability of non-renewable resource for future generations and on the environmental consequences of a consumer society. The focus of the discussion here will be especially on the first of these aspects.

A critique of consumerism may help people to recognise how they have become the victims of their own desires. Here one may refer to the burden of "keeping up with the Jones'", the accumulation of possessions, the anxious acquisitiveness, the consumerism of our children,³⁶ the lack of satisfaction that consumerism brings, even where desires are fulfilled, the ever faster tempo of urban life, the side-effects of overindulgence and avarice, the financial worries that always living on credit brings and the complicatedness of many people's lives. Colin Gunton adds that the consumer culture has introduced a rigid uniformity: "We might instance the consumer culture, with its imposing of social uniformity in the name of choice – a Coca Cola advertisement in every village throughout the world."³⁷

The symptoms of a culture of affluence has become widespread: tension, depression, regular complaints about full programmes, feelings of inferiority following the competitiveness of a capitalist ethos, an over-anxiousness about physical appearance, and over- or under-emphasis on sport, boredom, confusion as a result of being dictated by excesses, and so forth. These "diseases of our time" are, in fact, symptoms of a sick society. In the words of Richard Foster:

³⁴ Rasmussen 1996:74.

³⁵ This is the focus of sociological studies of consumerism. See also the report, *The consumer society as an ethical challenge* (Church of Norway 1995).

³⁶ Commenting about complaints from parents that they cannot keep up with consumerism of their children Schut (1999) says: "Part of the problem of shaping children's inclinations in the direction of a less-acquisitive lifestyle is that many parents tend to be part of the problem. They give their children money and things not only to please them but also to satisfy their own drive to 'keep up'."

³⁷ Gunton 1993:13.

... the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like ... Covetousness we call ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry."³⁸

Brian Swimme argues that consumerism is providing a new cosmology and that those working in the advertising industry are the high priests maintaining this cosmology. The following eloquent excerpts indicate the gist of his argument:

The fact that consumerism has become the dominant world-faith is largely invisible to us, so it is helpful to understand clearly that to hand our children over to the consumer culture is to place them in the care of the planet's most sophisticated religious preachers.³⁹

... what we need to confront is the power of the advertiser to promulgate a world-view, a mini-cosmology, that is based upon dissatisfaction and craving. One of the clichés for how to construct an ad captures the point succinctly: 'An ad's job is to make them unhappy with what they have.'⁴⁰

Advertisements are where our children receive their cosmology, their basic grasp of the world's meaning, which amounts to their primary religious faith, though unrecognized as such.⁴¹

In the propaganda of the ad the ideal people, the fully human humans, are relaxed and carefree – drinking pepsis around a pool – unencumbered by powerful ideas concerning the nature of goodness, undisturbed by visions of suffering that could be alleviated if humans were committed to justice. None of that ever appears. In the religion of the ad the task of civilization is much simpler. The ultimate meaning for human existence is getting all that stuff. That's paradise. And the meaning of the Earth? Premanufactured consumer stuff!⁴²

The consumer culture with its depletion of available resources, its production of waste and its quest for pleasure and happiness cannot hide an inner spiritual emptiness. Evy McDonald comments on this tendency: "Our affluence has shifted our focus from consuming only what we need to consuming for the sake of consuming. Consumption has become a habit, a hobby, a sport. A survey of teenage girls in the United States discovered that 93% of them identified store-hopping as their favorite activity."⁴³ Hans Küng adds that consumerism constitutes a religion of prosperity and progress, with the "gods" of sex, car and career operating as a holy Trinity for conformists.⁴⁴ The shopping center, and not the home or the work place, has become the locus for finding one's self-identity.⁴⁵ Ted Peters observes that the insatiable demands of the affluent leads to the

³⁸ Foster 1978:71.

³⁹ Swimme 1996:14.

⁴⁰ Swimme 1996:16. See also the comments by Peters (1978:75) on the logic of the advertising industry. When the average consumer already has the basic things they need (food and shelter) advertisements motivate them to buy something that they do not actually need simply because it is new.

⁴¹ Swimme 1996:17.

⁴² Swimme 1996:18.

⁴³ McDonald 1999:59-60.

⁴⁴ Küng 1984:189.

⁴⁵ Peters 1980:35.

habit of “moving sponge like through life, sopping up one experience after another, soaking in rich food, exciting travel, thrilling risks, sexual pleasure, and even religious ecstasy.”⁴⁶ Since such extravagance cannot ultimately provide happiness or security, there emerges a new curiosity in what Segundo Galilea calls the “superstitions of hope”: horoscopes, telling the future, charms that should protect the house, a false confidence in technology and the sciences, in the power of psychology and the medical sciences to provide healing, in the substitutes of political ideologies, etc.⁴⁷

There has been little sign of any impact on the materialism and consumerism that pervades industrialized countries.⁴⁸ Bill McKibben observes that affluence leads to inertia and that a voluntary simplification of one’s lifestyle falls outside the desire of most Americans.⁴⁹ In fact, a culture of affluence seems to demand more and more. Through the use of technology it seeks to consume that which is finite infinitely.⁵⁰ A consumer culture is actually not geared towards the satisfaction of desires, but to stimulate desire continuously. As Zygmunt Bauman notes: “... desire does not desire satisfaction. To the contrary, desire desires desire; the desire of an ideal consumer at any rate. The prospect of the desire fading off, dissipating and having nothing in sight to resurrect it, or the prospect of a world with nothing left in it to be desired, must be the most sinister of the ideal consumer’s horrors. To increase their capacity for consumption, consumers must never be given rest. They need to be constantly exposed to new temptations in order to be kept in a state of constant seething, never wilting excitation and, indeed, in a state of suspicion and disaffection. The baits commanding them to shift attention need to confirm such suspicion while offering a way out of disaffection: ‘You reckon you’ve seen it all? You ain’t seen nothing yet!’”⁵¹ Vincent Miller adds, with reference to Augustine’s notion of human restlessness, that the human spirit cannot be satisfied with any finite thing. Consumerism is not about possessions, but about the joy of desiring, about never being satisfied with consumer products. Its structure is therefore similar to that of religious desire.⁵²

It is not only the affluent who are caught into the trap of consumerism. James Childs comments that black Americans are also experiencing the side-effects of consumerism: “The aggressive marketing of goods and pleasures within poor, African American communities has had a corrosive effect on their traditional nonmarket values of love, care, and service to others. The predominance of materialistic consumerism among those living in poverty-ridden conditions, with limited capacity to ward off self-contempt and self-hatred, results in the possible triumph of the nihilistic threat in black America.”⁵³

Tragically, the whole “global village” has come under the spell of the “American dream” of the pursuit of happiness here and now. Consumerism has become the dominant global culture, also in Africa. And, as Richard Foster once commented about the love of money: “Those who have it the least, love it the most.” The hope and yearning of the

⁴⁶ Peters 1980:32.

⁴⁷ See Galilea, S 1988. *Spirituality of hope*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books. p. 32.

⁴⁸ Hallman 1994:5 & McKibben 1989:150-154.

⁴⁹ McKibben 1989:193, 204.

⁵⁰ Gilkey 1976:261.

⁵¹ Bauman, Z 1998. *Work, consumerism and the new poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press. p. 25-26.

⁵² Miller 2003:110, 144.

⁵³ Childs 1999:110-111.

world's poor is to achieve an equally affluent standard of living. All too often the hope of the poor is based on what money can buy. They dream of winning the lotto. They desire the affluence which they do not have and probably have little hope in obtaining. Gibson observes that: "The unhappiness often felt by persons of limited income is their sense that they have failed to meet the standards of success held by society and by themselves. They are not affluent but they wish they were. They want far more of the abundance displayed in the television commercials. They are saddled with debt because they have succumbed too frequently to the lure of the ads."⁵⁴

The underlying problem with such globalised consumerism, as we noted in the previous chapter, is that the lifestyle of the world's affluent center cannot be universalised and can be maintained only at the expense of the majority on the economic periphery.⁵⁵ This culture of consumerism is simply not sustainable. Of course, this raises major issues of justice. As Pope John Paul II has eloquently stated in his famous speech, "Peace with God the creator – Peace with all creation":

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life-style. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. ... The seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depths of humanity's moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and human life is lacking, we will also lose an interest in others and in the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few. It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness both – individual and collective – are contrary to the order of creation.⁵⁶

Such a consumerist culture, and the near-religious convictions that bolster it, has often been criticised from within a Christian context. Steven Bouma-Prediger observes, that Christians can scarcely accept such materialism and consumerism: "Given the God we serve, can we justify a way of life predicated on the inordinate desire for that which moth and rust consume?"⁵⁷ Indeed, a theological critique of consumerism may focus on the theme of idolatry, namely that in which people in a consumer society ultimately put their faith in, that for which they are willing to make sacrifices.⁵⁸

Such theological critiques of consumerist culture are entirely appropriate. However, more is at stake here. In a world of consumerism, the gospel can easily be translated into a language derived from the world of business, management, administration and

⁵⁴ Gibson 1999:133-134.

⁵⁵ Moltmann 1996:209.

⁵⁶ John Paul II (1990), also quoted in Scharper & Cunningham 1993:71-72.

⁵⁷ Bouma-Prediger 2001:167.

⁵⁸ See the report *The consumer society as an ethical challenge* (Church of Norway 1995:126). This report quotes the well-known Southern African document, *The road to Damascus* (1989), in noting that Mammon typically demands human sacrifices: "The only one that we are willing to sacrifice everything for, is indeed our God" (1995:127).

marketing, employing categories which are typical of a consumerist culture. Then religious experience (and God!) becomes a commodity to be marketed to potential consumers while one may go shopping for a church which would cater for one's own needs and desires.⁵⁹ Evy McDonald adds a stern warning:

A theology of consumption began to invade our culture – and our churches. Slowly, almost imperceptively, we wandered away from the foundational teachings of Jesus – sharing our wealth, identifying with the marginalized, living a life of grateful stewardship – and began to identify our worth with how much money we made or how many possessions we owned. Today many shopping malls evoke the image of a cathedral, with towers of glass rising upward and lighting effects suggestive of the second coming. On any given Sunday more people visit shopping centers than centers of worship. Rituals of communion have been replaced with rituals of consumption. We need to ask ourselves: What do we worship? The gospel of Matthew warns us that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:21). All too often our treasures lie tucked away in the department store sale.⁶⁰

As Vincent Miller points out in his important study, *Consuming religion: Christian faith and practice in a consumer culture* (2003), the underlying challenge posed by a culture of consumerism is the commodification of culture, values and beliefs. It would not be sufficient to demonstrate the superficiality of consumerist behaviour or to retrieve alternative theological resources from the Christian tradition, since such counter-cultural movements are easily commodified too and becomes available as products on the “market” of ideas. Moreover, the exchange of commodities requires an interchangeability where religious products are regarded as rough equivalents and may be compared with one another. This allows for a retrieval of the particularity of the Christian tradition, but in a manner similar to the widespread interest in the particularities of cultures and other consumer products. When religious beliefs are commodified and consumed, this leads to a disconnection between religious beliefs and human behaviour and practices which truncates the potential of values of beliefs to shape culture.⁶¹

5.5 A theological redescription of the roots of ecological destruction

What are the very roots of the environmental crisis? Presumably, if one can identify the roots of the problem, it would become possible to diagnose the problem accurately and to identify appropriate responses to the problem of environmental destruction. In the discussion thus far I have traced the roots of the environmental crisis from economic systems, to the science and technologies supporting it, to the worldview of modernity, the cosmologies on which it is based and the religious beliefs undergirding that. In the process I referred to the use of categories such as domination in the name of difference,

⁵⁹ See Bartholomew & Moritz 2000:135f.

⁶⁰ McDonald 1999:60. See also Bartholomew & Moritz 2000.

⁶¹ See Miller (2003) on the ways in which the habits of consumption transform religious practices through the commodification of culture, values and beliefs. His approach is novel in that he refrains from offering a critique of the consumer society. Instead, he focuses on the impact of consumer society on religious beliefs and practices.

consumerist greed, anthropocentrism and human alienation from the rest of nature to describe the very roots of the problem.

From the point of view of the Christian faith the use of such categories call for further clarification with reference to the Christian doctrine of sin. Indeed, the *human* roots of environmental destruction suggest a diagnosis of the human condition which is rather similar to the doctrine of sin. In classic Christian terms, sin is the root of evil; societal evil, as manifested for example in environmental destruction, is the cumulative product of human sin.

This is not the place to discuss the Christian doctrine of sin in any detail (see the discussion in Chapter 9 in this regard).⁶² It is nevertheless striking to compare the categories listed above with classic Christian descriptions of sin, for example as pride, selfishness, greed or covetousness, desire or lust, the negation of the good (*privatio boni*), disobedience, idolatry, passive resignation in the face of evil (*acedia*),⁶³ as “falling short” of God’s desires for us (*hamartia*), “a self-centred turning in upon oneself” (*incurvatus in se*) and enmity or alienation from a relationship with God.⁶⁴ In all these theological descriptions of the human condition, sin is viewed in terms of a distorted relationship with God.

Since I have discussed categories such as domination in the name of difference⁶⁵ and consumerist greed above, it may suffice here to explore two other categories somewhat further here, namely human alienation from nature and anthropocentrism. It is understandable that such categories are discussed in secular literature without any reference to a distorted human relationship with God. Strangely, this is often also true of discussions on alienation and anthropocentrism in theological literature.

a) The roots of alienation

In numerous contributions to ecological theology, the problem underlying environmental destruction is described in terms of human alienation from the rest of nature.⁶⁶ It is argued that we have become alienated from the material dimensions of creation, including our own bodily existence.⁶⁷ This form of alienation may indeed be viewed as the inner aspect of the external alienation evident in the late-modern industrial society.⁶⁸ Alienation is used here not only within a legal context (in the sense of a disposal of property), an economic context (the estrangement between workers and their economic products) or a religious context (as a synonym for Christian views on sin

⁶² See also my essay, “Towards an ecological reformulation of the Christian doctrine of sin” in this regard (Conradie 2005).

⁶³ For a reinterpretation of sin as sloth, drawing on the insights of feminist theologians, see the following work: Hall, DJ 1993. *Professing the faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 253-262.

⁶⁴ For an ecologically sensitive study of these manifestations of sin, see the following work: Peters, TF 1994. *Sin. Radical evil in soul and society*. Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans.

⁶⁵ See also the discussion on human dominion in subsequent chapters, especially chapter 9 and 10.

⁶⁶ Berry (2000) identifies three phases in this process of alienation: 1) The early Christian anthropocentric integration of Christian spirituality with Greek humanism; 2) The spirituality of detachment as a response to the tragedy of the Black Death in Europe (1347-1349); 3) The replacement of an ever-renewing organic agricultural economy with an industrial, non-renewing extractive economy towards the end of the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ On the theme of alienation between humanity and nature in ecological theologies, see especially Berry 1988:215, Chial 1996:59, Conradie 2005:23-44, McFague 1993:34 & Rasmussen 1996:75.

⁶⁸ Moltmann 1985:48.

as a separation from God). It is also used in a domestic context with reference to a way of life. Alienation is opposed to *oikeiosis*, that is, to familiarity and intimacy. Moreover, we have become alienated from the house which we live in, namely the earth itself. Alienation therefore leads to a sense of homelessness, to what Peter Berger and others have called a “homeless mind”. It is such alienation which prevents us from being “at home on earth”. It seems that many of us have become “eternal tourists” (Zygmunt Bauman).

We have indeed for too long thought of ourselves as somehow separate from nature. In the Christian tradition this alienation has been exacerbated by a dualism between humanity and nature.⁶⁹ Larry Rasmussen refers to the “apartheid habit” of distinguishing between humanity and non-human nature, leaving the impression that we are an ecologically segregated species – that we are somehow separate, hence “apart” from the ecosystems in which we live. Rasmussen adds that the same “apartheid habit” is also manifested in the “great divorce” of nature from (human) history. Human beings and the history of humanity should be regarded as a mere episode in the larger history of the cosmos itself and of life *in* (not on) this planet.⁷⁰ Steven Bouma-Prediger notes five different reasons for rejecting such a dualism of nature and history: 1) The natural world is historical in its own right; 2) The natural world is deeply affected by human agency; 3) As corporeal agents humans are embedded in nature; 4) This dualism has led to disastrous consequences since it has been used to sanction various forms of exploitation; 5) It conflicts with the biblical notion of a single, all-embracing covenant with God.⁷¹

A similar assessment of the alienation of human beings from nature is evident in the striking metaphor of “autism” which Thomas Berry uses:

In relation to the earth, we have been autistic for centuries. Only now have we begun to listen with some attention and with a willingness to respond to the earth’s demands that we cease our industrial assault, that we abandon our inner rage against the conditions of our earthly existence, that we renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe.⁷²

Sallie McFague comments on the same tendency:

We have lost the sense of belonging in our world and to the God who creates, nurtures, and redeems this world and all its creatures, and we have lost the sense that we are part of a living, changing, dynamic cosmos that has its being in and through God.⁷³

In most ecological theologies the root causes of such alienation between humanity and the earth community are traced to the rise of modernity. The classic critiques of

⁶⁹ See Van Hoogstraten (1993:102-131) for a detailed discussion on this dualism between humanity and nature.

⁷⁰ Rasmussen 1996:75-89.

⁷¹ Bouma-Prediger 1995:271, with reference to Rosemary Ruether’s views in this regard.

⁷² Berry 1988:215. Berry uses these personal pronouns with reference to the Western world. This would exclude urbanised Africa only on the basis of an all too romantic notion of our African heritage. Elsewhere, Berry (1991:14) argues that we have to remind ourselves that alienation is a cosmological impossibility due to the very forces of gravitation! We can *feel* alienated but we can never *be* alienated.

⁷³ McFague 1993:34.

alienation by Hegel, Marx, Toennies and the Frankfurt school may obviously be retrieved in this regard. More recently, a critique of a number of interlocking dualisms is offered in numerous ecofeminist contributions. These dualisms include the Platonic dualism between ideas and matter, soul and body, the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter (*res cogitans et res extensa*), the patriarchal domination in the name of differences between men and women, the Kantian dualism between the knowing subject and the known object and the anthropocentric divide between nature and culture.⁷⁴ These dualisms have reinforced the widespread sense of alienation from the earth community which we noted above.

Christianity, in particular, has been guilty of instigating, reinforcing and legitimising this alienation of human beings from the rest of the earth community. Christianity has all too often been preoccupied with an otherworldliness which did not encourage a sense of belonging here on earth. Instead, it fostered a sojourner sensibility (McFague).⁷⁵ This otherworldliness, this alienation from the rest of the earth community, is manifested especially in the following theological themes: 1) a *theological* emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God, 2) an anthropological emphasis on humans as sojourners here on earth, 3) a soteriology which focuses on human salvation *from* the earth instead of the salvation *of* the whole earth and 4) an escapist eschatological fascination with a heavenly hereafter where disembodied souls will live in the presence of God.⁷⁶

These comments clearly indicate that the human species cannot be isolated from the larger earth community, the “community of life”⁷⁷ to which we belong. Perhaps a sensitivity to particularity, difference and otherness requires a vocabulary which is reluctant to use “nature” as a *homo(!)*geneous term for oceans, mountains, forests, grasslands, deserts, lakes, trees, plants, birds, insects, viruses, bacteria, amoebae and mammals like human beings. A distinction between “humankind” and “otherkind” may, where necessary, be more appropriate.

This does not resolve the anthropological question that remains in many ways the crux of any ecological theology: *What is the specific place of humanity within the earth community to which we belong?*⁷⁸ At the very least, it does indicate the danger of an alienation of human beings from the environment that can all too easily become the breeding ground for anthropocentrism. The agenda of numerous ecological theologies is governed by the quest for an adequate theological response to this danger.

b) The roots of anthropocentrism

Another, much more controversial way of describing the human roots of environmental destruction is with reference to the notion of anthropocentrism. Let us explore current discourse in the field of ecological theology in this regard somewhat further.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ See Gebara 1999:19-66 and various contributions by Ruether 1983, 1992, 1996.

⁷⁵ McFague 1993:102.

⁷⁶ See also the discussion in Chapter 9.2.

⁷⁷ See Sindima 1989.

⁷⁸ For the discussion on alienation above, see my *An ecological anthropology: At home on earth?* (Conradie 2005:24-27) and the discussion in Chapter 9 on anthropology.

⁷⁹ The discussion on anthropocentrism below builds on sections from my *An ecological anthropology: At home on earth?* (Conradie 2005:94-97, 129-134).

There has been a long-standing tendency in Christian theology to over-emphasise the unique place of human beings within the created order. The belief in human supremacy is typically built on the conviction that the human species is fundamentally different from other species. This tendency is closely related to the pivotal role which the *imago Dei* has played in Christian anthropology. Although humans were formed out of clay, being created in the image of God suggests that humans do not simply form part of nature. Humans share in God's transcendence over nature. Such views led Lynn White to suggest in his famous essay on "The historical roots of our ecological crisis" that Western Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion which the world has ever seen.⁸⁰

Much of Christian teaching is indeed focused almost exclusively on human well-being so that the impression is often created that the non-human world has no purpose other than to serve humankind.⁸¹ Kant famously supported such a position. He said: "So far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man ... Our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity."⁸² Many would agree that, because humans have been made in the image of God, the Bible "places man [*sic*] at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process that leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creation. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him ... We see here a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things; these are made subject to him and entrusted to his responsible care, whereas for no reason can he be made subject to other men and almost reduced to the level of a thing."⁸³ Humanity is the centre and climax of everything on earth. Humanity is the goal and purpose of the whole creation. Human beings were appointed as lord of the created world. God has placed all things under our feet (Ps 8:7). Such anthropocentrism (and androcentrism) is also evident in the following statement from the US National Council of Bishops (1953): "Every man knows instinctively that he is, somehow, a superior being. He is superior to the land he tills, the machine he operates or the animals which are at his service."⁸⁴ Or in the words of Emil Brunner:

A distinctive feature of the Christian understanding of existence is the fact that in it not only is the boundary between God and the world, God and man maintained, but also that the distinction between man and the world is kept very clear and sharp, as something which must never be allowed to become blurred. Man [*sic*] is not a bit of the world; he stands over against all creaturely existence as something special, as a new dimension ... the Biblical picture of the world is absolutely anthropocentric.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ See White 1967 and the discussion in Chapter 6 below.

⁸¹ Cooper 1990:41.

⁸² The original reference is to Kant's *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), p. 127. Quoted in Rolston, H (III) 1988. *Environmental ethics: Duties to and values in the natural world*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 63. Rolston quotes several other sources, also Charles Darwin (!), defending a similar anthropocentric position.

⁸³ An extract from John Paul II's teaching *The gospel of life* (New York: Random House, 1995, p. 60-61), quoted in Rasmussen 1996:229. Note the androcentric language.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Sherlock, C 1996. *The doctrine of humanity. Contours of Christian theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Brunner, E 1939. *Man in revolt*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p. 409-410.

More recently, such anthropocentrism has been defended by renowned authors such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Robert Jenson. Pannenberg maintains that: “the rise and development of life and the appearance of humanity bring fully to light for the first time the meaning of all creaturely reality.”⁸⁶ He adds that, in the light of the incarnation of Christ as a human, it may be said “that creation comes to fulfillment in us and that the whole universe was created with a view to us.”⁸⁷ Indeed, humans represent the “culmination of the evolution of organic life on this earth, all creation culminates in humanity” and in humans “the purpose of finite life is both comprehended and fulfilled.”⁸⁸ Jenson, likewise, insists that there is an ontological difference between humans and the other animals.⁸⁹ His formulation of this difference is even more overtly anthropocentric: “Humanity is the reason for the rest of creation. The Son for whom God creates is one of us, and neither an angel nor a virus nor an instance of whatever other creatures may inhabit the cosmos; the creation is a stage and players for our story with him [*sic*].”⁹⁰

One may be left under the impression that the universe was created specifically for our purposes and that the history of creation reaches its final goal with humankind. If that were true, the 14 billion years or so of God’s creative love for creation is nothing more than a stage on which the drama of human salvation is worked out.⁹¹ In response to such a persistent anthropologising of creation theology, James Gustafson comments: “The salvation of man [*sic*] is not the chief end of God; certainly it is not the exclusive end of God. Concern for human salvation must be placed in a wider context than that of Ptolemaic religion. The preoccupation with self has to be altered; the proper orientation is not primarily toward self but toward God, and to the ordering of life in relation to what can be discerned of the divine ordering.”⁹² James Nash adds that: “The traditional idea that the earth, or even the universe, was created solely for humans is, in our scientific age, sinfully arrogant, biologically naïve, cosmologically silly and therefore theologically indefensible.”⁹³ Arthur Peacocke concurs: “The (evolutionary) process is so fecund and rich and the variety and intricate beauty of coordinated structures and functions so great, that surely we now have to escape from our anthropocentric myopia and affirm that God as Creator takes what we can only call delight in the rich variety and individuality of other organisms for their own sake.”⁹⁴

Such anthropocentrism is widely criticised in ecological theologies. The intuition behind this critique is that to regard human beings as the centre around which everything else turns, as the final goal of history, or as the exclusive focus of God’s love, has become

⁸⁶ Pannenberg, W 1994. *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p. 133.

⁸⁷ Pannenberg, W 1994. *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p.136.

⁸⁸ Pannenberg, W 1994. *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p. 175.

⁸⁹ Jenson, RW 1999. *Systematic Theology Volume II: The works of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 58.

⁹⁰ Jenson, RW 1999. *Systematic Theology Volume II: The works of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 115. It is rather odd that Jenson, in a chapter on “The other creatures”, spends just three pages on the nonhuman earthly creation and eight pages on the angels.

⁹¹ See McDonagh 1986:62-63.

⁹² Gustafson 1981:110.

⁹³ Nash 1996:8.

⁹⁴ Peacocke, AR 2001. *Paths from science to God: The end of all our exploring*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, p. 73.

spiritually barren in an age of ecological sensitivities. Instead, the place of humans within the larger scheme of things has to be (re)discovered.

There is, admittedly, a lack of clarity on the meaning of the term “anthropocentrism”. There are many who remain sceptical about the possibility of avoiding all forms of anthropocentrism. Since discourse on the environment remains necessarily *human* discourse, some form of anthropocentrism may indeed be hermeneutically necessary. Alternatively, it may be helpful to distinguish between anthropocentric and anthropogenic (generated by humans) positions.⁹⁵ In my view the legitimacy of this hermeneutical insight that language about God is inevitably *human* language cannot be denied. We cannot escape from ourselves simply by decrying anthropocentricity. Human self-understanding is the centre from which humans necessarily begin. Nevertheless, as Tony Kelly suggests, “the human is not a centre in which we end, but a center from which we begin; not self-centred fixation, but the self-transcendence into the other, the more, the whole.”⁹⁶ The temptation to reduce theology to anthropology has to be resisted, although this is admittedly far easier said than done. It is a fallacy that humans are the measure of everything in the cosmos and even of what may transcend the cosmos. Humans may, in some specific cases, be regarded as the only *measurers* of things, but it does not follow that we are the only *measure* of things.⁹⁷ With Calvin, we have to maintain that the knowledge of humanity and of God cannot be separated. Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of the self. Humanity is a theme in theology not despite but *because* God is the theme of theology.

Some theologians have on this basis proposed a theocentric orientation in order to counter such anthropocentrism.⁹⁸ Others have followed secular environmental discourse in proposing biocentric or ecocentric approaches to ecological thinking.⁹⁹ Yet others continue to defend anthropocentrism on the basis of Christian convictions.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, ecological theologies are characterised by the suspicion that an exclusive focus on human interests – whether in culture, the economy, politics or the church – forms one of the root causes of the widespread devastation of ecosystems. Many ecological theologies spell out the ways in which such anthropocentrism interacts with and exacerbates the prevailing ideologies of androcentrism, racism, classism and cultural elitism. The claim that the human species is unique is employed in these ways to provide a rationale for other forms of domination in the name of difference. Such a construction of difference creates the room for claims to superiority, subordination and exploitative practices: humans are not only different from nonhuman animals; these differences are

⁹⁵ See Rolston, H (III) 1988. *Environmental ethics: Duties to and values in the natural world*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 158-162.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Lowes 2001:129. The reference is to Kelly’s *An expanding theology* (Newtown: E.J. Dwyer, 1993), p. 133.

⁹⁷ See Rolston, H (III) 1988. *Environmental ethics: Duties to and values in the natural world*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 32.

⁹⁸ See the typologies for ecological theology proposed by Gustafson 1994: 77-110 & Nortchott 1996:124-164. See also my call for a theological and not only an ethical critique of anthropocentrism (Conradie 2005:130f).

⁹⁹ See the discussion in Chapter 12 in this regard.

¹⁰⁰ For a defence of Christian humanism as an anthropocentric form of ecological theology, see Thomas Derr 1975, 1995, 1996. See also Manenschijn (1988:90f, 120f) on the (hermeneutic) inevitability of a certain anthropocentrism and, in the German context, the debate between Auer 1988, Daecke 1989, Drewermann 1990 & Irrgang 1992.

morally relevant. It is a difference which makes all the difference. There is something which distinguishes us from the rest of the earth community and that something entitles us to special consideration and privileges *vis-à-vis* other species in the earth community.

The agenda of ecological anthropologies is typically governed by the quest for an adequate theological response to such anthropocentrism. In response, there is more or less consensus that the human species cannot and should not be isolated from the larger earth community, the “community of life” to which we belong. What is needed is a Christian anthropology which accentuates human creaturehood and humanity’s vocation within the sphere of creation instead of a further elevation of the human species. We need to retrieve a sense of the “solidarity of the sixth day” (Helmut Thielicke). However, this consensus again does not resolve the anthropological question: What is the specific place of humanity within the earth community. Is there a special place reserved for human beings in God’s household?¹⁰¹ This question will be further explored in chapters 8 and 9.

¹⁰¹ The discussion above is derived from my *An ecological Christian anthropology* (Conradie 2005:94-97).

PART B

**Christian theology
and the environment**

CHAPTER 6

The dispute over Christianity

6.1 The *Christian* roots of the environmental crisis?

In a famous article entitled “The historical roots of our ecologic crisis,” published in 1967, the American historian and Presbyterian layman Lynn White argued that the Christian tradition itself bears a huge burden of guilt for the worldview of modernity and the economic system which has led to the present ecological crisis.

White’s article placed the blame for the ecological crisis squarely upon Western Christianity. His thesis is a variation on Weber’s famous analysis of the relationship between Christianity and capitalism, namely that Protestantism has encouraged capitalism which, in turn, exploited nature. White argued that it is but a small step from the Christian notion of the dominion of man(!)kind over nature to the senseless exploitation of nature for human benefit.¹ Compared to the emphasis on the sacredness of nature in most other religions, the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation has led to a “disenchantment of nature.”² Biblical religion has expelled the gods from the forests and streams once and for all. Moreover, the notion of “dominion” over nature gave impetus to the rise of Western science by encouraging empirical investigations of the “book of nature”. White maintained that exploitative attitudes toward nature surfaced widely during the medieval period and that this was encouraged by the anthropocentrism of the dominant theology of the time. Christianity has given religious support to the notion that the world has been created primarily for the benefit of human beings. Modern science is an extrapolation of medieval natural theology while technology constitutes a realisation of the Christian notion of human mastery of nature. The Judeo-Christian tradition, and its typical vision of a better future, has had a lasting influence on the Western world, also through variants of this tradition such as Marxism and secularism. White maintains that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” and concludes that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.”³

In a similar critique of Christianity, Carl Amery describes the “gnadenlose Folgen des Christentums.” He highlights the impact of the history of interpretation of biblical motifs such as humanity being created in the image of God, the command to have dominion over the earth, the notion of original sin and the history of human salvation.⁴

This critique of Christianity has been reiterated in secular literature. There are many who accept the validity of the argument intuitively, especially since those Western

¹ See White 1967.

² The argument on the disenchantment on nature is the converse of the optimistic theory, for example proposed by Harvey Cox in *The secular city*, published two years earlier (1965), that Christianity has to be credited for the development of modern science. See Barr (1974:54) for a similar assessment.

³ White 1967:1205, 1207.

⁴ See Amery 1971, 1972.

countries where Christianity has traditionally been dominant are also countries typically accused of causing serious forms of environmental degradation. The mood amongst these non-Christian critics is often unremittingly hostile. Many secular environmentalists insist that the Christian and Jewish religions are inimical to the environment and have been so for thousands of years.⁵ Roderick Nash, for example, contends that Christianity's anthropocentrism, dualism, otherworldliness and hierarchical worldview lie at the root of the environmental crisis and leaves nature as "other" and thus fully exposed to human greed.⁶ Likewise, John Passmore complains that "Christianity has encouraged man to think of himself as nature's absolute master, for whom everything that exists was designed."⁷ Human beings may therefore do whatever they like to other animals and with the earth's resources.

White's article led to a heated debate and almost single-handedly sparked off the discussion of environmental issues in Christian theology.⁸ Since the publication of Lynn White's thesis numerous studies have defended Christianity against his accusations.⁹ Many have tried to refute his thesis by indicating some of its oversimplifications (from a historical point of view).¹⁰ In an influential argument, John Passmore suggests that the exploitative attitudes in the West originate from Greek dualism more than from biblical sources.¹¹ Peter Harrison argues that White is correct to suggest that particular biblical texts have served as important ideological sources for Western exploitation of natural resources. However, he denies that this has played a significant role in the history of the West prior to the emergence of modern science in the seventeenth century.¹² Rene Dubos argues that ancient Chinese, Greek and Muslim civilisations also caused serious environmental destruction.¹³ Francis Schaeffer, an evangelical theologian, argues that the pantheistic and humanistic alternatives to traditional Christian doctrines are equally problematic from an ecological point of view.¹⁴ In response to these criticisms, White acknowledged such environmental destruction, but maintained that Christianity has yielded favourable conditions for a technological impulse and its desacralising

⁵ Fowler 1995:60.

⁶ Nash 1989:91f.

⁷ Passmore 1980:12. The exclusive use of male pronouns is perhaps appropriate here!

⁸ Although there were some earlier contributions from Christian theologians, the movement towards an ecological theology should clearly be regarded as a response to the ecological crisis and not primarily as an initiative from within Christian theology.

⁹ Almost every book in ecological theology includes a discussion of White's thesis. See the early responses by Barr, Dubos, Macquarrie, Moncrief, Toynbee and Tuan in the volume of essays by Spring & Spring 1974. In the German context, see the contributions by Altner 1975 *et al*, Daecke 1987, Drewermann 1990, Krolzik 1979, Münk 1987 & Rappel 1996. See also the excellent discussion of this debate by Bouma-Prediger 2001:67-86, Fowler 1995:58-75, Nash 1991:68-92 & Santmire 2000:10-15. For a response defending Christianity against White's accusations, see Derr 1975, 1996 & Osborn 1993:24-40.

¹⁰ See the discussion by Bouma-Prediger 1995, 2001:67-86. He investigates the arguments that Christianity has understood dominion as domination, that it has fostered ecologically unhealthy dualisms, that it has a creation-negating eschatology and that it has played a pivotal role in the rise of modern science and technology. He suggests that a more plausible explanation for Christian complicity in environmental devastation may be found in the Western church's captivity to Western culture, its acceptance of modernist anthropocentrism, its glorification of technology, its hubris and its neglect of the doctrine of creation.

¹¹ Passmore 1980.

¹² Harrison 1998, 2006.

¹³ Dubos 1973.

¹⁴ Schaeffer 1972.

consequences.¹⁵ Granberg-Michaelson neatly summarises a number of conclusions reached in the twenty years following the publication of White's article:

First White's description of biblical teaching regarding the environment is selective and highly distortive.

Second his argument that Christianity paved the way for the scientific and technological revolutions is very questionable.

And third, his assumption that environmental destruction has flowed solely from the mindset of Western culture, and not from others, is historically dubious.¹⁶

6.2 A Christian defence

In response to Lynn White's thesis, many Christian theologians have engaged in the task of retrieving some of the ecological wisdom in the Christian tradition. It is argued that Christianity, if interpreted adequately, is not the cause of the environmental crisis but a part of the solution to it.¹⁷ The problem is not the message of the Bible or the Christian faith but the destructive legacy of skewed interpretations.¹⁸

This attempt to retrieve the ecological heritage of Christianity had led to numerous studies on ecological wisdom in the Bible, in the history of Christianity, in specific Christian traditions, in Christian doctrine, in Christian values and virtues, in the liturgy, Christian proclamation, pastoral care and counselling, Christian education, Christian mission, and in various expressions of a Christian spirituality and praxis. Each of these aspects will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

6.3 The ecological ambiguity of the Christian tradition

The shortcomings of Lynn White's thesis should not distract one's attention from the all too real complicity of Christianity in the historical processes that led to the present environmental crisis.¹⁹ It simply cannot be denied that the technological control over nature (and the exploitation of natural resources) by human beings was all too often overtly or explicitly legitimised by Christian notions of dominion over the earth. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the *dominium terrae* motif in Genesis 1:28 has indeed been remarkably complex and, at times, highly destructive.²⁰ David Hallman adds that:

¹⁵ White 1973.

¹⁶ Granberg-Michaelson 1988:33.

¹⁷ Or, as McGrath (2002:55) suggests, the dream of dominating nature "has its origins in classical Greek philosophy, was eclipsed through the rise of Christianity, and enjoyed resurgence from the sixteenth century onwards."

¹⁸ Amongst numerous other examples of this line of argumentation, see Altner 1974, Daecke 1979, Harrison 2006, McGrath 2002 & Osborn 1993. It should be noted that White's thesis focuses indeed on the reception of biblical texts in history. See the discussion in chapter 7 on the exegesis of biblical texts such as Genesis 1:27-28.

¹⁹ Boff (1997:78f) lists six points of an anti-ecological accent in the Jewish and Christians traditions: 1) the adoption of the cultural framework of patriarchy, 2) the separation between creature and Creator through monotheism, 3) the use of monotheism to justify authoritarianism and centralised power, 4) the anthropocentrism of human dominion over the earth, 5) the tribal ideology of divine election, and 6) the notion that nature itself is fallen and that the earth is punished as a result of human sin.

²⁰ See Krolzik 1989. He identifies the following logical phases in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 1:28: 1) Humans have to serve nature without changing it; 2) Humans rule over nature and care for it by

I believe that churches in the North have not yet come to grips with the degree to which Christian theology and tradition are implicated in the Western capitalist development model that has dominated our countries since the industrial revolution, many other countries through the colonial periods and more recently every part of the world that is touched by the new “global economy.” This goes well beyond the famous critique of Lynn White Jr and the theological responses to it.²¹

The Christian tradition (including the Biblical texts) is far more ambiguous than some apologists are willing to acknowledge. As James Nash argues, the ecological complaint against Christianity is, on the one hand, essentially valid. Throughout Christian history, the dominant theological and ethical strains have been oblivious or even antagonistic to nature. On the other hand, the ecological complaint is an over-generalisation since it overlooks the significance of dissenting opinions in Christian history and underestimates the tradition’s capacity for ecological reformation.²²

Christian thinkers usually do acknowledge that Christian attitudes towards nature have been far from innocent. Francis Schaeffer, for example, speaks of a Christian arrogance towards nature.²³ However, as apologists for the Christian tradition usually argue, this is a serious aberration from authentic Biblical and Christian attitudes to the environment. Accordingly, a distinction has to be made between Christianity and Christendom.²⁴ It is not the Bible or the Christian faith that is to blame, but modern *interpretations* of Christianity.²⁵ Although this is certainly the case, there is an unhelpful tendency to merely justify the Bible and the Christian faith in the process.

In his excellent study, *The travail of nature* (1985), Paul Santmire has acknowledged and analysed the *ambiguous* ecological promise of Christian theology at length. He devotes chapters to most of the major theologians before returning to a critical assessment of the Biblical roots of Christianity. He counters both those critics who assume that the Christian tradition has little, if anything, to offer to ecological thinking, and those who are overly eager to redeem the tradition, for example through an all too uncritical retrieval of human dominion.²⁶

Following Weber’s famous thesis on the historical correlation between Protestantism and capitalism, there is a further need to explore the complicity of a Protestant ethos and the theological convictions supporting the establishment of environmentally destructive economic systems. In addition to Santmire’s work a number of studies have focused on the ecological legacy of the Protestant tradition.²⁷

cultivating it; 3) Human rule over nature is grounded in human freedom; 4) Human rule over nature has to address the consequences of human sin; 5) Nature is there to serve human interests and can be improved through human interaction; and 6) Nature provides the space within which the free rule of humans can be exercised.

²¹ Hallman 1994:5.

²² Nash in Taylor 2005:316.

²³ Schaeffer 1970.

²⁴ See the argument by Wilkinson 1980, 1991.

²⁵ See Loader 1987, Tucker 1991.

²⁶ Santmire 1985, 1992.

²⁷ See Fowler 1995, Keller 2000, Nash 1991 & Palmer 1992.

This acknowledgement of the ecological ambiguity of Christianity is given weight by two interesting empirical studies from sociologists.

a) In a study conducted in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley found that there is a significant negative correlation between Protestantism, a belief in the existence in God, a belief that the Bible is the Word of God, and willingness to support an increase in government spending on the environment. He concludes that a rigid religious orientation seems to inhibit a willingness to promote environmental spending.²⁸

b) In 1991 the South African sociologist, Jacklyn Cock published a report entitled, *Towards the greening of the church in South Africa*. In this report she investigated the environmental awareness amongst church leaders and in official church publications and resolutions on the environment. She concluded that there is a “blind spot” and a “deep silence” within the Christian church in South Africa on environmental issues.²⁹ The reasons given (and defended!) by her informants (for the silence of the church on environmental issues) tend to confirm Lynn White’s suspicions since they go beyond arguments for the priority of other concerns on the social agenda of the church. These reasons given include the following: a preoccupation with human salvation, the doctrine of divine transcendence, the emphasis of the Judaeo-Christian tradition on human domination over nature, the dismissal of environmental issues as “new age” and even the perception that the ecological crisis confirms the Biblical apocalyptic prophecies. By contrast, Cock’s interviews with environmental activists reveal a striking absence of any religious affiliation!³⁰

6.4 An ecological transformation of Christianity

Due to this ecological ambiguity of Christianity, a Christian confession of guilt – and not just of a confession of faith – may be the more appropriate response. Indeed, Christianity has all too often shown “contempt of the world” (*contemptus mundi*). It focused almost exclusively on the salvation of the soul *from* this world. In this way it showed disdain for the biophysical world and gave tacit permission for environmental degradation to proceed – since this was regarded as an ultimately and morally immaterial matter. In proposing a Christian confession of guilt, James Nash concludes that Christianity itself cannot escape an indictment of ecological negligence and abuse.³¹ David Field adds that confessing Christ in response to the ecological challenges poses a new “kairos” for the church (also in South Africa), a challenge similar to the ones posed by Nazism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa. He also insists that confessing Christ implies both a confession of faith and of guilt.³²

The environmental crisis has therefore not only led to the claim that Christianity could and should make an important contribution to a more adequate understanding of the role of humanity in nature. It has also led to calls for a critical reassessment of the

²⁸ Greeley 1993.

²⁹ For similar studies from within the African context, see Gitau’s survey of Christian attitudes towards environmental concerns in Central Kenya (Gitau 2000:79-91) and Golo’s study on Ghana (Golo 2006).

³⁰ See Cock 1991, 1992.

³¹ Nash 1991:72.

³² Field 1997.

Christian faith itself. Many theologians have suggested that there is a clear need to transform Christian theology into an ecological theology. This need arises from the “fundamental failures of Christian and other religious traditions to adapt to the limiting conditions of life; to recognise intricate and interdependent relationships involving humankind with the rest of nature and to respond with benevolence and justice to the theological and biological fact of human kinship with all other creatures.”³³ It is therefore important to deal not only with the possible contributions that Christianity can make within the context of environmental degradation, but also to consider the implications which the environmental crisis may have for the Christian faith and for a Christian ethos.³⁴

James Nash explains that an ecological “reformation” of Christianity implies that there are significant flaws in the Christian tradition – else a reformation would not be necessary. It also implies that these flaws can be corrected – else a reformation would not be possible. He adds that reformation is fortunately not something alien to the Christian faith (see the protestant axiom of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*).³⁵ Larry Rasmussen calls for a “conversion to the earth”, a radical turn to re-earthing our identities as bonded with that of all creation.³⁶ Likewise, and more evocatively, Kwok Pui-lan calls for a “recycling” of Christianity that will constitute a move from a hierarchical to an ecological model, from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, from a passive spirituality to a passionate spirituality and from an ecclesial solidarity to a ecological solidarity.³⁷ Or, in the more vivid imagery of Joseph Sittler, theology “must be reconceived, under the shock of filth, into fresh scope and profundity.”³⁸ This constitutes, in Sallie McFague’s terminology, an earthly theological agenda.³⁹

6.5 Stimuli behind such an ecological reformation of Christianity

The following stimuli are playing a role in such calls for a critical reassessment of Christianity.

One obvious factor is the sense of urgency in the light of the environmental crisis itself. This is amplified by the structural links between environmental degradation and problems such as economic disparity, poverty, armed conflict, environmental refugees and so forth. In a time of crisis (such as these problems suggest) the reinterpretation of any tradition seem to become necessary. Indeed, at times, interpretation matters (David Tracy).

³³ Hessel & Ruether 2000:xxxvii.

³⁴ The difference between these two modes of doing ecological theology is, of course, only in emphasis. Both aspects are always already playing a role in the process of doing theology.

³⁵ See Nash 1996 & Nash in Taylor 2005:316-317.

³⁶ Rasmussen 1996:5-14.

³⁷ See Pui-lan 1994. See also Keller (1993:43) who asks somewhat sceptically “Can there be a greening of Christian theology?” She responds: “If so, a new kind of theological self-understanding, one with a method expressive of its content must develop. We need a theological practice of recycling. It will issue from a kind of ecology of discourse. Discerning the toxins at work in Christianity and its cultures allows us, or rather requires us, to break down the elements of Christian hope, to cleanse them where possible of their own patriarchal poisons and late modernist capitalist deteriorations.”

³⁸ Sittler (1970) in Bakken & Bouma-Prediger 2000:83.

³⁹ McFague 1993.

A second factor is the accusations against Christianity by Lynn White and others (see the discussion above). While some Christian theologians have responded by defending Christianity, others have seen an element of truth in these accusations and have called for a more thorough transformation of Christian theology.

A third factor is the new impetus of discourse on the relationship between theology and the sciences and the impact of such discourse on ecological theologies.⁴⁰ Ecology is itself primarily a scientific discipline and many ecological theologians have drawn insights from the environmental sciences. Even more important is the emergence of a new story of the universe, combining the insights from the cosmological reflections in astrophysics (the challenge posed to Christian theology by Copernicus) and the reconstruction of the evolution of life on earth by the biological sciences (the challenge posed to Christian theology by Darwin). Many ecological theologians have sensed that there is an urgent need to reinterpret the Christian doctrines of God, creation and humanity in the light of these contributions from the sciences.⁴¹ In an overview of such discourse, James Nash identifies especially five scientific insights which have shaped the attempt of Christian theologians engaged in the ecological reformation of Christianity: an awareness of evolutionary fecundity, biological kinship, universal relationality, sustainable living within biophysical boundaries and human dominance.⁴²

A fourth factor is the heightened sensitivity to cultural and religious plurality. The environmental crisis has not only brought a critique of Christianity, but also a new interest in the ecological wisdom of pre-literate cultures and indigenous religions. The dialogue between Christianity and the religious traditions of the East has also received a new impetus in the search for ecological wisdom. These dialogues have evidently not left Christian theology untouched.⁴³

A fifth factor is the retrieval of the biblical roots and the subsequent history of Christianity with newly found ecological sensitivities. Such reconstructive work has yielded numerous insights that are giving momentum and theological depth to emerging ecological theologies.

How should such an ecological transformation of Christianity be approached? The focus of this task should obviously be on a more adequate environmental praxis in Christian churches. But what kind of Christian theology should provide the rationale for such an environmental praxis? In the following chapters various aspects of this attempt to retrieve forms of ecological wisdom in the Christian tradition will be investigated in more detail.

⁴⁰ See especially the essay by Chapman (1998) in an important volume on *Science and theology: The new consonance* (edited by Ted Peters), which recognises the need to relate theology, science and environmental ethics with each other. See also the contributions on the notion of wisdom at the boundary between science, ethics and theology by Deane Drummond 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, King 2001, 2003 & Moltmann 2003.

⁴¹ See also the discussion in section 5.2 above. Among the numerous examples of contributions in ecological theology that employ insights from the “new cosmology”, see, for example, the monographs by Berry 1988, Boff 1995, 1997, Bruteau 1997, Capra & Steindl-Rast 1991, Edwards 2004, Haught 1993, Khem 1992, McDaniel 1989, 1995, McDonagh 1986, McFague 1991, 1993, Rasmussen 1996 & Ruether 1992. The work by Swimme & Berry (1992) has been especially influential in this regard.

⁴² Nash in Taylor 2005:372-375.

⁴³ See the discussion in Chapter 15.

CHAPTER 7

Biblical perspectives on the environment

The environmental crisis and the accusations of Lynn White have inspired many Christian theologians to return to the biblical roots of Christianity in order to retrieve some of its ecological wisdom. This chapter will provide a survey of some of these exegetical and theological investigations.

7.1 An ecological Biblical hermeneutics

In numerous contributions, Biblical scholars have offered a broad overview of Old Testament and New Testament perspectives on the environment. Typically, such overviews focus on a few favourite texts such as Genesis 1-3, the theme of the covenant (e.g. Genesis 6-9), the Sabbatical laws (e.g. Lev 25), Job 37-39, some of the Psalms (8, 19, 24, 98, 104), some prophetic texts such as Isaiah 9-11, 40f, 65, Ezek 36, Joel, Amos, some of the sayings of Jesus (e.g. in Matt 6:28-30, 10:29-31), Romans 8:18-23, Colossians 1 and Revelation 21-22. The selection of these texts is quite understandable since they deal explicitly with nature or with a theology of creation.

The insights on ecological wisdom emerging from these contributions cannot be discussed here in any detail. A few comments regarding the hermeneutical approach that is assumed in this regard are important though:

- * The selection of some favourite texts may unintentionally reinforce the perception that ecology is indeed a marginal concern in the Bible. The focus may be far too narrow. It only relates to an aspect of creation theology or, more specifically, to the relationship (of stewardship?) between human beings and nature. Accordingly, a concern for the environment is one aspect of a Christian ethos, but it does not really belong to the heart of the Christian gospel. By contrast, a retrieval of the ecological wisdom in the Biblical traditions has to be doctrinally comprehensive. This implies that texts dealing with each aspect of God's work – creation, providence, humanity, sin, redemption, the church, the sacraments and eschatological consummation – have to be retrieved from an ecological perspective.
- * Another way of broadening the scope of such a retrieval of ecological wisdom is to trace the Bible for references to the earth, mountains, hills, air, waters, rivers, soil, trees, animals, birds, insects, etc. It is important to read the whole Bible through ecological spectacles. This soon leads to the discovery that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is “filled to the brim” with ecological overtones. The earth and all its creatures are intimately interwoven with God's loving care for humanity.
- * At the same time, an ecological hermeneutics has to consider the suspicion that many biblical texts do not escape from an anthropocentric bias. With liberation theologians and feminist theologians, ecological theologians have to come to terms with the discovery that the Bible itself does not necessarily support a particular

cause, in this case an ecological ethos.¹ Many critics have argued that biblical texts, more often than not, show a preoccupation with human well-being and that the interests of other creatures and the voice of the earth itself are as a result marginalised. This calls for a more critical hermeneutics in which it is not presupposed that the Bible must be “rescued” against environmental critics. All the evidence has to be taken into account for an investigation into the ecological thrust of a particular biblical text. An ecological hermeneutics therefore has to operate not only with a hermeneutics of trust but also with one of suspicion.

A critical ecological hermeneutics is adopted most notably and most radically in the five volume “Earth Bible” series, initiated by the Australian Biblical scholar Norman Habel (the chief editor of the project) and published by Sheffield Academic Press / Liturgical Press.² In an introductory essay to the project, Habel explains that the widespread sense of environmental crisis has stimulated the emergence of a new “Earth consciousness”. This is the awareness that humans are not in control of natural ecosystems, but that all forms of life are interconnected and that we are deeply dependent on the complex web of relationships that allows life on Earth to flourish. The term “Earth” suggests the “living system within which we humans live in a relationship of interdependence with other members of the Earth community.”³ Moreover, the sense of Earth community calls for “Earth justice”, the call to resist the violation of ecosystems in solidarity with all the marginalised and threatened species and specimens. This emerging Earth consciousness invites and challenges us to revisit our religious traditions (and sacred texts) from the perspective of the Earth community. In the words of Habel, “This new Earth consciousness invites us, a [*sic*] members of the Earth community, to return to the bible, and in dialogue with the text, ascertain whether a similar kinship with Earth is reflected here.”⁴ We have to “interrogate the biblical heritage to ascertain whether Earth is silenced, oppressed or liberated in the Bible.”⁵

The focus of the Earth Bible project is not merely a renewed interest in creation theology and in the Earth as part of creation, but in the voice of Earth in the text itself. The Earth is not so much a topic in the text but a voice or (often marginalised) presence in the text that has to be listened to. In this way, Earth becomes a subject (with a voice in its own right) and not so much an object in the Biblical texts. This calls for a reflecting *with* Earth and not so much *about* the Earth, in the same way that feminist Biblical scholars would want to read the Bible in solidarity *with* oppressed women and not *for* them. Habel explains this point of departure in an introductory essay to the project:

(This) involves a move away from searching the text to study the theme or topic of Earth, as part of a creation theology or any other theology. Rather, we are identifying, as far as possible, with Earth or the earth community, as we converse with the text. We no longer consider ourselves readers within the hierarchy of creation, but fellow members within the community of Earth. We are no longer reading as stewards over creation, but as kin, relatives within the Earth

¹ See Thomas Berry’s designation of the Bible as “dysfunctional” and the wholesale abandonment of the Bible in some ecofeminist theologies. See Adams 1993 & Gray 1985.

² For the discussion below, see my review of the Earth Bible project (Conradie 2004, also 2005).

³ Habel 2000:27.

⁴ Habel 2000:26.

⁵ Habel 2000:26.

community. We no longer see ourselves as pilgrims on Earth, but as a species in Earth, beneath a common protective skin called the atmosphere.⁶

The “Earth Bible” project therefore explores the Biblical texts from the perspective of the Earth, suspecting that the text and / or its interpreters may be anthropocentric and not geocentric. It asks whether there is a concern for Earth community in the text or whether Earth is being treated unjustly in the text. It attempts to retrieve alternative traditions that hear the voice of the earth and that value the earth more than as a human instrument.⁷ On this basis, the Earth Bible team have identified the following six guiding ecojustice principles for Biblical interpretation:

- a) *The principle of intrinsic worth*: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth;
- b) *The principle of interconnectedness*: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival;
- c) *The principle of voice*: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice;
- d) *The principle of purpose*: The universe, 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.
- e) *The principle of mutual custodianship*: 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.
- f) *The principle of resistance*: Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.⁸

The articulation of these principles helps to pose new questions to the Biblical texts. This may lead to the discovery of new concepts, insights and dimensions embedded in the text – which may not have been seen before. Does this not fall into the trap of reading one’s own assumptions into the text? The Earth Bible team acknowledge this danger, but argues that each interpreter approaches a text with a set of governing assumptions that often remain unarticulated and subconscious and that are therefore even more dangerous. The danger of reading into the text randomly may be avoided if the articulation of such ecojustice principles is done in conjunction with historical, literary and cultural modes of analysis.⁹

The ecological hermeneutics developed within the context of the Earth Bible project may be described as being predominantly a hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval. Together with the approaches to Biblical interpretation derived from psychoanalytical theory, Marxism, feminist theology, liberation theology and indigenous theologies, a critical ecological hermeneutics articulates the suspicion that the Biblical texts and their interpretations have been distorted as a result of an anthropocentric bias which marginalises other creatures and the voice of the Earth itself.

⁶ Habel 2000:34.

⁷ See Habel’s introductory essay in Habel 2000:25-37, 38-53, also Eaton 2000:54-71.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of these principles, see Habel 2000:42-53.

⁹ Habel & Wurst 2000:21-33.

The best analogue for the Earth Bible project's hermeneutics is perhaps feminist hermeneutics¹⁰ (see the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza). Many feminist biblical scholars have reached the conclusion that the Bible is not a neutral book with regard to the oppression of women. The Bible consists of a corpus of books written predominantly by men, reflecting a male-chauvinist perspective and serving primarily male interests. Thus the Bible can be used as a weapon *against* women's struggles for liberation. This calls for a two-pronged hermeneutics, including both a hermeneutics of suspicion and of reconstruction. The hermeneutics of suspicion requires an ideology-critical analysis of androcentric distortions at work in the production and interpretation of biblical texts. This is supplemented with reconstructive work in which the stories of the victims of patriarchy and misogyny are excavated and where more inclusive traditions in the production and interpretation of these texts are retrieved.

In a similar way, the Earth Bible project articulates the suspicion that the production and the appropriation of biblical texts have been distorted as a result of an anthropocentric bias. With Fiorenza such a hermeneutics may wish to place a warning label on all biblical texts: "Caution! Could be dangerous to your health and survival."¹¹ Its suspicion is that "biblical texts, written by humans to meet human circumstances, will reflect human interests at the expense of the non-human Earth community."¹² It suspects that biblical texts are likely to be anthropocentric, as well as patriarchal or androcentric – because most writers and interpreters of the Bible in past periods were males socialised within the dominant patriarchal traditions.¹³ It acknowledges that we as members of the human community have all too often exploited, oppressed and endangered the existence of other members of the Earth community. It therefore seeks to ascertain whether Earth and Earth community are silenced or liberated in the production, transmission and interpretation of particular Biblical texts.

The approach followed in the Earth Bible project is therefore to ask whether there is a concern for Earth community in the text or whether Earth is being treated unjustly in the text. It also offers an incipient "hermeneutic of retrieval" by seeking to discern and retrieve alternative traditions about Earth or the Earth community that have been unnoticed, suppressed or hidden and that may help the earth community to flourish again.¹⁴ It facilitates a retrieval of alternative traditions which hear the voice of the earth and which value the earth as more than a human instrument. In this way it wishes to allow the often marginalised voices of Earth to be heard again. A theology based on such alternative traditions has to help us to live as part of the earth community on the planet's terms and not on our own.¹⁵

What, then, is an ecological hermeneutics? Perhaps it is too early to provide a clear answer to this question since there have been relatively few contributions on the nature of an ecological hermeneutics and (except for the *Earth Bible* project), these have been

¹⁰ On the connections between feminist perspectives on biblical hermeneutics and an ecojustice hermeneutics, see the helpful essay by Eaton 2000, also 1996.

¹¹ As quoted in Habel 2000:33.

¹² Habel & Balabanski 2002:1.

¹³ See Habel 2004:6.

¹⁴ Habel & Balabanski 2002:1.

¹⁵ See Habel 2000:35.

rather diffuse.¹⁶ Perhaps one may argue that an ecological hermeneutics does not introduce a new hermeneutical theory or methodology. Similar to a liberation, feminist or African hermeneutics, it introduces a new interpretative or doctrinal key,¹⁷ that is, a new “theology” for example God’s concern for the well-being of the Earth and its living creatures. This interpretative key is used to unlock the significance of the Biblical texts for the contemporary context. At the same time, it functions as a *critical* key to uncover anthropocentrism in the text, behind the text, in front of the text and in the contemporary context.

This may also apply to the ecological hermeneutics employed in the Earth Bible series. Together, the six ecojustice principles provide a creative and constructive new doctrinal key which can help us to read the Biblical texts in a new way and to appropriate it within a context of environmental devastation. It should also be noted how a normative priority is attributed to the set of ecojustice principles in this way. They are employed to judge both the validity of the text and contemporary culture.¹⁸

One could even argue that these six ecojustice principles provide nothing less than a “small dogmatics.” The first two principles on the intrinsic worth (instead of the utilitarian value) of all matter¹⁹ and on interconnectedness form an incipient doctrine of creation.²⁰ The emphasis on the earth community and a kinship between all creatures could also be read as a revised and more inclusive ecclesiology.²¹ The third principle on voice (a vital aspect of human personhood) could be read as an anthropology where the

¹⁶ See the contributions by Müller 1994 & Van den Brom 1997, 1998. In German debates, see the contributions by Ebach 1989 on Old Testament and Becker 1985 on New Testament hermeneutics, also Frierich 1982 & Halter 1985.

¹⁷ I have explored the notion of doctrinal keys in more detail elsewhere. See, for example my essay, “What are interpretative strategies”, *Scriptura* 78 (2001), 429-441. Such doctrinal keys are usually derived from core Christian doctrines. They play a crucial role in the identification of similarities (amidst differences) between the Biblical text and a contemporary context. They have a double function in this regard. They provide a key to unlock the meaning of *both* the contemporary context *and* the Biblical texts and simultaneously enable the interpreter to establish a *link* between text and contemporary context. Doctrinal keys are not only employed to *find* similarities but to *construct* similarities, to *make* things similar (indentify = idem facio), if necessary. The scope of such doctrinal keys is often quite comprehensive: they purport to provide a clue to the core meaning of the contemporary context *as a whole* and the Biblical text *as a whole*.

¹⁸ Eaton (2000:63) correctly notes that this priority of the principles over the biblical texts is entirely appropriate; the emancipatory interests of women have priority over both misogynist texts and power structures. It may be noted that this position poses serious questions for a retrieval of the authority of Scripture. However, one may also argue that such doctrinal keys (which arguably all readers of the Bible employ) obtain such a priority at a *de facto* level. They prescribe to their users what texts to select, what to find in such texts, what features and problems in the contemporary context may be highlighted, how the correlation between text and context may be established, how to appropriate the meaning of such texts and what aspects of the text and the context should be resisted. Such doctrinal keys are, of course, not static, they may be shaped by cultural evolution, changing contexts and by an engagement with the biblical texts.

¹⁹ On the distinction between intrinsic worth, utilitarian value and the notion of “added value”, see the discussion in Habel & Balabanski 2002:8-10.

²⁰ Habel (1998) himself develops this principle into a *theologia crucis* where the hidden presence of the Creator can be discerned in, with and under all created realities.

²¹ See Habel 2000:44-46.

voices of humans are situated amongst (and therefore not necessarily privileged²²) the varied modes of self-expression or silent communication of others in the earth community and beyond (as epitomised by Psalm 19²³). The fourth principle on design, purpose and an orientation towards an implicit goal is an (immanent) eschatology in the making.²⁴ The fifth principle on mutual custodianship and partnership challenges earlier anthropologies based on dominion and stewardship and constructs a doctrine of providence and an ecological ethics on the basis of a recognition of the ways in which Earth has sustained humanity and all life on Earth.²⁵ The sixth principle on resistance acknowledges the impact of evil and injustices, suggests the focus of an alternative doctrine of sin accordingly,²⁶ and locates the sources of redemption from such injustices in the ability of Earth and its components to offer resistance. As Habel notes, ecosystems are not necessarily fragile, but have a limited yet “remarkable capacity to survive, to regenerate and adapt to changing physical circumstances in spite of human exploitation and short-sighted greed.”²⁷

The vision articulated in these six ecojustice principles is bold, audacious, uncompromising and attractive in many respects. There are a number of striking features of this “small dogmatics.” Firstly there is no reference to “creation” or creatures, precisely in order to avoid any reference to or assumption of a Creator. This is indeed a radically this-worldly “theology” (if it could be called that) with no reference to divine presence (immanence) in the world, not to mention a recognition of the possibility of transcendence. As may be expected, any categories reminiscent of the particularity of Christianity (expect the focus on the Bible itself) are avoided in order to allow for a more universal (?) appeal of such an ecological hermeneutics, especially in a secular context and in conversation with other faith traditions.²⁸ On this basis there can be no suggestion of references to God the Father (or Mother), Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit, not to mention theological constructs such as trinity, incarnation, cross, resurrection justification, sanctification, ecclesiology, sacraments, or eternal life.²⁹ The contrast

²² See Habel 2000: 46-48. The privileging of some voices above others calls for the supplementary principle on ecojustice – precisely because of the conflicting agendas amongst those humans who wish to function as the mediating voice of the “voiceless” Earth in human decision making processes. See Eaton 2000:67.

²³ See Habel 2004:12.

²⁴ See Habel 2000:48-50, Habel & Balabanski 2002:5-6. The principle of purpose is described in terms of material processes as an inherent tendency of matter towards life and of life towards increasing diversity, complexity and symbiosis.

²⁵ See Habel 2000:50-51. The formulation by Habel and Balanski (2002:10) is illuminating in this regard: “There is a tendency to discern God as the sustainer of life without also recognizing Earth as the immediate agent of sustenance, support and creative energy.” Mutual custodianship implies that Earth is a life partner to be understood, respected and appreciated.

²⁶ See Habel’s (1998:119) and the discussion on the doctrine of sin in chapter 9.3.

²⁷ Habel 2000:53. Habel (1998:121) formulates this principle from a *theologia crucis* perspective in the following way: “Justice for the earth requires that we recognize the presence of God in Christ suffering with and within creation and join the Christ of the cross as suffering partners in the struggle of the earth to resist those forces that violate the integrity of earth by following the way of the cross.”

²⁸ See Habel 2000:38, 2004:8 where this motivation is explicitly mentioned.

²⁹ The article by Habel (1998) illustrates how such ecojustice principles can be developed from the perspective of a theology of the cross.

between the “small dogmatics” of the Earth Bible team and the Nicene Creed could scarcely be starker.³⁰

In the light of these comments on Christian doctrine it is pertinent that an ecological biblical hermeneutics should go hand in hand with an ecological reformulation of Christian doctrine. The challenge that the Earth Bible team is putting to their colleagues in Systematic Theology is to tackle these doctrinal questions with a vigour, thoroughness and imagination that is comparable to that of the Earth Bible series.³¹

7.2 Exegetical studies on the Bible and the environment

There are numerous studies which develop a broad biblical theology of the environment. Most of the edited volumes and many monographs on ecological theology have chapters on Old Testament and New Testament perspectives, often providing little more than a broad overview.³² Other studies are more popular and therefore tend to be somewhat repetitive. More recently a number of exegetical studies have been done to investigate the ecological dimensions of particular biblical texts. The Earth Bible series constitutes a large corpus of such contributions.

The following examples of exegetical studies on specific Biblical texts which focus explicitly on ecological issues (thus excluding numerous other studies which would also be relevant) may be simply listed here:

- * The creation narratives in Genesis with reference to the priestly narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4a,³³ and more specifically the locus classicus of Genesis 1:27-28,³⁴ and the Yahwist narrative of Genesis 2:5-25,³⁵ often in critical comparison with one another;³⁶

³⁰ I have no intention of testing the orthodoxy of the Earth Bible’s “small dogmatics” or to supplement the six principles with doctrinal allusions or to legitimate its principles by planting a cross on its fertile soil or to baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. That would not only be cheap, but would also be a form of colonisation and conquest and would not recognise the resistance against doctrinal interference in biblical exegesis. At the same time, the emergence of such a “small dogmatics” raises my curiosity precisely because it illustrates the inescapability of such heuristic / doctrinal keys very well. It also invites further critical reflection. See Habel (2004:8) on this invitation and the critical reflection on the six ecojustice principles offered by Eaton (2000).

³¹ This challenge was recognised in the planning stages of the Earth Bible project. Together with the Earth Bible project, a Contextual Ecotheology project was launched under the leadership of Denis Edwards. This project, which is perhaps less well-known than the Earth Bible project, was also located at the Centre for Theology, Science and Culture (Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University of South Australia). It has led to an excellent volume of essays entitled *Earth revealing – Earth healing: Ecology and Christian theology* (Edwards 2001).

³² See the excellent chapter on the Bible in Santmire (1985:189-216) and the very informative review by McAfee (1996). Cf. also the contributions by Hahne in Taylor 2005:319-323, Hill 1998:35-97, Page 1992, Tucker 1997 & Uehlinger 1995.

³³ See the contributions by Anderson 1994:42-55, Limburg 1991:124-130 & Santmire 1991:366-379.

³⁴ See, especially, the contributions by Anderson 1975, 1994:111-131, Barr 1972, 1974, Cooper 1990:51f, Dyrness 1987, Habel 2000, Jüngling 1981, Koch 1983, Krolzik 1989, Liedke 1979, Loader 1987, McAfee 1996, Scharpert 1987 & Uehlinger 1995.

³⁵ See the excellent contributions by Brown 1999:133f & Hiebert 1996, 2000. Hiebert contrasts the priestly emphasis on human beings as stewards or rulers with the Yahwist view on human beings (‘*adam*’) as farmers, intimately connected with the land (‘*adamah*’). Hiebert (2000:150-151) concludes that, “By describing the archetypal human task as cultivating or ‘serving,’ the soil, the Yahwist subordinates human behavior to the larger ecosystem upon which human survival depends. According to the Yahwist, the

- * The narratives in the Pentateuch, for example the fall and its aftermath,³⁷ the flood narratives,³⁸ the tower of Babel,³⁹ the patriarchal narratives,⁴⁰ the plagues in Egypt,⁴¹ the Exodus and the wandering in the desert.
- * The Decalogue⁴² and the law codes in the Pentateuch;⁴³
- * Wisdom literature,⁴⁴ for example the book of Job,⁴⁵ especially chapter 37-39,⁴⁶ and the books of Proverbs,⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes⁴⁸ and Song of Songs;⁴⁹
- * The book of Psalms,⁵⁰ for example Psalm 8,⁵¹ 19, the enthronement Psalms (93, 95, 96)⁵² and 104,⁵³
- * The prophetic books,⁵⁴ including Isaiah,⁵⁵ Jeremiah,⁵⁶ Ezekiel,⁵⁷ Hosea,⁵⁸ Joel,⁵⁹ and Amos,⁶⁰

human vocation is not to manage the ecosystem of which humans are a part, but rather to align its activity to meet the demands and observe the limits imposed by this system upon all of its members." Creation was therefore not created for us human beings; we were created for the sake of creation. See also Keitzar 1994:54f.

- ³⁶ Several authors regard the notion of human dominion in the Priestly text problematic and contrast this with the notion of gardeners in Genesis 2. See, for example, Boersema 1997:49-110, Callicott 1991 & Hiebert 1994, 1996.
- ³⁷ See Wurst (2000) on Genesis 3, Wittenberg (2000) on Genesis 4 and Kahl (2001) on Gen 2-4.
- ³⁸ See Anderson 1984, 1994:56-64, 137-164, Gardner 2000, Fejo 2000, Olley 2000 & Zenger 1983.
- ³⁹ See Anderson 1994:165-178 and especially Van Wolde 2000.
- ⁴⁰ See the essays by McAfee, Boorer, Hobgood-Oster and Fontaine in Habel & Wurst 2000.
- ⁴¹ See Fretheim 1991.
- ⁴² See Sölle & Schottroff 1996.
- ⁴³ The Pentateuch is dominated by an exposition of God's law. God gives the people laws to govern every aspect of society. These laws regulated not only the relationship between God and the people and between human beings in their everyday lives, but also between the people and the rest of creation. Many of the laws in the Pentateuch have a specifically ecological dimension. See, for example, Boersema 1997:111-180 (especially on Lev 11:1-8, Deut 14:1-6).
- ⁴⁴ The wisdom literature in the Old Testament reflects on the classic human questions of life, death, love, suffering, evil, social existence, etc. Wisdom is the art of living a life acceptable to God, in harmony with the whole created order. The way to attain wisdom is through a close relationship with God. Nature is often used as an instrument through which wisdom is manifested and taught. For general contributions on the ecological significance of Wisdom literature, see especially the study by Perdue 1994 and the contribution by Johnstone 1987. See also the discussion on wisdom as a biblical motif below.
- ⁴⁵ See the essays by Habel, Sinnot, Spangenberg, Patick and Dell in Habel & Wurst 2001.
- ⁴⁶ See the chapter on Job in Brown 1999:317-380, also Habel 2004 & McKibben 1994.
- ⁴⁷ See the chapter on the book of Proverbs in Brown 1999:271-316.
- ⁴⁸ See Van Heerden 2001.
- ⁴⁹ See the essays by Fontaine and Viviers in Habel & Wurst 2001.
- ⁵⁰ See, especially, Volume four in the Earth Bible series edited by Habel 2001.
- ⁵¹ See, especially, Anderson 1994:111f, Carley 2000, Jüngling 1981 & Loader 1987.
- ⁵² See Du Preez 199 and Habel & Avent 2001.
- ⁵³ See Limburg 1994, Ntrel 2001, Sölle & Schottroff 1996, Steck 1978:67-69 & Walker-Jones 2001.
- ⁵⁴ See, especially, Volume four in the Earth Bible series edited by Habel 2001.
- ⁵⁵ See the chapter in Anderson 1994:195-206 (on Isaiah 27:1), the chapter on Second Isaiah in Brown (1999:229-270) and the exegetical studies by Charles, Gardner and Olley in volume four of the Earth Bible series (Habel 2001).
- ⁵⁶ See the chapter in Anderson (1994:179-194) on Jeremiah 31:15-22, also Fretheim (2000) on Jeremiah 12.
- ⁵⁷ See, for example, Stevenson 2001.
- ⁵⁸ See Bergant 1994 & Braaten 2001.
- ⁵⁹ See Cunanan 1994.
- ⁶⁰ See Jobling & Loewen 2000.

- * The gospels, for example the Sermon on the Mount,⁶¹ the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth,⁶² the miracles and parables of Jesus and the preaching of Jesus on the coming reign of God;⁶³
- * The Pauline⁶⁴ and deuterio-Pauline literature, often with specific reference to texts such as Romans 8:18-23,⁶⁵ Colossians 1:15-23,⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 15 and Ephesians 1;
- * The pastoral epistles and the letter to the Hebrews;⁶⁷
- * The Johannine literature, with specific reference to the gospel of John,⁶⁸ the letters of John and the book of Revelation⁶⁹ (e.g. the “new heaven and the new earth” in Rev 21, and the imagery in Rev 22⁷⁰).
- * Deutero-canonical books such as Tobit⁷¹ and the Wisdom of Solomon.⁷²

Although considerable work has been done in the field of such exegetical research from an ecological perspective, there remain considerable gaps in the literature, for example on the law codes and the historical books in the Old Testament and the letters of Paul in the New Testament.

7.3 Excursus on Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15

The command in Genesis 1:28 to “have dominion” over the earth plays a pivotal role in a Christian understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature. The history of interpretation of the *dominium terrae* motif in Genesis 1:28 has been extraordinarily complex, leaving in its wake a highly destructive legacy.⁷³ Since this text has often been used and abused in the history of Christianity, virtually every major contribution to ecological theology discerns the need to offer a reinterpretation of this text.

Most ecological reinterpretations of Genesis 1:28 attempt to move away from an understanding of dominion as domination. Instead, the meaning of dominion is interpreted in terms of the metaphor of stewardship. In such expositions human beings are typically portrayed as stewards, guardians, gardeners, priests, custodians, or caretakers of creation.⁷⁴ Such ecological reinterpretations of Genesis 1 suggest that humans need to act as just and caring stewards of the land entrusted to them by God. The command in Genesis 1:28 is not interpreted in terms of domination or military conquest, but in terms of caring, protecting, nurturing, gardening, cultivating or serving. We can learn to rule

⁶¹ See, for example, Balabanski 2000 on an ecofeminist reading of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6), Ganoczy 1982, Stuhlmacher 1988, & Trainor 2000 on Luke 2.14.

⁶² See Hahne in Taylor 2005:317-9 & Sölle & Schottroff 1996:126-149 on Mark 10:17-27.

⁶³ See Cadwallader 2004.

⁶⁴ See Reid 1994 & Wild 1988.

⁶⁵ See Bindemann 1983, Byrne 2000, Grässer, Lawson 1994 & Schottroff 1986.

⁶⁶ See Friedrich 1982 & Trainor 2004.

⁶⁷ See Salevao 2000 on Hebrews 6:7-8 and Treblico 2000 on 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

⁶⁸ See the Bible studies on earthy symbols in John’s gospel in Conradie 2000. On the category of land ownership in John’s gospel, see Bahr 1991.

⁶⁹ See Du Preez 1992, Hawkin 2003, Rosenau 1991 & Rossing 2000.

⁷⁰ See Reid 2000.

⁷¹ See Urbrock 2000.

⁷² See Bergant 2000 & Turner 2004.

⁷³ For excellent overviews of the history of interpretation of the notion of the *dominium terrae*, see Krolzik 1989 & Liedke 1989.

⁷⁴ On an environmental “ethics of care”, see Abraham 1994:69 & Cooper 1990:53.

the earth only if we rule over our own ruling. Human beings are responsible for “tending the garden”⁷⁵ which God has entrusted to us for our care. Brueggemann, for example, understands “dominion” in terms of the care of the shepherd who protects his flock and leads it to green pastures.⁷⁶ To rule the earth is the function of the shepherd king (Ezek 34) or the ideal king (Psalm 72). Proper stewardship requires the Benedictine task of using resources wisely, sound management, reliability, commitment, dedication, hard work and responsibility towards God as owner of the land. This fosters an environmental ethos where it is acknowledged that natural resources are not our own, but only entrusted to us for our care. Since we did not create the beasts, we cannot be their absolute lords. Our role is not to function as a second God, but to carry out a commission as a *primus inter pares* amongst those over whom we are called to rule. Humans retain this dominion as long as humankind cares for the land properly. If this does not happen, the soil itself cries out for justice and humans are expelled (the expulsion from Eden and the exile from the land).⁷⁷

It is often argued that we should read Genesis 1:27-8 together with Genesis 2:15 where humanity (*adam*) is called to “till” (*abad*) and to “keep” (*samar*) the soil (*adamah*). Human rule over the earth is a matter of serving (*abad*) and preserving (*samar*) the earth.⁷⁸ Theodor Hiebert suggests that the priestly emphasis on human beings as stewards or rulers may be contrasted with the Yahwist view on the human being (*adam*) as a farmer, intimately connected with the land (*adamah*).⁷⁹ Hiebert concludes that, “By describing the archetypal human task as cultivating or ‘serving’ the soil, the Yahwist subordinates human behavior to the larger ecosystem upon which human survival depends. According to the Yahwist, the human vocation is not to manage the ecosystem of which humans are a part, but rather to align its activity to meet the demands and observe the limits imposed by this system upon all of its members.”⁸⁰

Despite such attractive efforts to offer ecological reinterpretations of Genesis 1:27-8, the exegesis of this text remains deeply problematic. The Hebrew words *kabash* (“subdue”) and *radah* (“have dominion”) cannot be completely “pacified”.⁸¹ The word *kabash* is rooted in the kingship ideology and also has the connotations of “trample upon”, “conquer” and the “occupation of conquered territory.”⁸² The context within which the word functions elsewhere is that of slavery (Jer 34:11, 16) and even rape (Esther 7:8, Neh 5:5), the subjection of foreign nations (2 Sam 8:11) and the invasion of land. The word *kabash* (“subject”) is, for example, used to describe the way in which Moses, Joshua and

⁷⁵ See the title of the volumes of essays edited by Granberg-Michaelson 1987. For Granberg-Michaelson, the Bible stresses God’s care for the earth and our duty to nurture creation. He remains ambivalent about the notion of stewardship itself and emphasises a deep, complete caring (as is indicated in the metaphor of “tending the garden”). This is distinct from the notion of human authority in a hierarchical universe.

⁷⁶ See Brueggemann, W 1982. *Genesis* (Interpretation). Atlanta: John Knox Press.

⁷⁷ For biblical references, see Genesis 3 and 2 Chronicles 36:20f. See also Brueggeman’s analysis (1977:1f) of the traditions of landedness and landlessness in the Bible.

⁷⁸ See Wilkinson 1991:287.

⁷⁹ On the tendency to prioritise the priestly version of the creation narratives, see especially Hiebert 1996, 2000 & Tucker 1991.

⁸⁰ Hiebert 2000:150–51. Welker (1999:9f) warns that a too positive appraisal of the gardening metaphor in Genesis 2 overlooks the need for aggressive pruning that is assumed by any gardener.

⁸¹ Uehlinger 1995:51.

⁸² See Habel 2000:46f & Hiebert 2000:137.

David conquered Canaan by overwhelming and conquering Israel's enemies.⁸³ The word *radah* means "rule" in the sense of bringing order among other living beings (for example the domestication of animals), thus implying human supremacy.⁸⁴ The word *radah* also includes the connotations of "rule", "ordering", "control" and even "dominate". It is used for the authority of the head of the house over household servants, and especially for the rule of kings. It is used for rule over Israel's enemies and occurs in descriptions of military conquest, where it is used with verbs such as "destroy" (Num 24:19) and "strike down" (Is 14:6). The verb clearly designates a potent authority.⁸⁵ It plays an important role in legitimising the ideology of imperial reign. It suggests that humans have to establish and maintain law and order. It also suggests the supremacy of humans in relation to other species. From this the rights of us humans to tame animals and to use them for our own benefit may be deduced. Animals are serviceable to humans. The connotations of power and force therefore cannot be excluded from the way in which both these concepts are used.⁸⁶ In his essay on Genesis 1:26-28, Habel adamantly concludes that the claim that the mandate in this passage has been misunderstood and that it can best be interpreted in terms of a benign stewardship model is untenable.⁸⁷

In response to such views, Bernard Anderson argues that although the verbs may be used in contexts with violent connotations, such is not the context in which they appear in Genesis 1.⁸⁸ In subsequent essays Anderson reiterated the argument that the context within which the authority of dominion is granted precludes exploitation and should be properly understood as responsible stewardship.⁸⁹ There is, moreover, a democratisation of the image of God in the priestly tradition since the function of "ruling" (*radah*) is applicable to all human beings, including men and women. The flourishing of the human species has to be understood in terms of the prior flourishing of other species which are also instructed to multiply and to fill the earth. This reading of human dominion is reinforced by the food arrangements of Genesis 1:29-30. Whatever human dominion may mean, this does not include the right to kill other animals for food. James Barr concurs that the relationship between human beings and the animals in Genesis 1:28f (which may be read as an explication of Gen 1:27) may be one of hierarchy, but certainly does not justify exploitation (any form of killing is prohibited in the food arrangements of Gen 1:29-30). He suggests that the semantic field of *kabash* in this context includes at most the needs of settlement and agriculture.⁹⁰ Paul Santmire agrees that: "the apparently harsh language that gives voice, in part, to the theology of dominion here, must be read in the context of that all-pervading, harmonious world of *shalom* which Genesis 1 presupposes, a world where humans and the animals enjoy a marked commonality and where the Creator clearly has purposes for the whole creation that transcends instrumentalist human needs."⁹¹

⁸³ Habel 2000:46f.

⁸⁴ See, especially, Hiebert 1996a, 2000, Uehlinger 1995:51 & Wilkinson 1991:287.

⁸⁵ Hiebert 2000:137.

⁸⁶ Welker 1999:62.

⁸⁷ Habel 2000:31.

⁸⁸ Anderson 1975.

⁸⁹ Anderson 1984, 1994.

⁹⁰ Barr 1972, 1974.

⁹¹ Santmire 2000:39.

Moreover, as Pannenberg notes, our dominion has to be linked to God's own dominion. God's will as Creator is the standard against which the dominion which we exercise as God's image should be measured. And this certainly excludes arbitrary control or ruthless exploitation. The ecological crisis is therefore "a reminder that God is still the Lord of creation and that human arbitrariness in dealing with it is not without limits or consequences."⁹² The Genesis creation narratives are not anthropocentric but theocentric. Human dominion is therefore authority within creation, not over it.⁹³

In addition, as Michael Welker argues, some form of human adaptation of the environment is both necessary and legitimised by Genesis 1:28. It is necessary because there is a need in any human community to distinguish between the interests of children, pets and tamed animals. In a harsh climate with many threats to life and a food chain which is shared with other animals, it is demanded that the welfare of children be protected, if necessary against other forms of life. The interests of animals cannot be valued above those of children and neighbours. In this sense, Welker argues, there is a legitimate anthropocentrism in the kerygmatic thrust of Genesis 1:28. However, it is precisely the *proximity* of the animals, not an *alienation* between humans and animals, which makes such a distinction and the need to rule over animals necessary. Furthermore, in the Ancient Near East any form of rule over someone or something necessarily implied that the one who rules had to accept responsibility for the well-being of the ones who are ruled over. The ruler (humans) therefore has the responsibility to protect the interests of the ruled (the other animals) with mercy and fairness. Although provision is made for the use of force and violence, this may never cause the destruction of the community and solidarity between human and the other animals. In fact, ruling over the animals implies the responsibility to ensure that there is sufficient nourishment and a sustainable habitat for animals. This is crucial precisely because, within the context of the Near East, the alternative to arable land is not wilderness, but desert. Welker concludes that the notion of dominion is "realistic" and necessary to govern the relationship between human beings and other creatures.⁹⁴

How should these contrasting exegetical comments be understood? Perhaps Tim Cooper is on the right track when he argues that the text has to be understood within its original historical context which cannot be appropriated directly in any modern context:

For a people at the dawn of creation, subject to the forces of nature and facing the task of establishing agriculture, instructions to take the ground under control in order to produce food would make sense. ... Even in the current age the state of land in the poorest regions makes food difficult to grow and often the land needs treatment before it can be fertile; in these circumstances the strong language of Genesis seems fitting. In the struggle for mere survival, human force against the elements is often necessary. The problems arise when the force used is unwarranted or undisciplined and applied with little foresight.⁹⁵

In his contribution on Genesis 1–3 in the Earth Bible series, Mark Brett adds that wild animals were, until recently, regarded in most peasant societies as a threat. In such

⁹² See Pannenberg, W. 1994. *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p. 203-205.

⁹³ Bauckham 2006:46.

⁹⁴ Welker 1999:70v.

⁹⁵ Cooper 1990:51.

contexts there is a need to respond to this threat by “subduing” the wild animals to human rule.⁹⁶ Outside the garden of Eden the world is not yet fit for human habitation. The command to “subdue” suggests that things are not yet as they should be.⁹⁷ One also has to recognise the liberating thrust of texts such as Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. Humans are not powerless creatures exposed to a threatening environment. Here the divine being is no longer pictured as being associated with natural forces *against* human beings (through droughts, sickness, accidents); the God of Israel is standing alongside humans in their struggle to control nature.⁹⁸ One may therefore conclude that the meaning of Genesis 1 should not be universalised. It can indeed be used for a criticism of ecological tyranny (in some contexts), but also as a right of subsistence in other (less affluent) contexts.⁹⁹

7.4 Contributions to biblical theology

Several studies also offer contributions to an ecological theology from the perspective of biblical theology. Many of these studies focus on the ecological significance of specific biblical and theological motifs. Some of these studies move explicitly towards an application of the meaning of these themes in the contemporary context of environmental degradation. The following examples of such motifs may be mentioned:

- Animals: God’s love and concern for animals as expressed in the biblical texts;¹⁰⁰
- Beauty: The category of nature’s amazing beauty and grandeur in the midst of the repulsive ugliness of pollution and the invitation to wonder in this beauty of God’s creation;¹⁰¹
- Covenant: The category of the covenant (which is often used to explore new forms of an ecological covenant);¹⁰²
- Creation: The motifs of creation in the beginning,¹⁰³ creation and chaos,¹⁰⁴ continuing creation and consummation in the new creation;¹⁰⁵
- Cross: The symbol of the cross in the light of the forces of death, threatening the natural environment;¹⁰⁶
- Doxology: The situatedness of a theology of creation within the context of worship in biblical texts;¹⁰⁷
- God’s reign: The kingdom of God and the reign of God over the whole earth;¹⁰⁸

⁹⁶ Brett 2000:78-79.

⁹⁷ See Gunton 1998:197.

⁹⁸ See Berkhof 1963:40.

⁹⁹ See Uehlinger 1995:51, also Loader 1987.

¹⁰⁰ See Hyland 2000 and the volume of essays edited by Janowski 1993.

¹⁰¹ See Austin 1988, Downing 2003 and the indexed bibliography for more references.

¹⁰² See, for example, Anderson 1987:43-47, Field 1996, Granberg-Michaelson 1990, McCoy 1991, Niles 1989 and Robb & Casebolt 1991.

¹⁰³ See Anderson 1994:19-41.

¹⁰⁴ See Anderson 1967, 1987 & Nürnberger 1997.

¹⁰⁵ See especially Anderson 1987:110-143, 1994 and the innovative contributions by Duchrow & Liedke 1987 & Nürnberger 1997. Duchrow & Liedke (1987:50f) distinguish between three aspects of a Biblical theology of creation, namely the continuing creation (God’s faithfulness in suffering), dangerous and encouraging recollections (God’s original intention for creation), and dangerous and encouraging promise (creation liberated in Christ).

¹⁰⁶ See Rasmussen 1992:40-56, 1996 & Vähäkangas 2001.

¹⁰⁷ See Anderson 1987:78-109, 1994:207-232.

- Household: Belonging to the whole household of God, its management and vision;¹⁰⁹
 Justice: The search for a biblical basis for an ethos of ecojustice;¹¹⁰
 Land: The rich heritage of a biblical theology of land;¹¹¹
 Liberation: The theme of liberation for the whole of creation;¹¹²
 Life: The gift of life, sense of wonder over the fecundity of life and the need for a responsibility for all forms of life;¹¹³
 Love: The category of love as a call to Christians to love and nurture nature;¹¹⁴
 New earth: The vision of a new earth as portrayed especially in Isaiah 65¹¹⁵ and Revelation 21;
 Play: The notion of God's playfulness and delight in creation;¹¹⁶
 Sabbath: The Biblical motif of the Sabbath (the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee);¹¹⁷
 Trees: The tree of life as an ecological and ecofeminist symbol;¹¹⁸
 Wilderness: Theological reflection on negative attitudes towards wilderness in the biblical texts;¹¹⁹
 Wisdom: The need for a retrieval of the ecological wisdom embedded in the biblical roots of Christianity.¹²⁰

Furthermore, many studies have touched on a variety of other themes in Biblical theology such as community, compassion, conversion, grace, hope and despair, law and gospel, peace, priesthood, reconciliation, renewal, respect, sacrifice, etc.¹²¹ A few attempts have also been made to develop a more comprehensive theology of the Old Testament¹²² and a theology of the New Testament¹²³ from an ecological perspective.

¹⁰⁸ See Osborn 1993:116-128, Wenham 1992 & Zerbe 1991, 1992. Zerbe argues that the most comprehensive conception in the New Testament for God's redemptive activity, the kingdom of God, is an ecological concept because 1) its redemptive vision includes the restorative re-creation of the entire universe to its intended ecological balance and 2) this vision of holistic redemption motivates Christian ethics.

¹⁰⁹ On this theme in John's gospel, see Bahr 1991.

¹¹⁰ See Jacobsen 1996.

¹¹¹ See, especially, the classic studies by Brueggemann 1991, Habel 1995 & Watson 2004. In the South African context, see the contributions by Conradie 1992, Conradie & Field 2000:63f and Nürnberger 1992. There are numerous other studies on a theology of land in the South African context, but these studies do not always draw on the Biblical material. Most of these focus on the need for a redistribution of land and not so much on earthkeeping. See the indexed bibliography for further references.

¹¹² See Birch & Cobb 1981, Birch, Eakin, & McDaniel 1990, Boff 1995 & Daneel 1991.

¹¹³ See Loader 1991.

¹¹⁴ See McFague 1997 & Nash 1991.

¹¹⁵ See Gardner 2001.

¹¹⁶ See Hoezee 1998.

¹¹⁷ See, especially Moltmann 1985, 1989:61f, also Bratton 2000, Clark 1993:92f, Conradie 1996, Deane-Drummond 2004, Olivier 1987 & Wallace 2000.

¹¹⁸ See Moltmann-Wendel 1995 & Schottroff (with reference to Luke 13:1-10 and Mark 13:29-33).

¹¹⁹ See Leal 2005, also Austin 1987, Beisner 1997 & Bratton 1993.

¹²⁰ See especially Carmody 1991, Deane –Drummond 1997, 2000:1-71, 2002, Edwards 1995 & Perdue 1994.

¹²¹ See the indexed bibliography for references to these themes.

¹²² The debate on an Old Testament theology of creation is still marked by Gerard von Rad's influential salvation history approach to creation and redemption. The work of Claus Westermann has stimulated a new interest in the theme of creation in the Old Testament. Several recent studies attempt to understand the significance of creation within the cultural roots of ancient Israel. Among the authors that do so from a specifically ecological interest, the following major contributions may be mentioned: Anderson 1984, 1987, 1992, Brown 1999, Habel 1995, Hiebert 1996 & Simkins 1994.

7.5 Conclusion

As this brief survey demonstrates, according to the biblical traditions, God's interaction with creatures is not limited to humanity. It is always an interaction with humanity in relation to the rest of creation and at times with other creatures to the exclusion of humanity. God's acts of creation, judgement and redemption embrace the earth and all its creatures. The growing ecological awareness of biblical scholarship is to be applauded. However, as McAfee warns,

... there is a danger of simplifying the goodness of creation and the evils of cultural existence. Nature is assuredly fertile, beautiful, creative, nurturing, and sustaining; but such blessings are bought at the price of struggle, pain, suffering, destruction, wastefulness, cruelty, and death. Nature participates in redemption not because of sin, but because of suffering and pain, present as certainly in the world of nature as in the world of culture.¹²⁴

Despite the considerable evidence for an ecological wisdom in the Bible, it should also not be denied that there is sometimes a tendency in the Bible itself to be preoccupied with purely human concerns (as the earth Bible projects has demonstrated). According to some texts, it seems as if Christians do not really belong to this world (John 8:23, 1 Pet 2:11), that the earthly remains transient (2 Cor 5:1) and that Christians should be concerned only with what is "above" (Col 3:2). Such anthropocentrism may call for a Christian critique of the biblical roots of Christianity, precisely on the basis of the biblical witness. At the same time, it may also serve as a reminder that God always transcends our agendas, also ecological ones.

These texts call for further scrutiny. They ought to be viewed against the background of the predominant affirmation of creation. It must also be recognised that ecological deterioration was not a major aspect of the context in which the Biblical authors wrote. These texts do at least remind us that the earth is not an object of worship in the Christian faith; the focus should be on the God who encompasses everything, who created, sustains and will create anew. Our task today is to discover what the significance of this confession is in the contemporary context of ecological deterioration.

¹²³ See, for example, the edited volume by DeWitt 1991 and the essay by Gregorios 1990.

¹²⁴ McAfee 1996.

CHAPTER 8

Ecological wisdom in the history of Christianity

8.1 The environmental legacy of the history of Christianity

The debate on Lynn White's assessment of the historical roots of the environmental crisis calls for a more detailed investigation of the history of Christianity and its environmental legacy. It is not only important to retrieve sources of ecological wisdom from within the Christian tradition. The whole tradition should be subjected to scrutiny, following both a hermeneutics of suspicion and of retrieval.

Such a detailed assessment of the environmental legacy of the history of Christianity (in all its facets) obviously cannot be undertaken here. In general, it is probably wise to speak with Paul Santmire of the "ambiguous ecological promise" of Christianity.¹ The following introductory comments on the main periods will have to suffice here:

- * The patristic period, the work of the early church fathers and the ecumenical councils, was characterized by a deep ambivalence towards the natural world. In his overview, Douglas Burton-Christie notes that there was in this period, on the one hand, an affirmation of the goodness of the natural world on the basis of the doctrine of creation and the incarnation. On the other hand, there was a deep suspicion regarding a wrong kind of attachment to the things of the natural world. This ambivalence was shaped by Christianity's uneasy acceptance of Hellenistic dualism, but also by its rejection of gnosticism.²
- * Medieval Christianity was characterized by a dichotomy between nature and supernature, body and soul, nature and grace. In her overview, Nancy Hudson notes that "Medieval Christian thought has been routinely criticized for its pervasive theme of human dominance over nature. A perceived split between nature and supernature results in a sharp dichotomy between physical reality and a transcendent spiritual reality. Furthermore, the latter is identified with the image of God in human beings, often to the exclusion of the body."³ She also notes that the medieval sense of wonder at nature ended paradoxically in nature's availability for divinely ordained human dominion. She then explores the ambivalence towards nature amongst the great theologians of this period. One would also need to take into account the environmental legacy of powerful ecclesial institutions, the monasteries, the missions, the mystics,⁴ the crusades and the revival movements which flourished during this period.
- * The period of the Renaissance and the Protestant reformation cannot be separated from the voyages of exploration and exploitation and the economic dispensation

¹ See the subtitle of Santmire's *The travail of nature* (1985). It should be noted that Santmire focuses in this work on an assessment of Christian theology (only).

² See Burton-Christie in Taylor 2005:324-6.

³ See Hudson in Taylor 2005:326-327.

⁴ For a discussion of various historical manifestations of mystic love for the earth, see Thiele 1989.

emerging during that time. Despite ongoing scholarly debates on the legitimacy of Max Weber's famous thesis, it seems clear that the Protestant reformation at least provided impetus to the rise of an entrepreneurial middle class and, subsequently to the emergence of a capitalist ethos. This was stimulated, for example, through a strong sense of vocation and, in distinct ways, through the Lutheran notion of the two kingdoms of God and the reformed vision to establish God's reign in every sphere of society.⁵

- * It is much more difficult to characterise Christianity within the context of modernity. In Chapter 5 we explored some of the ideological roots and environmental fruits of the worldview of modernity. For present purposes it will have to suffice to say that Christianity in the Western world over the last few centuries either followed modernist trends and criteria in its appropriations of the Christian faith or had to respond to modernist challenges within a context where it could no longer prescribe the rules of such dialogue.
- * The environmental legacy of twentieth century ecumenical Christianity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.

In addition to the need for an assessment of the environmental legacy of the broader history of Christianity, one also has to note various more specific attempts to retrieve the ecological wisdom embedded in particular manifestations and traditions of Christianity. This chapter will provide a brief survey of such contributions.

8.2 A retrieval of pre-modern expressions of an ecological ethos

If the cultural roots of the environmental crisis are closely related to the rise of modernity, it is hardly surprising that many contributions to ecological theology have explored the ecological wisdom in pre-modern expressions of Christianity. The following traditions and figures are usually mentioned in this regard:⁶

- * The legends about the desert fathers and their spirituality and lifestyle in the wilderness, based on asceticism, humility, charity and simplicity;⁷
- * The earthly spirituality of Celtic expressions of Christianity;⁸
- * The emphasis on transformative manual labour in Benedictine and Cistercian monasticism, following the famous Rule established by Benedict of Nursia (480-547);⁹

⁵ On the environmental legacy of the Protestant reformation, see especially Field 1996, Fowler 1995 & Palmer 1992.

⁶ See the excellent overview of these traditions by McDonagh 1986:129-142, 1990:165-174. Fox (1983:307-315) proposes a "family tree" that lists important figures (completed even with star ratings!) who have contributed to what Fox calls a "creation spirituality."

⁷ For examples and a discussion in this regard, see Chrissyavgis 1993, Lane 1994, McDonagh 1990:166f & Nash 1991:82f.

⁸ See the contributions on Celtic spirituality by Bamford 1983, Bradley 1998, Deane-Drummond 1993, 1996, Donaldson 1995, Santmire 2000, 2002, Taylor 2005:280-283 & Woods 1984. The article by Bradley avoids a romantic notion of a "green" Celtic Christianity and calls for more careful historical scrutiny.

⁹ See Ancilla 1997, Chittister 1992 & Kardong 1994. Chittister identifies 5 features of Benedictine monasticism: praise, humility, stewardship, manual labour and community. Biologist Rene Dubos (1974) advocated such a Benedictine model of active stewardship instead of the Franciscan model of passive conservation since humans will inevitably interfere with the environment. They therefore need to do so with a sense of proper management, as illustrated in the Benedictine monasticism. Warner (2003:55)

- * The Franciscan sense of joy, wonder, praise and gratitude for the gift of creation and the emphasis on co-existence and friendship with animals;¹⁰
- * The intimate and organic relationship with nature portrayed in the visions of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179);¹¹
- * The sacramental vision of the natural world as revelatory of the mystery of God with Hugh of St. Victor;¹²
- * The vision of mystic unity in Meister Johannes Eckhardt (1260-1327);¹³
- * The concept of the universe as God's self-externalisation in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464).¹⁴

The differences between, for example, Benedictine monasticism, St Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen perspectives are particularly illuminating.¹⁵

- * The rhythm of monastic life in Benedictine monasteries included liturgical celebrations, prayer, study and also manual work. Monastics did not live solitary lives in desert cells or in woodland hermitages. They did not wander through the countryside begging for alms and food. The Benedictine monks formed communities in which they learned to cultivate the soil in a sustainable way, enhancing its fertility. This was of special significance at a time when farming practises in the Roman empire brought a lot of land to the edge of environmental disaster. The Sahara desert was already making inroads into the vast grain fields of North Africa. In Benedictine monasteries an emphasis was put on domesticating the garden of nature through human stewardship of the land, providing food, clothing and shelter for human beings.
- * The emphasis of the Benedictine tradition is on the transformation of nature through the stewardship of the land. For Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), nature was not so much something which one should interfere with; it was a source of joy, wonder, praise and gratitude for the gift of life. Every creature in the world is a mirror of God's presence and is therefore worthy to be treated with respect. Francis showed friendship, compassion, tenderness, and even sacrifice to pheasants, lambs, mice, rabbits, bees, fish, worms (he gently lifted them from his path) and larks (he wanted the emperor to outlaw their killing). This sense of friendship extended beyond the animal world: Francis treated sun, moon, water, fire, rocks, and plants with respect because they shared with him a common Source. The fellowship and co-existence with nature (instead of interference) is exemplified in the famous canticle for 'brother sun' and 'sister moon'.

identifies three typical aspects of such a monastic ecological ethos: praying with nature, learning from nature and acting on behalf of nature.

¹⁰ See, for example, Allen & Allen 1996, Boersema 2002, Boff 1997:203-220, Brugge 1987, French in Taylor 2005:670-672, Hooper & Palmer 1992, McMahon 1995, Mehren 1991, Saggau 2003, Senocak 2003, Sorrell 1998, Stratman 1982, Warner 1994, Weigand 1984 & Zweerman 1987.

¹¹ See especially the attractive work by Fox 1985 and also Craine 1987, Fox 1984, Stanton 1994 & Van Laarhoven 1990.

¹² See McGonigle 1994 & Rudd 2003.

¹³ See Fox 1983.

¹⁴ See Hudson in Taylor 2005:441.

¹⁵ I find McDonagh's discussion (1986, 1990) of the differences between these three perspectives particularly illuminating, and draw on his work in the discussion below. See also the influential article entitled "Franciscan conservation versus Benedictine stewardship" by René Dubos (1974).

- * Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was a remarkable medieval abbess, poet, visionary, painter, musician, botanist, herbalist and counsellor to popes and princes. In comparison with the taming, organising skills of the Benedictines and the brotherly co-existence with other creatures of the Franciscans, Hildegard celebrates the more feminine, organic unity with nature. Her poetry pulsates with a rapturous love for the earth and the fertility of nature. It is full of ardour and passion. She celebrates the love of the Creator for the earth in explicitly sexual imagery. Hildegard insists that the world is not evil, corrupted or to be avoided through ascetic practices. Holy persons draw to themselves that which is earthly.

It is not possible or necessary here to offer a more detailed description of such contributions. It seems clear that more work is required to investigate the contributions of numerous other Christian movements, historical figures and theologians in the light of the environmental critique against Christianity.

8.3 A retrieval of the ecological heritage of confessional traditions

Studies in ecological theology have often investigated a particular confessional tradition in order to retrieve the ecological wisdom from that tradition.¹⁶ This has often stimulated a creative reinterpretation of some of the basic tenets of such a tradition. The following confessional traditions may be mentioned in this regard:

a) Many Orthodox theologians have argued that this tradition has kept alive forms of ecological wisdom which were gradually lost in the West due to an adaptation to the modern world. Orthodox monasticism has exhibited both a renunciatory and a reverential attitude towards nature which contrasts with the rationalistic Western attitudes stressing human mastery over nature.¹⁷ In his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, John Chryssavgis observes that, “By contrast with Western theologians who underlined the significance of history from the time of Tertullian (d. 225), Eastern theologians have emphasized the role of the metahistorical, the eternal or the spiritual in the world. Thus, the world around has always been appreciated in the light of the heavens above; and the Eucharist became the criterion by which the value of the natural world was determined.”¹⁸ The human person is typically viewed as standing between two worlds, between heaven and earth, serving as a microcosm, a mediator, a priest to reconcile that which is spiritual with that which is material. Orthodox contributions to ecological theology typically draw on the work of patristic and medieval Orthodox theologians such as Origen of Alexandria (185-254),¹⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 296-377), Basil of Caesarea (330-379),²⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389),²¹ Gregory of Nyssa (330-395),²² John Chrysostom (d. 407), Maximus the Confessor (580-662),²³ John

¹⁶ The volume by Paul Santmire, *The travail of nature* (1985), offers an excellent overview of the history of Christian theology from an environmental perspective.

¹⁷ See Sotitui in Taylor 2005:334, Theoxeni 1992 & Vasileios 1993, 1996.

¹⁸ Chryssavgis in Taylor 2005:334.

¹⁹ Santmire 1985:44-53.

²⁰ See especially Edwards 2004.

²¹ See Bergmann 1995, 2005.

²² Gregorios 1987:53-71.

²³ See Gregorios 1987:73-85.

of Damascus (d. 749) and Gregory Palamas (1269-1359).²⁴ In such contributions themes such as human priesthood,²⁵ the Orthodox liturgy, monasticism, iconography²⁶ and so forth are often emphasised.²⁷ The roles played by the ecumenical patriarchs Dimitrios I (1972-1991) and Bartholomew (1992-) have more recently also been highlighted in this regard.²⁸

b) Roman Catholicism has been characterised by shifting emphases in its understanding of the place and vocation of human beings in the earth community. In his excellent contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, William French offers a wide-ranging overview of such historical shifts. He suggests that Catholicism's rich sacramental sensibility is rooted in its relational cosmology where humanity is regarded as part of the community of creation which is sustained by God and which is analogous to God (*analogia entis*). This cosmology is also characterised by a hierarchical ordering of the universe where humanity is viewed as the apex of creation, called to exercise dominion over the rest of nature.²⁹ In Roman Catholic contributions to ecological theology the work of classic theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons (115-190),³⁰ Tertullian (160-220), Augustine of Hippo (354-430),³¹ Benedict of Nursia (480-547), John Scotus Erigena (810-877), Richard of St Victor (d. 1173),³² Bonaventure (1221-1274),³³ Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)³⁴ and Teilhard de Chardin³⁵ are often explored. Other contributions focus on papal³⁶ and episcopal directives³⁷ as well various contemporary movements towards an ecological reformation of Catholicism.³⁸ Here one would also need to taken into account the ecological wisdom embedded in various Catholic orders.³⁹ Contemporary Catholic scholars such as Thomas Berry, Leonardo Boff, Denis Edwards, Matthew Fox (who later shifted to the Episcopal Church), John Haught, Sean

²⁴ See Read 1999.

²⁵ See especially Chryssavgis 1999, Gregorios 1987, Sherrard 1990 & Theokritoff 2005.

²⁶ See Chryssavgis 2000 & Skliris 1992, 1996.

²⁷ See, for example, the edited volumes by Belopopsky & Oikonomou 1996, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople 1992, Limouris 1990 and the contributions by Chryssavgis 1999, 2003, Gregorios 1987, Guroian 1991, 1994, Limouris 1992, Theokritoff 1994, 1996, 2005, Theoxeni 1992, Ware 1997 & Zizioulas 1990, 1992, 1993. See also the interesting contribution on Ethiopian Orthodox theology by Berhane-Selassie 1994.

²⁸ See Bartholomeos (Dimitrios Archontonis) 1995, 1998 & Chryssavgis 2003.

²⁹ See French in Taylor 2005:328.

³⁰ See Santmire 1985:35-44.

³¹ See the assessment of Augustine in Santmire 1985:55-74, also 2000:25-28.

³² See Edwards 1995:93-101.

³³ See Edwards 1995:101-110, Hayes 2003 & Santmire 1985:98-105.

³⁴ See Santmire 1985:75-95 & Leblanc 1999. Deane-Drummond (2004) draws extensively on the virtue ethics of Thomas Aquinas in order to develop her "ethics of nature".

³⁵ See Santmire 1985:155-170, 2000:45-60.

³⁶ See especially the critical assessment of the directives from John Paul II by French (in Taylor 2005:330-1) as well as the historical overview of the concern of the Holy See for the environment (1972-2002) by Keenan 2002.

³⁷ For an overview of such episcopal statements and pastoral letters, see Hart 2004.

³⁸ See especially the essays in the edited volumes by Christiansen & Grazer 1996, La Chance & Carroll 1993 & Ryan & Witmore 1997. See also the contributions by Blewett 1990, Coste 1990, Crotty 1971, Fritsch 1997, Jakowska 1986, McDonagh 1990, Murphy 1989, Nairn 1994 & Przewozny 1992, 1995.

³⁹ In addition to comments on the Benedictine and Franciscan movements above, see also the helpful overview by Splain in Taylor 2005:1403-1408 and the contributions by Czerny 1999 & Albrecht 2002 on Ignatian spirituality.

McDonagh and Rosemary Ruether have made major contributions to ecological theology.⁴⁰

c) The dominant trend in the Lutheran tradition is to focus on human salvation with an emphasis on themes such as justification by grace through faith. This has been exacerbated by what Jürgen Moltmann has called the “theological retreat from cosmology into personal faith” in Protestant Christianity.⁴¹ The environmental legacy of the Lutheran tradition is perhaps dominated by two themes: its doctrine of the two kingdoms of God and its ambivalent rejection of natural theology. It should nevertheless be noted that Luther’s own theology emphasises the glory of God in the whole of creation and calls for an appreciation of the spiritual significance of earthly life. For Luther, God is not detached from the world but is “in, with and under” the whole world.⁴² In the subsequent Lutheran tradition, the ecological wisdom of theologians such as Jacob Böhme (1575-1624),⁴³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)⁴⁴ and Paul Tillich⁴⁵ have been retrieved. Contemporary Lutheran scholars such as Günter Altner, Gerard Liedke, Christian Link, Larry Rasmussen, Paul Santmire and Joseph Sittler have made major contributions to ecological theology.⁴⁶

d) The dominant trend in the reformed⁴⁷ and evangelical⁴⁸ traditions of Christianity is also on human salvation, although the need for a sanctification of life is also emphasised. The distinctive theocentric orientation of John Calvin⁴⁹ continues to shape the ethos of the reformed tradition, its view of creation as the theatre of God’s glory, its strong emphasis on the impact of the fall, the need for God’s activity to sustain creation and to restrict evil, and its sense of the place and vocation of humans in the earth community to

⁴⁰ See the indexed bibliography for such contributions.

⁴¹ Moltmann 1985:34, also Conradie 1997. Moltmann (1985:36) explains: “After its retreat from cosmology, theology concentrated on personal faith. ‘I believe that God created me ...’ as Luther’s Short Catechism says. Of course all belief in creation includes that personal conviction. But this personal confession of faith was now increasingly interpreted in an exclusive sense, although it was meant inclusively: for Luther goes on ‘together with all creatures.’”

⁴² See Holze 1995, Gregersen 1995, Mortensen 1995, Rasmussen 1992, 1996:270-81 & Stephenson & Bratton 2000.

⁴³ See Halter & Lochbühler 1999:102f.

⁴⁴ Rasmussen 1996:295-316 & Van Hoogstraten 1991.

⁴⁵ See Carse 1996, Daecke 1994, Drummy 2000 & Lai 1999.

⁴⁶ See the indexed bibliography for references to such contributions.

⁴⁷ For an assessment of the reformed tradition, see Field 1996, Fowler 1995, Oliver 1992 & Palmer 1992. See also the indexed bibliography for contributions to ecological theology from contemporary reformed and / or evangelical scholars such as Steven Bouma-Prediger, Martien Brinkmann, Ernst Conradie, Calvin DeWitt, David Field, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Colin Gunton, James Gustafson, Douglas John Hall, Sallie McFague, Jürgen Moltmann and Michael Welker. In addition, see numerous ecclesial statements by reformed churches and ecumenical bodies.

⁴⁸ Although the reformed tradition is sometimes described as “evangelical” / “evangelisch”, these traditions cannot be equated with one another in all contexts. For contributions where “evangelical” is used as a self-description, see the many contributions by DeWitt 1991, 1994, 1996 1998, also Campolo 1992, Langmead 1998, McGrath 2002:42f, Sider 1993 & Wilkinson 1991. Langmead (1998) identifies seven factors which tend to inhibit an evangelical concern for ecojustice: 1) an almost exclusive focus on personal salvation for humans at the expense of the cosmic scope of soteriology; 2) an emphasis on God’s transcendence at the expense of God’s immanence, 3) an emphasis on the historical Jesus at the expense of Christ as the cosmic Creator, 4) otherworldly forms of hope for the future, 5) an emphasis on the spiritual at the expense of the material; 6) a fear that the pursuit of ecojustice might lead to New Age thinking; 7) an activism that inhibits a contemplative appreciation of God’s creation.

⁴⁹ See Field 1996, Field in Taylor 2005:344-348, Schreiner 1991 & Santmire 1985:122f.

establish God's reign.⁵⁰ These theological emphases are reflected in the confessional documents of the reformed tradition⁵¹ and remain present in the work of classic reformed scholars such as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920),⁵² Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Karl Barth (1986-1968).⁵³

e) Violent persecution by state churches forced Anabaptist groups to settle in isolated areas where they introduced innovative farming and conservation practices. Farming communities of Amish and Mennonite groups are well-known for their limited use of technology. Anabaptist theological reflections on nature are characterised by a strong contrast between creation and new creation, but the need for the redemption of nature and the place of nature in the coming reign of God are not always clarified.⁵⁴

f) Anglican churches in Australia, England, South Africa⁵⁵ and the USA have been at the forefront of Christian environmental advocacy and community projects. Such contributions are perhaps characterised by pragmatic considerations and not so much by a distinctly Anglican theology.

g) Some Methodist contributions to ecological theology have retrieved the vision, ministry of renewal and musical legacy (celebrating God's love for all creatures) of John Wesley.⁵⁶ The contributions to ecological theology by contemporary Methodist scholars

⁵⁰ In his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, David Field identifies four main features of this ethos: "First an emphasis on the unique glory of God and hence on the distinction between Creator and creature. Second, an emphasis on the pervasive sovereignty of God and hence an attempt to bring God and creation into as close a proximity as possible. Third, an emphasis that the purpose of creation is the glory of God and hence that nature, in diverse ways, demonstrates the character of God. Fourth, an emphasis on the vocation of human beings to glorify God in all areas of life leading to an activist and world transformative spirituality." See Field in Taylor 2005:344.

⁵¹ There is a further need for a detailed assessment of such reformed confessions, for example the Heidelberg Catechism. See Conradie (1994) and the extended footnote 3 in the contribution by Kehm (1992:199-200) on the anthropocentric focus of the famous first question of the Heidelberg Catechism.

⁵² See Bacotte 2003 & DeWitt 2003.

⁵³ See Santmire 1985:146-155, 171f, 1992 & Hafstad 1995. Santmire accuses Barth of an exclusive theo-anthropological focus, namely on an encounter between God and humanity. He comments:

Remarkably, in the context of his extensive exegesis of the Genesis creation texts, Barth also argued that the Bible does not permit us to espouse a theology of nature at all, only a theology of God and humanity. Nature comes into view in Barth's thought in two respects: first as the stage for God's covenant history with humanity; second, as the field in which the human creature exercises a limited but undeniable lordship, akin to the divine lordship over creation. Strikingly, the same Barth could celebrate the great beauties of Mozart's music found little or no opportunity to celebrate the beauty of the Swiss Alps in the midst of which he lived. Wonder in Barth's thought almost always had to do with the glories of the divine-human drama, not with the glories of the divine creativity in the cosmos, as depicted, for example, in Psalm 104 (1992:62).

⁵⁴ See Redekop 1994 & Redekop in Taylor 2005:348-350. He notes that, "The Mennonite tradition was thus not equipped to see nature as part of the creation that God cared for and loved. Consequently the positive role that nature would play in the redemption of creation and humankind has only recently been explored."

⁵⁵ See the website of the Network of Earthkeeping Christian Communities in South Africa <www.neccsa.org.za> for ample evidence in this regard.

⁵⁶ See Lodahl 2004 & Lodahl in Taylor 2005:352-353. See also the famous comment by John Wesley (quoted in Keller 2000:86): "I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches."

such as John Cobb, Jay McDaniel and James Nash are not characterised by a strong confessional orientation.⁵⁷

8.4 Ecological motifs in contemporary theological movements

In addition to an ecological reformation of such confessional traditions, there are also a number of contemporary theological movements in which calls for ecological reformation have often been made. The following theological movements may be mentioned in this regard:

a) *Political theology* first emerged in Europe as a response to the horrors of World War II, symbolised by the Holocaust (Auschwitz) and the use of nuclear weapons (Hiroshima and Nagasaki).⁵⁸ The failure of churches during the Nazi regime led to calls to resist a privatisation of Christian faith and to exercise resolute political responsibility. During the following decades, the agenda of political theology widened to include anti-Semitism, dialogue with Marxists in the context of the Cold War, decolonisation and the need to address poverty and economic development in the emerging so-called Third World, women's liberation, human rights advocacy and campaigns against the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. After the publication of the report to the Club of Rome in 1972, ecological concerns were soon added to the agendas of political theologians such as Johann-Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothy Sölle and many others.⁵⁹ Political theology has exercised a strong influence on the emergence of Latin America liberation theology, especially through Moltmann's *Theology of hope* (1964).⁶⁰ It is often aligned with calls for public theology in the USA and also in South Africa.

b) *Liberation theology* emerged in Latin America in the late 1960's as a response to political and economic oppression. The term "liberation" was employed to express a notion of salvation that could address the material consequences of such oppression. Following the collapse of socialism as a viable alternative in Eastern Europe after 1989, the concept of liberation was reconceptualised and broadened to address all forms of discrimination. In the 1990's a number of liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Helder Camara, José Comblin, Virgil Elizondo, Yvone Gebara, Eduardo Gudynas and Ingemar Hedström recognised that the urban and rural poor have become the victims of environmental degradation.⁶¹ This is graphically illustrated by living conditions in urban slums and the plight of environmental refugees due to deforestation in the Amazons. This led to the realisation that it is the very same logic of the accumulation of wealth that leads to the plundering of the earth and to the exploitation of the poor. The concern for liberation was consequently broadened towards a vision of comprehensive liberation for the whole

⁵⁷ See the indexed bibliography for references to such contributions.

⁵⁸ See Moltmann's overview of the ecological legacy of political theology in Taylor 2005:355-357.

⁵⁹ See the indexed bibliography for references to such contributions.

⁶⁰ See also the study by Beermann (1995, 2005) which offers a Western-European contribution to an ecological theology based on the category of the liberation of creation.

⁶¹ See Boff 1995, 1996, 1997, Boff & Elizondo 1995, Camara 1995, Gebara 1996, 1999, Hadsell 1992, Hedström 1990, Lockman 1991 & Regidor 1995. See also the introductory overview by Maclean in Taylor 2005:357-360 & Scharper 1998:165-183.

of creation. For Boff and others this vision finds appropriate political expression in the “social ecology” movement.⁶²

c) Several *feminist* and *womanist*⁶³ theologians have made important contributions to an ecological theology – to the extent that “ecofeminism” (often regarded as part of the third wave of feminism)⁶⁴ has become a self-description of many such theologians. Women in Africa,⁶⁵ Asia,⁶⁶ Latin America⁶⁷ – who do not necessarily use terms such as “feminist” or “womanist” for self-description – have also reflected on the significance of the Christian faith in the midst of domination on the basis of differences of gender, culture, class and species.⁶⁸ Such ecofeminist contributions have been collated in a number of important edited volumes.⁶⁹

Ecofeminist contributions typically include both deconstructive and constructive components: Ecofeminist cultural analyses seek to unmask the interlocking dualisms (male / female, mind / body, culture / nature,⁷⁰ human / animal, reason / passion, public / private), heaven / earth) of patriarchal cultures and systems of knowledge.⁷¹ Such dualisms, ecofeminists argue, reduce diversity into a bipolar reality. Moreover, these dualisms have been used in the interest of the domination and exploitation of both women and nature by male power. This is epitomised in the way in which nature is portrayed in female categories, for example as “mother earth” or “virgin forests”. The contrast between culture and nature is thus reinforced by the contrast between male and female. In the same way that patriarchy legitimates the domination of women by men, an environmentally destructive culture legitimates human supremacy in the earth community.⁷²

In their constructive work, ecofeminists typically seek to transform relationships of domination and exploitation into non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal relationships of mutual support. They have stressed the need for a new way of seeing the world and new ways of living in the world as co-members of the ecological community. This requires a

⁶² On the notion of social ecology in Latin American liberation theology, see Boff 1994, 1995, 1997:112, Brun 1994 & Gudynas 1995.

⁶³ For contributions to ecowomanist theologies, see, Baker-Fletcher 1998, Riley 1995 & Williams 1993.

⁶⁴ Contributions on ecofeminism from a Christian perspective are appearing at a rapid rate. These include a number of anthologies (e.g. Diamond & Orenstein 1990, Gaard 1993, Green 1994, Mackinnon & McIntyre 1995, Plant 1989, Plaskow & Christ 1989), several important monographs (e.g. Adams 1992, Eaton 2005, Gebara 1999, Grey 1989, Halkes 1991, McFague 1993, 1997, Primavesi 1991, Rae 1994, Ruether 1975, 1992 & Sölle & Cloyes 1984) and a number of helpful introductory essays, (e.g. Clifford 2001:219-260, Daly 1990, Eaton 1996, 2000, 2001, Fowler 1995:123-140, Green 1994, Grossmann 1989, Kyung 1994, Ruether 1993, 1994, 2000, Scharper 1998:132-164, Scott 2003:89-108 & Spretnak 1994). See the indexed bibliography for numerous further references.

⁶⁵ For a systematic exposition of ecofeminist insights from the perspective of African women’s theology, see Getui 1996, Hinga 1996, Ndyabahika 1996 & Nyajeka 1996.

⁶⁶ See the contributions by Dietrich 1998, Kyung & Gnanadason 1994, 1995, 1996.

⁶⁷ See the contributions by Ivone Gebara 1995, 1996, 1999.

⁶⁸ See Eaton & Lorentzen 2003 and the volume of essays edited by Ruether (1996) and her own attempt (Ruether 1997) to relate the environmental agendas of First and Third World women.

⁶⁹ See Diamond & Orenstein 1990, MacKinnon & McIntyre 1995, Merchant 1994, Plant 1989 & Ruether 1996. Some of these volumes are not confined to contributions from within Christian theology and include essays on cultural criticism and essays from a multi-faith perspective.

⁷⁰ For an extensive discussion of the relationship between nature and culture, see Halkes 1989:17-86.

⁷¹ For an ecofeminist critique of patriarchal epistemology, see Gebara 1999.

⁷² Amongst many other contributions, see Eaton 2005:37-61 & Ruether 1975, 1992.

recasting of traditional ethics to underscore the importance of values such as care, reciprocity and diversity. Some ecofeminists would illustrate such an ethics through investigations of themes such as bodiliness, human sensuality and sexuality, the female body, childbirth, nurture and motherhood. Others resist any association between women and nature since this may reinforce the oppression of both. Ecofeminist Christian theologians often suggest that an ecological ethos may be supported by a spirituality which stresses the immanence of God,⁷³ the sacredness of the world and the wholeness of the body.

Within this main thrust of ecofeminist theologies, not to mention the broader ecofeminist movement (outside Christian theology), there is a wide and often conflicting variety of voices. In a helpful overview, Heather Eaton discussed these contributions under six headings: 1) An ecofeminist analysis and critique of culture and worldviews, 2) Reflections on themes in systematic theology, 3) Reflections on Biblical motifs, 4) A liberative theology and praxis, 5) Ecofeminist contributions to multi-faith and multi-disciplinary discussions, and 6) Ecofeminist spiritualities.⁷⁴ Since none of these aspects are unique to an ecofeminist agenda, these contributions are indicated elsewhere in this guide to the literature.

In her recent work, *Introducing ecofeminist theologies* (2005) Eaton identifies especially two strands of ecofeminist Christian theologies, namely 1) those who draw on insights from contemporary cosmology and evolutionary biology to construct a theological narrative (including Celia Deane-Drummond, Ivone Gebara, Sallie McFague, Anne Primavesi, Rosemary Ruether), and 2) those who engage in socio-political and multi-cultural analysis to promote liberation, ecojustice and social transformation (including Ivone Gebara, Aruna Gnanadason, Chung Hyun Kyung, Judy Resz, also Mary Grey).⁷⁵ She also notes that there is an obvious need to relate cosmology with concrete praxis, as most participants in such discourse realise.⁷⁶

d) Several contributions to a Christian ecological theology have explored the *ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples*,⁷⁷ for example in Africa⁷⁸ Australia,⁷⁹ Central America,⁸⁰

⁷³ See McFague (1993) for a description of the world as God's body and Kyung (1994:177) for a description of the cosmos as God's womb.

⁷⁴ See Eaton 1996, 2005:74-92 as well as her subsequent assessments of Christian discourse on ecofeminism (Eaton 2000, 2001, 2005).

⁷⁵ See Eaton 2005:93-111.

⁷⁶ Eaton 2005:110-111. See also the following quotation from Anne Clifford: "These two areas, cosmology and praxis, will likely provide the guiding questions for the expression of belief in God who is both the source of and ground for the world we inhabit and our destiny and hope." Quoted in Eaton 2005:111. See also my comments in Chapter 9.2 below on the need to relate the doctrines of creation and redemption with one another.

⁷⁷ Boff (1997:122f) identifies five aspects of the ecological wisdom of original peoples: 1) ancestral wisdom, 2) the sense of the mystique of nature, 3) an understanding of work, not merely as production, but as the collaboration that human beings give to Mother Earth in handling human needs, 4) the emphasis on celebration and dance, and 5) an emphasis on the experience of God.

⁷⁸ For contributions drawing on the ecological wisdom of African traditional culture and religion, see the contributions by Asante (1985) on Ghana, Berhane-Selassie (1994) on Ethiopia, Daneel (e.g. 1994, 1999) on Zimbabwe, Gitau (2000) on Kenya, Kalugila (2001) on the Kagera region in Kenya, Kyomo (2001), Nyajeka (1996) on Zimbabwe, Ongong'a (1999), Setiloane (1995) on South Africa, Sindima (1990) on Malawi, Wangiri (1999) on Kenya and Zvanaka (1994) on Zimbabwe.

⁷⁹ See the contribution by McKay 1994, also Silman & McKellar 1997.

⁸⁰ See Hedström 1990.

India,⁸¹ Latin America,⁸² New Zealand,⁸³ North America,⁸⁴ the Philippines, the Pacific islands, Scandinavia⁸⁵ and South-east Asia.⁸⁶ In virtually all these indigenous theologies the harmonious relationship of humanity and nature in pre-industrial cultures is praised and celebrated in songs and legends. There is a sense of wonder at the fecundity of life, for the land and all the creatures that live from it, for the cycles of the seasons. There is an almost overwhelming emphasis on notions of interrelatedness, mutual dependence, reciprocity, ecological balance, wholeness, the integrated web of life and, especially, *community*.⁸⁷ The world exists as an intricate balance of parts. Human beings must recognise this balance and strive to maintain and stay within this cosmic balance. The earth is regarded as a living being which must be treated with respect and loving care. Everything, from hunting to healing, is a recognition and affirmation of the sacredness of life.

The testimony of George Tinker,⁸⁸ the Native American Lutheran theologian, who speaks intimately of creation as kin and passionately about the need for ecojustice to restore balance and reciprocity, has become well-known in this regard. From an African perspective, Harvey Sindima (Malawi) speaks of the bondedness, sacredness and fecundity of the “community of life”,⁸⁹ Emanuel Asante (Ghana) suggests the ecological category of pan-vitalism,⁹⁰ Eugene Wangiri (Kenya) calls for an *urumwe* spirituality which sees God’s presence in creation,⁹¹ while Gabriel Setiloane (South Africa) celebrates an African biocentric theology and ethos.⁹²

In appropriations of such indigenous theologies by Western theologians, the critique of a Western preoccupation with a sense of time and history is recognised. Instead, a

⁸¹ See the contributions by Brand 1987, Gnanadason 1994, 1995, Grey 2004 & Nalunnakkal 1999.

⁸² See Gebara (1999) on Brazil.

⁸³ See the contributions by Cooper 1994 & Pearson 1997, 1998.

⁸⁴ From a Christian perspective, see especially the contributions by Tinker 1992, 1994, 1996.

⁸⁵ See Jensen (1979:19f) on the liquidation of Eskimo culture.

⁸⁶ See the contributions from Jong-Sun Noh (1990) on Korea.

⁸⁷ See for example Berry 1991:10f, Boff 1995:63, Kyung 1994, Moltmann 1989:55f, Rasmussen 1994:122f, Sindima 1989:539f & Tinker 1994. For Berry (1991:13), “The universe itself is the most basic expression of community. The universe is the ultimate sacred community.” Rasmussen calls the scientific discovery of inter-relatedness (and the theological rediscovery of community) *the* discovery of the 20th century.

⁸⁸ See Tinker 1989, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2004.

⁸⁹ Sindima (1989:537f) says: “The African idea of community refers to bondedness; the act of sharing and living in the one common symbol – life – which enables people to live in communion and communication with each other and nature. Living in communication allows stories or life experiences of others to become one’s own.”

⁹⁰ Asante (1985:290) says: “Reality is inseparable. The African is kin to all creatures – gods, spirits and nature ... The whole of nature must be understood as sacred because it derives its being from the Supreme Being who is the Creator-Animator of the universe.”

⁹¹ The concept of *urumwe* is based on notions of social and ecological harmony and oneness. Wangiri (1999:72) says: “Harmony is therefore life. Oneness and harmony thus make up *urumwe* which is a harmonious existence of entities whose being is being-together-with-others.”

⁹² Setiloane (1995:52f) says: “We Africans sincerely believe that by taking into its fabric these African interpretations and views about the universe, creation and nature, the Christian understanding is enriched rather than impoverished and the image of God becomes more worthy, inspiring greater wonder, love and praise.”

theology of *place* is developed,⁹³ emphasising both humanity's cultured rootedness in a particular place and the concreteness of God's reign.⁹⁴

e) *Process theologians* have often suggested that this theological school may help to challenge the radical separation of God from the world. The typical emphasis in process theology on the bipolar relationship between God and the world has often been regarded as a helpful way of understanding God's immanence in the world and the subsequent holiness of creation. Theologians working in the tradition of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne (often in conjunction with the vision of Teilhard de Chardin) have maintained that all creatures are valuable in their own right because God participates in their joys and pains.⁹⁵ In his contribution to *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Jay McDaniel identifies 12 themes that are explored in process theological contribution to ecological theology, namely 1) nature as being creative,⁹⁶ 2) nature as being visible and invisible, 3) pan-experientialism and the intrinsic value of everything, 4) a conscious or non-conscious sense of wholeness, 5) interconnectedness, 6) a teleological orientation, 7) an emphasis of God's presence in nature, 8) non-supernaturalism, 9) divine empathy, 10) a recognition of tragedy in God, 11) a description of sin as unnecessary violence against creation and 12) the co-creativity of humans.

Process theologians have made major contributions to ecological theology in the North American context. The leading figure in this regard has been John Cobb (jr), whose early contribution, *Is it too late? A theology of ecology* (1972), established an ecological interest in process theology. He has made several subsequent contributions on an ecological ethic of sustainability.⁹⁷ Other well known authors include Charles Birch, David Ray Griffin, John Haught, Jay McDaniel, Cathrine Keller and Marjorie Suchocki.⁹⁸

These theological traditions provide ample evidence of the richness but also of the conflicting diversity of the ecological wisdom embedded in the larger Christian tradition.

⁹³ Many other theologians have stressed the importance of a theology of space/place instead of the dominance of concepts of time in Western theology. The category of space emphasises the rootedness of all forms of life and highlights the relationship between the issues of ecology (inhabited space) and justice (the control over space). See Lilburne 1989, McFague 1993:99f, Petersen 2001, Talliday 2001, Tinker 1994 & Tuan 1997.

⁹⁴ See also Granberg-Michaelson 1994:109.

⁹⁵ See the edited volumes by Cobb & Birch 1981 and Birch, Eakin & McDaniel 1990, and the many contributions by John Cobb (jr) e.g. 1972, 1991, 1994 and Jay McDaniel, e.g. 1989, 1995. For an overview of process environmentalism, see Cauthen 1985, Deckers 2004, Fowler 1995:108-122 & Scharper 1998:75-108.

⁹⁶ In the process view of reality, the universe is perpetually in process. "The world is an incredible multiplicity of entities, each creating and re-creating itself, combining and recombining, in a fluid process where individual elements last only briefly. As basic entities combine, the process as a whole edges toward a greater unity" (Fowler 1995:111).

⁹⁷ See Cobb 1991, 1995 and Cobb & Daly 1989, 1994.

⁹⁸ See Fowler (1995) for a helpful overview of the contributions of Whitehead, Hartshorne, Cobb, McDaniel and others. For an assessment of the work of Birch & Cobb, see Sideris 2003:104-129.

CHAPTER 9

Ecology and Christian doctrine

9.1 Introduction

Ecological theology requires a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine. The reinterpretation of Christian doctrine from an ecological perspective faces a constant temptation to reduce the scope of such theological reflection. This is the temptation to focus only on a new theology of creation (which too many studies and official statements from churches invariably tend to do). A renewed interest in creation theology is indeed important – if only to challenge the almost exclusive focus on a theology of salvation, the marginalisation of a theology of creation, and to reflect on the relationship between a theology of creation and of redemption.

Nevertheless, an adequate ecological theology cannot be narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology only. It calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith, including the trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope. Ecological theology therefore has to be more than environmental ethics or a revisited theology of creation. Ruth Page insists that, “What is needed now is not another skirmish on the green fringes of belief but a rethinking of fundamental doctrine.”¹ Any adequate ecological theology needs to be doctrinally comprehensive and systematic.² It needs to remain true to the trinitarian, Christological and soteriological heart of Christian theology. An ecological theology that is grounded only in the doctrine of creation will lead to a reductionistic distortion of the Christian faith. The task of a doctrinally comprehensive Christian ecological theology can perhaps be formulated in the following way: to investigate whether the Christian notion of God’s self-disclosure (especially in Jesus Christ) is able to provide a clue to an ecological understanding of God, the world and the place of humanity in the world. In many ways anthropology forms the crux of ecological theology. *The crucial question that any ecological theology needs to address is indeed that of understanding the place of humanity in the earth community.*

9.2 Six core doctrinal problems on the agenda of ecological theology

In a helpful article Wesley Granberg-Michaelson identified the following six open questions which have to be addressed in ecumenical discussions on a theology of creation which can respond to environmental concerns: 1) How do we understand humanity’s place within the creation? 2) How holy is creation? 3) Is creation’s natural, biological order altered by sin? 4) Is God’s transcendence irrelevant? 5) What about

¹ Page 1996:xiv.

² See Nash 1996.

orienting theology around place instead of time? 6) Does ecological theology, reflecting on creation, provide a new paradigm for doing ecumenical theology?³

In a similar analysis, Jürgen Moltmann identifies three concerns that contemporary ecological theologies have to address: 1) the need for a retrieval of a trinitarian theology which can counter the monotheist notion of abstract transcendence and can account for God's presence in the world; 2) the need for a cosmic Christology that can counter the reductionist notion of salvation for a selected group of human beings only; and 3) the need to develop a non-anthropocentric anthropology that can clarify the place of humans in the cosmos and in the evolution of life on earth, that can affirm human dignity as inalienable and that can resist human exploitation.⁴

Dieter Hessel, following work by Ian Barbour, identifies the following four "dysfunctional theological habits" which foster alienation between humans and the earth community: 1) a separation of God from nature since God was understood to be revealed primarily in historical events rather than in natural life; 2) a separation of humanity from nature on the basis of the distinctiveness of humans being created in the image of God; 3) a separation of redemption from nature since nature became the backdrop for the drama of human salvation; 4) the logic of domination of men over women and human beings over nature.⁵

In a discussion on the critique of Lynn White, Kenyan theologian Margaret Gecaga identifies four elements of Christian doctrine which have contributed to the environmental crisis: 1) the idea that nature exists solely for human beings, 2) a deist portrayal of God as radically transcendent and separate from the world, 3) the notion of the natural world as a sphere of profanity and darkness as a result of the fall, and 4) the idea that nature is punished together with human beings as a result of the fall.⁶

In the same vein, I will focus here on six issues which demand our attention in an ecological reformation of Christian doctrine. The first four issues indicate areas where Christian piety has often inhibited an environmental ethos, spirituality and praxis, namely 1) a worldless notion of God's transcendence; 2) a dualist anthropology suggesting that humans are temporary sojourners here on earth; 3) a soteriology which focuses on human salvation *from* the earth instead of on the salvation *of* the whole earth; and 4) an escapist eschatological fascination with a heavenly hereafter.⁷ Any ecological theology will remain shallow unless an adequate response to these four problems can be provided. The last two issues indicate underlying theological problems, namely 5) the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit in Trinitarian theology (the *filioque* controversy) and 6) an assessment of the place of natural theology in Christian theology.

In this section I will discuss these six theological problems briefly.⁸ In the following section (9.3) I will show that these are by no means the only doctrinal questions which have to be addressed in the context of ecological theology.

³ Granberg-Michaelson 1994:102-105.

⁴ See Moltmann in Taylor 2005:355-357.

⁵ See Hessel 2001:187-188 and Barbour 2000.

⁶ Gecaga 1999:29-37.

⁷ See my *Hope for the earth* (Conradie 2000a) as one response to this concern.

⁸ See my articles on an agenda for ecological theology (Conradie 2004, 2005) for previous versions of this identification of six core theological problems which have to be addressed in contemporary ecological theologies (from a reformed perspective).

a) How should the transcendence of the Creator be understood?

In many ecological theologies the distinction between Creator and creation is underplayed. This is the result of attempts to stress the immanence of “God *in* creation” (the English title of Moltmann’s seminal work).⁹ Moltmann responds to what he perceives to be the ecologically disastrous consequences of an overemphasis on divine transcendence which stripped God of God’s connection with the world and increasingly secularised the world.¹⁰ Instead, as Moltmann suggests, there is a need to recognise God’s presence in the world (and, as he adds, the presence of the world in God).¹¹ This emphasis on God’s immanence is prevalent in ecofeminist theologies (e.g. with reference to the notion that the world is God’s body), in several exponents of process theology (John Cobb, John Haught, Jay McDaniel), in the contributions by Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke and others to recent discourse on science and theology, and in the pantheism of leading ecological theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Ivone Gebara, Sallie McFague and Jürgen Moltmann.

This theological emphasis on God’s immanence in creation may be helpful in order to guard against a deist separation and alienation between God and creation.¹² However, it has to be noted that the distinction between Creator and creatures is not necessarily an alienating one. The Creator’s distinctness from creation does not imply a lack of involvement or concern. As Joseph Sittler insists, “God is not identical with but is present in what he creates, is present in the redemption of what he creates, and is present in all restoration, uniting, and upholding of his redeemed creation.”¹³ Elsewhere Sittler observes in one of his typical aphorisms: “God is not identified with the world, for he *made* it; but God is not separate from his world, either. For *He* made it.”¹⁴

Colin Gunton also insists that the distance between Creator and creature is not necessarily an alienating one. In fact, it is vital precisely for the sake of the integrity of creation. Creation, Gunton argues, may be understood as “the giving of being to the other and that includes the giving of space to be: to be other and particular ... the world’s otherness from God is part of its space to be itself, to be finite and not divine.”¹⁵ The stress on God’s otherness is crucial because it reminds us that the immanence of God can be understood in such a way that it would deprive creation of its freedom.¹⁶ Together with the rest of the cosmos, the earth comes forth from the being of God, but

⁹ Most ecological theologians argue vehemently against triumphalist and monarchical images of God, ruling from a distance and controlling the world through domination and benevolence. Instead, the immanence of God in creation is emphasised. See, Boff 1995, Daneel 1999:93-150, Larkin 2001 & McFague 1987, 1993:131-158, 2001:133-156.

¹⁰ Moltmann 1985:1.

¹¹ Moltmann 1985:13.

¹² In an essay on an *urumwe* spirituality (calling for a sense of harmony and oneness within the Kenyan context), Eugene Wangiri (1999:88) also addresses a deist separation between God and the world. He says: “In living *urumwe*, we will experience God everywhere. We will listen to God’s music in the birds, a brook and the clatter of leaves. We will experience God’s love as the wind caresses us and in the loving touch of other human beings. We will smell God in the scent of flowers. All this will bring the realization that God loves us and provides for us. It will give us consolation and reduce the loneliness which many of us are subject to.”

¹³ Quoted in Bakken & Bouma-Prediger 2000:83.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bouma-Prediger 1995:88.

¹⁵ Gunton 1991:56.

¹⁶ Gunton 1992:91.

thereafter remains distinct from God. The otherness of Creator and creation should therefore be affirmed and not underplayed.

The distinction between Creator and creature requires a new appreciation for God's transcendence. There are several possibilities available for this task. One may recall Karl Barth's early views on the "infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity", Wolfhart Pannenberg's distinction between the finite and the infinite that includes the finite, Jürgen Moltmann's retrieval of the category of heaven as part of God's creation and the sphere where God's presence may be discerned, Sallie McFague's suggestion that God is more than the world (the body of God) in the way that an embodied person is "more" than her or his bodiliness, the ongoing discourse on the distinction between time and eternity and the speculative notion that God may transcend the world in the same way that higher dimensions transcend but also include lower ones.¹⁷ Another option may be to explore the notion of "transparence" in order to acknowledge that we cannot know that which transcends the world and should not search for transcendence outside of the world that we know.¹⁸ Instead, it may be possible to focus exclusively on that which is immanent until it becomes transparent, that is, until it reveals unexpected depth dimensions that transcend our knowledge. The mystery does not lie in that which transcends the visible, the audible and the touchable, but in the marvel of that which is created. The mystery is that there is something and not nothing! As Luther observed, "If you really examined a kernel of grain thoroughly, you would die of wonderment".¹⁹ In this way we may discover the transcendent through the transparence of the immanent.

One may, of course, retort that transcendence will always remain a mystery since it literally transcends our finite human knowledge and understanding. Transcendence is therefore best expressed in metaphor, myth and ritual. One may also point to the hermeneutical insight that any notion of transcendence will always remain an altogether human construction of that which may transcend us as humans. Any talk about what is "above" can only come from "below". The implication of these arguments seems to be that one should preferably refrain from trivial speculation on the ways in which God transcends the world. As a result, some have opted to avoid the concept of transcendence altogether and to search for other, typically this-worldly concepts to express God's otherness. Such otherness cannot be understood in purely ethical terms though. Ultimately, an adequate notion of otherness has to help us to surmise where the world comes from, where we belong, how we can come to terms with evil and where history is heading towards.

In these debates two crucial points should not be missed, namely that (human) constructions of transcendence are hermeneutically inevitable and that, at times, they really matter.²⁰ Although constructions of transcendence can serve to legitimise oppressive social orders, they are necessary to help us to put everything else into context, within a larger interpretative framework. In precisely this way they can offer a powerful critique of any existing social order. To confess that God created the world is to challenge any other claims to autonomy. What is therefore required is a notion of transcendence that does not alienate and a notion of immanence that does not

¹⁷ See Conradie 2000, 2002.

¹⁸ See also Kallistos 1997:17.

¹⁹ Quoted in Hall 1996:77.

²⁰ See Conradie 2005:57-60.

encourage resignation or tyranny. The Christian claim is that this can best be found in Jesus Christ who enables us to discover ourselves and to know who God is at the same time. There is a need for further work in ecological theology to investigate this claim critically.

b) How can both anthropological dualism and reductionism be avoided?²¹

Ecological theologies have consistently maintained that a dualist anthropology has to be avoided. Ecofeminist contributions, especially, have unmasked the interlocking dualisms of patriarchal Western culture and systems of knowledge. These dualisms include the Platonic dualism between ideas and matter, soul and body, the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter (*res cogitans et res extensa*), the Kantian dualism between the knowing subject and the known object and the anthropocentric divide between nature and culture.²² These dualisms have been used to legitimise a hierarchical worldview: God rules over the world; the soul controls the body; men are the masters of women; and humanity dominates the other creatures. This serves to legitimise relationships of domination and exploitation in the name of differences of gender, race, class and culture.

As a result of this critique against an anthropological dualism, especially one of body and soul, some contemporary theologians seemed to have abandoned the category of the human soul altogether. More recently, there have been attempts to retrieve the category of the human soul following a critique against scientific reductionism and the need to explain the tendency in nature towards increasing complexity. Although scientific theories on the “emergence” of complexity remain tentative at this stage, there is considerable interest in such questions. Emergent properties are characterised by organisational patterns that give rise to novel forms of behaviour that are not predictable or comprehensible from a reductive analysis of the pre-emergent properties of a system. It remains to be seen whether insights on self-organisation (building on the pioneering work of Ilya Prigogine on non-equilibrium thermodynamics) will be fruitful to describe the emergence of life from (bio)chemical processes and the emergence of consciousness and human self-consciousness from embodied brain functioning (often called one of the last remaining mysteries of science).

On the basis of such an appreciation for the emergence of complexity some have sensed the opportunity to retrieve the category of the “soul” to describe a number of features of the human psyche such as its ability to engage in interpersonal relations, language, culture, ethos, worldviews and religion (an openness to transcendence) which are based on neurological functions, but cannot simply be reduced to that. Here “soul” is clearly not understood in a dualist way as something that is immortal and independent of the human body. Brain functioning is a necessary but insufficient condition for the life of the soul. The category of the soul indicates the biological ability of humans for self-reflexivity and therefore the human openness for transcendence. It describes the human capacity for a particular realm of experience rather than a non-physical essence inhabiting the body. This allows for a conceptual differentiation of various perspectives on the human person (e.g. body, self, life, soul, spirit) in order to resist a reductionist explanation of personhood. Human personhood may be understood as a multileveled

²¹ For my response to this question, see Conradie 2005.

²² See Gebara 1999:19-66 & Ruether 1992.

psychosomatic unity, as both a biological organism and a responsible self, as an animated body and not so much an incarnated soul. Personhood represents the total psychosomatic experience of human existence in all its modalities, conscious and unconscious, rational and emotional, intellectual and aesthetic, active and passive, social and individual.²³ A retrieval of the category of soul therefore does not necessitate a view of soul as an entity separate from or alongside the body. Rather, it expresses a concern for the quality of human life and the fullness of human existence. In this way both dualism and reductionism can be avoided.

These insights seem to me to be crucial for an appreciation of the incredible complexity of human language, knowledge, culture, ethics and religion. These aspects of human life are rooted in the material, biological and ecological interaction of humans amongst themselves and within their environments. They can easily be employed for the sake of domination and exploitation, but can also enrich such interaction. Domination in the name of difference can only be avoided through a sense of integration; enrichment only becomes possible if there is a clear sense of the place and role of humanity in the earth community.²⁴

c) How can both an escapist and a purely this-worldly eschatology be avoided?

The track record of the history of Christianity in providing a form of hope that could empower an environmental praxis has not been too promising. Christian hope has often focused on the world to come, thus fostering and endorsing a sense of escapism and a lack of concern for this earth. Reinforced by apocalyptic images of the imminent destruction of the world in the Biblical roots of Christianity, Christian hope has often been understood as a final redemption *from* the earth and not *of* the earth itself. Catherine Keller comments that this eschatological distraction from the earth complies with the ecological destruction of the earth. She says: "Does not Christian eschatology gather under its wings precisely that array of doctrinal symbols that has drawn interest away from the earth, from natural conditions, from finitude and flesh?"²⁵

Moreover, biblical eschatology, with its unleashing of a dream of future perfection, is for many inimical to environmental concerns. It harbours the danger of strengthening the myth of progress. Some critics therefore sense in the prophetic vision of a better future an ecologically dangerous feature of Christianity. Thomas Berry argues, for example, that the Bible's looking toward a future messianic age has set loose a drive toward progress and limitless development that is draining the earth of its natural resources at a calamitous rate.²⁶ It is the biblical injunction to transform the world that has inspired and legitimated ecological recklessness. In the Western world, especially (but not only), there is indeed a deeply ingrained faith in progress and continual material prosperity and the ability of science and technology to satisfy the insatiable wants of humanity.²⁷

How, then, should the vision of Christian hope be understood in a way that will not destroy, but will bring healing for the earth and all its creatures?²⁸ Since the Christian

²³ Peacocke 2001:61.

²⁴ See Conradie 2005.

²⁵ Keller 1997:86.

²⁶ See Berry 1988:204-206, also Haught 1993:16.

²⁷ Olivier 1989:32.

²⁸ For my response to this question, see Conradie 2000.

hope for eternal life is often criticised as escapist, we are urged by numerous ecological theologies to focus on this life (only). We need to dedicate our lives to the well-being of the whole earth community and to reduce future suffering. We need to work towards a better future for all, to establish “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” here on earth. However, a denial of that which transcends this life does not necessarily encourage responsibility for this earth. A culture that assumes that there is nothing more than this life may easily degenerate into the caricatures of consumerism and hedonism or of cynicism and nihilism. Then we may just as well eat and drink and be merry, because tomorrow we are dead. Then we may easily become obsessed with overcoming anxieties about our existence and imminent death, with accumulating material possessions, with fruitless crusades, frantic pleasure seeking, an unbridled hunger for power and a thirst for recognition through success and admiration.²⁹

Without a strong sense of the Giver of life, a celebration of life may easily revert to a Fascist vitalism, a theology of blood and soil, an arrogant, death-dealing idolisation of life.³⁰ Without a vision of that which transcends this life, we may easily become preoccupied with this life. To hope for life beyond death is not to deny this life and this earth, but precisely to affirm this life. Such hope is born amongst those who love this life and this earth so much that it cannot bear the thought of its transience.³¹

d) How can the themes of creation and redemption be reintegrated with one another?

In my view, there is a clear need for a thorough reintegration of the doctrines of creation, sin, providence, redemption and consummation.³² The narrative of God’s love for the world will lose its plausibility whenever these aspects are allowed to become disintegrated from one another. This is particularly urgent given the inability of recent Christian theologies to do justice to both the themes of creation and redemption. This may be illustrated by the following observations:

- * In his famous address to the New Delhi assembly of the World Council of Churches, Joseph Sittler argued that ever since Augustine, Western Christendom has been unable to relate the realm of grace to the realm of nature due to the influence of a Hellenistic dualism between the spiritual and the temporal. This encouraged the conclusion that redemption should be understood as an escape from that which is finite, material and concrete.³³
- * Following the work of Copernicus, Newton and Darwin, Christian theology has struggled to explain how the world can be plausibly viewed as God’s creation. When our children ask us: “Where is God?”, many of us still point vaguely to the heavens above even though we know quite well that God is not somewhere up in the blue sky. In response to the emerging scientific cosmologies, Protestant and especially evangelical theology followed a route described by Moltmann as a “retreat from

²⁹ Moltmann 1997:107.

³⁰ Rasmussen 1999:211.

³¹ Rasmussen 2002:69, following Bonhoeffer’s ethics of responsibility.

³² See the helpful discussion in Lønning 1989, 1990, 1995 and the study by Bergmann (2005) on the liberation of creation in the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus. This calls, as I have argued elsewhere (Conradie 2000:259), for an integrated vision of the triune God’s creative, protective, nurturing and nourishing, hurt, enduring, corrective, salvific, innovative, vindictive and transformative love for creation.

³³ Sittler in Bakken & Bouma-Prediger 2000:38-50.

cosmology into personal faith".³⁴ Christian piety desperately tried to heal the broken relationship between humanity and an increasingly transcendent God. On this basis, creation is often regarded as the mere stage and setting within which the human drama of personal (or societal) redemption is taking place. However, this theology of personal redemption could not and cannot be plausible as long as the relationship between God and the world remains obscure.

- * In an attempt to protect itself from the scientific questioning of the status of the biblical creation narratives, Christian theology, until recently, tried to demarcate its own field of specialisation by detaching the doctrine of creation from cosmology. In this theological climate, creation theology itself has often been marginalised. This is also evident in dialectical theology. Following the lead of Von Rad and Barth, the faith of Israel in a Creator God was regarded as an extrapolation of its experiences of God's redemption in history. They argued that the noetic priority lied with Israel's experiences of God's redemption in history. The theme of creation itself, understood as God's work to establish order amidst the chaos (following the destruction of Jerusalem), was now understood in terms of its soteriological thrust. On this basis the theological structure of creation as origination and redemption as restoration of the beginning was rejected. Instead, creation could be viewed as God's continuous redemptive acts towards the telos of creation, while redemption could be understood as a creative process in which God allows something new to emerge out of a world infected by sin. This approach helped to clarify that a Christian doctrine of creation is not primarily a generalised theory about the origin of all things, but an investigation into the identity of the Creator. Christians believe in the triune Creator and not in "creation" itself. Nevertheless, it should be clear that any noetic priority of faith in God as Saviour cannot imply an ontic priority. Salvation can only take place within the realm of creation.
- * Contemporary theological movements such as liberation theology, black theology, feminist and womanist theology tend to maintain the emphasis on redemption, but understand it in societal instead of personalist terms, that is, as liberation from oppression and victory over the many contemporary manifestations of evil. However, if the relationship between God and the world is not clarified (an agenda addressed in several ecofeminist theologies), this does not resolve the problem of understanding how the liberating praxis of the poor, oppressed and marginalised could be interpreted as *God's* own action in the world.
- * More recently, the theological pendulum has swung to the extreme opposite, namely to an almost exclusive interest in the theme of creation, sometimes without any particular interest in the doctrine of redemption. This is especially evident in the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry. The Western pre-occupation with sin and redemption is criticised in order to retrieve a sense of the sacredness of God's "original blessing".³⁵
- * This theological interest in creation theology is also evident in recent contributions that relate Christian doctrine to insights emerging from the sciences. It is interesting to note that the classic Christian message about sin and redemption receives comparatively little interest in such dialogues between theology and science – except in discussions of the theodicy problem, natural suffering, and in generalised

³⁴ Moltmann 1985:34, also Conradie 1997.

³⁵ Fox 1983.

accounts of how divine action in the world may be understood. The same tendency may be identified in process theology.

- * The need to relate the themes of creation and redemption is recognised, interestingly enough, in a very different form in indigenous theologies, including African theology. This is evident from the question raised by Mercy Amba Oduyoye: "Is the God of our redemption the same God of our creation?"³⁶ This question is born from the African quest for identity. What is the continuity between a pre-Christian African notion of the creator God and the Christian message of redemption that took root in Africa following the work of Western missionaries?

These rather wide-ranging comments suggest that a far more thorough theological integration of the themes of creation and redemption has become urgent, especially for a Christian ecological theology. In my view, the oeuvres of Colin Gunton, Jürgen Moltmann and Arnold van Ruler, together with those of Douglas John Hall, Paul Santmire and Joseph Sittler offer the most promising sense of direction in recent Protestant theology for this task. Since I hope to focus on the relationship between creation and redemption in a future research project, these rather sketchy comments will have to suffice here.

e) How should the relationship between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit be understood?

Several recent ecological theologies have identified a certain resonance between an ecological emphasis on the community of life and a theological vision of the trinitarian communion. Accordingly, a social doctrine of the trinity suggests an ecological doctrine of creation and vice versa. As some have argued, the earth community participates within the life of the trinity which itself is an (ecological) communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Jürgen Moltmann says for example: "If we cease to understand God monotheistically as the one, absolute subject, but instead see him in a trinitarian sense as the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we can no longer, either, conceive his relationship to the world he has created as a one-sided relationship of domination. We are bound to understand it as an intricate relationship of community."³⁷ A trinitarian theology where God is understood as persons-in-relationship suggests that human beings, made in the image of God, are to be understood as persons-in-relationship rather than as disengaged subjects.³⁸ The recognition that God's being is to-be-in-relationship calls for a rethinking not only of the human person and of social relationships, but of all of reality. At the heart of reality is relationship, personhood and communion. This suggests an "ontology of communion",³⁹ an ontology where relationship is introduced into substance itself.⁴⁰ The relatedness of everything in the cosmos mirrors the primal, reciprocal, indwelling and interpenetration of the trinitarian *perichoresis*.⁴¹

³⁶ See Oduyoye, M 2000. *Hearing and knowing: Theological reflections on Christianity in Africa*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 75.

³⁷ Moltmann 1985:2.

³⁸ Edwards 1995:135.

³⁹ Sittler in Bakken & Bouma-Prediger 2000:174.

⁴⁰ Also Zizioulas 1985, 1991:41.

⁴¹ Moltmann 1985:17, also Hall 1986:113-160.

In my view, a certain theological ascesis is nevertheless called for in speaking about the immanent trinity in order to avoid inner-trinitarian speculation and mystification. Perhaps Karl Rahner's famous rule that we can talk about the immanent trinity only on the basis of the economic trinity has to be followed more rigorously. We may be tempted to make deductions about the immanent trinity on the basis of salvation history. However, theological speculations and too many quasi-logical deductions should be avoided in order to respect the divine mystery. The doctrine of the trinity emerges, at best, as a *doxological conclusion* of theological reflection on the work of the triune God and not as a pre-historical *conceptual foundation* upon which the entire edifice of a systematic theology may logically be built up.

Moreover, a focus on the economic trinity reveals a lack of consensus in contemporary ecological theologies. There can be no doubt that creation, redemption and new creation is the work of God's Spirit.⁴² The Spirit hovers over creation from the beginning. Throughout the biblical narratives the Spirit makes things new. The Nicene Creed therefore confesses that the Spirit is the "Giver of Life." The early church prayed "Veni, Creator Spiritus" and the World Council of Churches subsequently prayed at its Canberra meeting in 1991: "Come Holy Spirit, renew your whole creation."

However, what is still not clear is *how* the renewing work of the Spirit takes place. We are confronted here with one of the major theological problems of our time, continuing a debate that goes back to Western and Eastern views on the relationship between the Spirit and Christ (*viz.* the *filioque* controversy).⁴³ A few wide ranging comments may illustrate what is at stake here. The Western tradition has always emphasised that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and that the Spirit therefore works through Jesus Christ, the proclamation of the message of redemption in Christ, the Bible and Christian preaching, the body of Christ (the church), the sacraments, the ministries of the church and the witness and service of the church in the world.

By contrast, several contemporary theological movements tend to make room for the work of the Spirit outside the work of Christ. They have argued that we can talk about both the Spirit of Christ and of Christ as one manifestation of the work of the Spirit.⁴⁴ In Pentecostal theology it is often emphasised that the Spirit "blows wherever it wills" and that the power of the Spirit cannot be restricted within the context of the institutionalised church. In African theologies it is often argued that the Spirit of God was present and active in a salvific way long before the message regarding Jesus Christ reached sub-Saharan Africa. According to some liberation theologies, the liberating political work of the Spirit also takes place outside the witness of the church. The Spirit moves in the world in various ways and the church is not the only instrument that the Spirit uses in this regard. Some feminist theologies, likewise, emphasise the feminine face of the Holy Spirit (the one who gives life) over and against the male figure of Christ. And in several ecological theologies the cosmic work of the Spirit outside that of Christ is regarded as redemptive. The power of the Spirit to renew the earth is not restricted to the influence

⁴² This is a recurring theme in the ecologically sensitive pneumatologies of authors such as Edwards 2004, Moltmann 1993, Müller-Fahrenholz 1995, Van de Beek 1987 & Welker 1994. See also my review of such pneumatologies, Conradie 2002.

⁴³ See Volume 79 of the journal *Scriptura* which offers various South African perspectives on the *filioque* controversy under the title "Whither does the Wind blow?" (Conradie 2002).

⁴⁴ See Edwards 2004, Moltmann 1993.

of the message of Jesus Christ. A similar tendency to widen a “narrower” Christological orientation towards a more “inclusive” pneumatological approach may be identified in some ecumenical theologies, missiological debates and in the ongoing dialogues with other religious traditions. These debates clearly call for a reinterpretation of trinitarian theology in which the relationship between the work of Christ and the work of God’s Spirit can be clarified. Several leading ecological theologians have recognised this need, but more work is required here.⁴⁵

f) Natural theology

The hermeneutic inevitability of a form of natural theology cannot be denied. The history of modernity has made it abundantly clear that the only access which we have to God’s revelation is through the categories of human reason (the turn to the subject), within a particular preunderstanding (the hermeneutical turn), language (the linguistic turn), culture (the sociological turn), gender and local context. The categories which we use to talk about God come from below, not directly from above (Harry Kuitert). A purist position on natural theology is therefore (*contra* Barth) not tenable. Instead of denying or hiding the use of such categories, it is better to articulate the categories which we do employ as honestly as possible so that they can be open to public scrutiny.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, a Barthian suspicion against natural theology remains entirely appropriate, especially in the light of the theological legitimising (through different forms of natural theology) of Nazism in Germany, apartheid in South Africa and consumerism worldwide. Clearly, natural theology does not necessarily stimulate an affirmation of the natural world. It also remains a danger for romanticised forms of ecological theology that celebrate that which is natural. As Paul Santmire notes: “We have worshipped nature idolatrously even as we have exploited nature selfishly, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly.”⁴⁷ Michael Welker argues, along the line of Calvin’s famous argument, that only relative and problematic degrees of theological clarity can be achieved on the basis of natural theology.⁴⁸ These comments call for further reflection on the distinction between natural theology and a theology of nature and on the place of natural theology in ecological theology.

Conclusion

The identification of these six theological problems which require further reflection within the context of ecological theology leads to a somewhat curious observation. In many earlier contributions there was an understandable eagerness to emphasise those aspects, themes and symbols of the Christian faith that seemed to resonate more immediately with ecological concerns. The temptation has been to explore the

⁴⁵ See Edwards 2004, and, in the reformed tradition, the many contributions to trinitarian theology by Jürgen Moltmann.

⁴⁶ Moreover, the disastrous impact of the repudiation of natural theology in Protestant theology has to be acknowledged. As Elizabeth Johnson (2000:9) comments:

However, the trajectory of Protestant theology shows increasing repudiation of anything remotely smacking of Catholic natural theology and its association with works’ righteousness. Human nature in its fallenness is depraved; nature as a whole can only refer to fallen creation, which is empty of God’s presence and in need of God’s sovereign act of salvation given only in Christ. Theology’s vision thus stays focused on humanity where the all-important saving action of God takes place.

⁴⁷ Santmire 2000:116.

⁴⁸ Welker 1999:21-32.

ecological significance of God's creation more than its Creator, God's immanence more than God's transcendence, the cosmic work of God's Spirit more than the particularity of Jesus Christ, the humanity of Jesus more than the divinity of Christ, general revelation more than special revelation, the human body more than the human soul, the continuity between humans and other animals more than human distinctiveness, the theme of creation more than salvation, the earth more than heaven, this life more than eternal life, this body and this earth more than the hope for the resurrection of the body and a new earth, the continuity between creation and eschaton more than the discontinuity, and so on and so forth.

Perhaps the time has come for the theological pendulum to swing back to the other side of these polar opposites in order to reformulate, re-conceive or undermine these polarities. It is true that these themes have traditionally been interpreted in ways that supported alienation from the earth. It seems to me that both alienation and reductionism can be avoided if we recognise that the vision of God may help us to understand the world in a new light,⁴⁹ that the hope for eternal life puts this life into a proper perspective, that an appreciation for the novelties of the human soul can help us to put the significance of the human body into context and, especially, that the Christian message of salvation is one in which the history and destiny of God's creation is at stake. Unless ecological theologies can avoid such reductionism it will become shallow and sterile.

9.3 Challenges for an ecological reformulation of Christian doctrine

In contributions to ecological theology virtually every aspect of Christian doctrine has been subjected to a critical reinvestigation. The abiding concern in such contributions is to show how God's love for the earth and all its creatures is portrayed in each aspect of the Christian faith. While several important studies have attempted to cover all the major Christian doctrines,⁵⁰ there is now a need for more detailed investigation of each specific aspect of Christian doctrine.

One of the dominant features of such ecological reinterpretations of Christian doctrine is the inclusion of conversation partners other than Western philosophy. These conversation partners include social theory, feminist theory, history, indigenous cosmologies, literature and the fine arts, as well as the astrophysical, geological, biological and ecological sciences. The role of the sciences in ecological reconstructions of Christian doctrine is influenced by the sense of awe evoked by the story of the universe as this is told by contemporary science⁵¹ and the intuition that there is an ecological moral to this story.⁵² At the same time, this requires the enormous task of

⁴⁹ This is also the core of the argument in my book on the search for an earthly spirituality (Conradie 2006).

⁵⁰ See contributions by Boff 1997:140-186, Bouma-Prediger 2001, McFague 1993 & Nash 1991:93-138 amongst many others.

⁵¹ Haught argues that scientists have become storytellers. He says: "Science has increasingly and almost in spite of itself taken on the lineaments of a story of the cosmos. The cosmos itself has increasingly become a narrative, a great adventure ..." (Haught 1990:173).

⁵² See my essay "An ecological moral to the story of the universe?" (as yet unpublished).

rethinking the content of the Christian faith in categories which no longer reflect a pre-Copernican, and pre-Darwinian cosmology.⁵³

The task of an ecological reinterpretation of Christian doctrine may be indicated by a number of important questions that have stimulated contributions to ecological theology. These include the following questions and contributions which focus explicitly on ecological issues:

a) On the doctrine of God

The following themes which are traditionally associated with the doctrine of God may be mentioned here:

- * How should the category of God's *revelation* be understood?⁵⁴ Is the distinction between general revelation (the "book of nature")⁵⁵ and special revelation (the "book of Scripture") still valid from an ecological perspective if God's acts in the history of Israel, in Jesus Christ and in the history of the early church is to be understood as an integral part of the earth's own history? What significance does a Lutheran theology of the cross, based on the notion that God's presence in the cross remains hidden, except through the eye of faith, have for an ecological theology?⁵⁶
- * How should the difference between a theology of nature and *natural theology* be understood?⁵⁷ How can an uncritical and naïve form of natural theology be resisted without falling into the trap of an anthropocentric reduction of the cosmic scope of the gospel in terms of personal salvation? How should the relationship between nature and grace⁵⁸ be understood within an ecological context without losing sight of the Protestant insight that the primary theological tension is between sin (and its impact on nature) and grace (and its impact on nature)?
- * Does the Christian doctrine of the (immanent) *trinity* suggest an ecological model of community between Father, Son and Spirit (with an interplay of perichoretic

⁵³ This also implies that what Moltmann (1985:34) has called the "retreat from cosmology into personal faith" must be resisted. See also Conradie (1997) and Johnson (2000) on the ecological legacy of this retreat from cosmology and the suggestion from Rossi (1997) that a sacred cosmology will require a "liturgising" of the world.

⁵⁴ Berry (1991:7f) has argued that God's revelation has always taken place through nature. In the first of his "Twelve principles for understanding the universe and the role of the human in the universe process" Berry (1987:107) asserts that: "The universe, the solar system, and the planet earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being." This is also true of God's revelation in Jesus Christ (who has become a part of nature). In fact, for Berry, the universe itself is the primary mode of God's revelation. Any notion of God is a function of the wonder and agony of the earth. Berry speculates that if we had lived on the moon, our sense of the divine would have reflected the arid lunar landscape. Berry (1991:54) argues furthermore that the story of the universe told by scientists has constituted a new revelatory event (analogous to the incarnation of Jesus Christ) that will radically challenge our Ptolomaic understanding of the cosmos and the place of humanity in the cosmos. For him, this also calls for a thorough reinterpretation of Christian theology (and its often all too anthropocentric and Christocentric focus).

⁵⁵ For a collection of delightful stories with an ecological moral from "God's first book of revelation", see Aurelio 1997. See also Faricy 1982:62-74, Gilkey 1994 & Senocak 2003. Gilkey detects "signs of the sacred" in nature that encourages him to speak of nature as the "image of God".

⁵⁶ See the article on a *theologia crucis* by Habel 1998.

⁵⁷ See Dembowski 1989, McFague 1993:78f and the discussion above.

⁵⁸ See, especially, the many contributions of Joseph Sittler on this theme (1972, also the various essays included in Bakken & Bouma-Prediger 2000). See also the discussion by Moltmann (1985) on the relationship between nature and grace.

relationships) that can serve as inspiration in the search for sustainable community?⁵⁹ Does such a notion of the trinity not lead to speculative inner-trinitarian mysticism? Furthermore, how can the anthropocentric tendency in personalistic and agential language on the triune God be avoided or corrected?⁶⁰ What can the renaming of God as “Mother” contribute to an ecological ethos? How should the characteristics of God be re-described in such a way that God’s concern for the whole of creation becomes evident?⁶¹

- * How should *the relationship between God and the cosmos* be understood? What is the significance of describing the cosmos as God’s creation?⁶² How should the presence or immanence of God in creation be accounted for? In what way can models such as the world as God’s body, or as God’s womb,⁶³ or as sacrament contribute to this question?⁶⁴ How should the use of panentheist⁶⁵ or even pantheist categories of God as a description for creative processes⁶⁶ (instead of the classic Christian emphasis on theism) be evaluated?⁶⁷ Is it not perhaps better to retrieve classic trinitarian language, with a specifically Christological and pneumatological focus, to account for God’s presence in the world?⁶⁸
- * What is the ecological significance of *God’s transcendence*?⁶⁹ How can the mystery of God’s otherness, also to the earth, be protected?⁷⁰ How should the transcendence

⁵⁹ Several theologians who are contributing to the renaissance of trinitarian theology since the early 1980’s are doing that self-consciously from ecological concerns. In such contributions there is an emphasis on the inter-relatedness within the trinitarian communion. It is often suggested that human beings and the whole earth community may participate within this trinitarian communion. The trinity is thus portrayed as an ecological community. The many contributions by Leonardo Boff, Denis Edwards, Colin Gunton, Elisabeth Johnson, Catherine LaCugna, Jürgen Moltmann and John Zizioulas are especially influential in this regard. See also Boff 1997:154-157, Buxton 2004, Edwards 1995:111-132, 1998, 2004, Field 1996, Patricia Fox 2001, Gebara 1999:137-172, Lowes 2001, 2004, Moltmann 1985 & Scott 2004.

⁶⁰ See Santmire (2000:61-73) for a critical discussion on the legacy of theological personalism (with reference to Buber, Barth, Brunner and Tillich).

⁶¹ See the excellent article on theological foundations for ecological praxis by Edwards (1998) in which he explores the relationality and the fecundity of God.

⁶² See WD Hall 2005:800f. Hall observes that there is much confusion in ecological theology on the distinction between cosmos (or nature) and creation. This emerges where creation is regarded merely as a theory on the origins of the universe or where scientific cosmology is conceived as a (new) creation story (but without any reference to a Creator). Scientific cosmologies offer an explanation of how what is came to be the way it is, but does not explain how what is came to be (2005:802). Instead, “creation” should be understood primarily as a theological category in which the relationship between God and the world is described.

⁶³ See Kyung 1994.

⁶⁴ See Dietrich 1998, Jantzen 1984, McFague 1990, 1993 & Rae 1994:71f.

⁶⁵ For an explicit defence of panentheism in ecological theologies, see Boff 1995, 1997:152f, Cooper 1990:145-176, Haught 1993, Fox 1983, 1991, Gebara 1995, McFague 1993 & Moltmann 1985. For a critical response, see Greshake 1986, Link 1987 & Schaeffer 1970:23f. See also the suggestion of Ruth Page (1996:40-52), which she labels “pansyntheism”, namely that the Creator is distinct from creation, but is nevertheless present with creation and in everything.

⁶⁶ See Peters 2002.

⁶⁷ Hall (2005:799) distinguishes between traditional theists and revisionists in this regard. The former place emphasis on the relationship between God and the world while the latter use scientific cosmologies as a point of departure to avoid the problem of anthropocentrism, namely by stressing that human beings are “at home in the cosmos”.

⁶⁸ See, especially Gunton 1993, 1998 & Moltmann 1985.

⁶⁹ See the discussion above and the comment by Field (1996:142) that panentheist and pantheist notion cannot do justice to the value and integrity of creation:

of God be understood in the light of the finitude of the earth and indeed of the whole cosmos?

- * How should the Christian belief that God created “in the beginning” be understood, also in the light of new scientific insights on the age, size and complexity of the universe? What is the ecological significance of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*?⁷¹ How should the notion of a primordial *zimsum* (self-withdrawal of God) be assessed?⁷²
- * What are the implications of an ecological doctrine of creation for a *theology of nature* (the debate on the “nature of nature”),⁷³ a theology of land⁷⁴ and also of sea,⁷⁵ a theology of place,⁷⁶ and a theological understanding of fellow creatures?⁷⁷ What would the ecological significance be of a theology where the significance of not only

In those understandings creation has value, not by virtue of its own worth, but as a consequence of it being in some sense an extension of the divine, or of the divine being present in it. In the covenantal and trinitarian model creation has a worth in and of its self.

This perhaps suggests the need for a return to a theist notion of God where creation comes forth from the being of God but thereafter exist independently from God. The strength of classic theism is its ability to acknowledge the distinctness of creation in relation with God. Although this may lead toward a deist separation of the world from God, this distinction is crucial to protect the (ecological) integrity of the created order. The earth is not simply an extension of God. Together with the rest of the cosmos, the earth comes forth from the being of God but thereafter remains distinct from God. To use an analogy: A baby coming forth from the mother’s womb has to grow up and become a mature human person in her own right. The daughter cannot remain an extension of the mother forever. The mother has to allow the daughter the freedom to become distinct from her. The relative independence of the daughter from the mother is a condition for a relationship of mutual love and respect that will emerge between mother and daughter. This does not diminish the nourishing, nurturing, protecting love of the mother for the child in any way. Moreover, the mother will always remain “present” in the daughter – genetically, through the mother’s upbringing and through their lifelong companionship. Likewise, God’s loving care for creation does not imply that creation has to remain merely an extension of Godself. See also Conradie 2005:55f, Gunton 1993:161 & Scott 2004.

⁷⁰ See the emphasis on God as “the greatest of mysteries” in a chapter on the doctrine of God by Gebara 1999:101-136.

⁷¹ Moltmann’s work *God in creation. An ecological doctrine of creation* (1985) remains the most influential contribution towards a theology of creation from the perspective of an ecological theology. See also the major Dutch reformed study on the doctrine of creation by Van de Beek 1996. For South African contributions on the doctrine of creation from an ecological perspective, see Buitendag 1986, 1988 & Edwards 1994. Western theologies of creation are now being challenged by many indigenous (including African) perspectives on creation (see Fulljames 1993). In addition, see Bedford-Strohm (2001), Lönning (1989) and Sölle (1984) for ecumenical perspectives on creation theology, the essays by Mortenson, Lönning, Bettenhausen, Hafstad & Nilsson in Mortensen (1995) for Lutheran perspectives, and the contributions by Igumnov (1990), Mihoc (1990) for Orthodox perspectives on creation theology – all of these contributions reflect an explicit ecological sensitivity. See also Beinert 1982.

⁷² See Boff 1997, Haight 1993, Moltmann 1985 & Müller-Fahrenholz 1995.

⁷³ On an ecological theology of nature, see Faricy 1982, Gilkey 1994, Gregorios 1987:13-36, 1996, Hefner 1994, 1995, Hendry 1980, Hermann 1994, McFague 1993:65-98, 1997, Meyers 1987, Moltmann 2002, Ruether 1995 & Scott 2004. Not all contributions towards an ecological theology recognise the need for conceptual clarity on the “nature of nature” sufficiently. Another important contribution to this debate is the notion of the “end of nature” (see McKibben 1989).

⁷⁴ See the indexed bibliography for numerous references to a theology of land.

⁷⁵ On the beach as the “sacred edge” between land and sea, see the innovative article by Victorin-Vangerud 2001.

⁷⁶ See especially Lilburne 1989. See also Sharon Betcher’s evocative article on the pneumatological notion of sanctuary. The Spirit takes root and dwells on earth, within human beings as the “living temple” of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁷ See the essay of McDaniel (1986) on Christian spirituality as openness to fellow creatures.

the category of time, but also the category of space is acknowledged?⁷⁸ Is there a place for an angelology in an ecological doctrine of creation? How can theological themes such as beauty⁷⁹ and humour⁸⁰ contribute to a theology of creation?⁸¹

- * How should the *goodness of creation* be understood in the light of natural disasters, human disease and the predicament of finitude (including death)?⁸² Nature is not only beautiful. It is also menacing, destructive and violent.⁸³ The excessive celebration of the beauty of creation is therefore flawed.⁸⁴ Is there a place for suffering, pain and death in God's good creation? How should this "darker side" of nature be understood?⁸⁵ Is God the author of suffering? And of evil?⁸⁶ How should the notion of a paradise be understood in the light of the desolate early history of the earth (with molten lava, a poisonous atmosphere and ultraviolet radiation)?⁸⁷ Although pain, suffering and death (also amongst plants and animals) did not enter God's creation through human sin, is it not true that such suffering is nowadays primarily caused by the cumulative impact of human sin?⁸⁸
- * How should the *relationship between humanity and nature* be understood?⁸⁹ Or, to phrase the question more precisely: How should the place and vocation of humanity within the earth community⁹⁰ and within the evolutionary history of life on earth and within the larger history of the cosmos be understood?⁹¹ How should human personhood,⁹² human dignity⁹³ and the notion of humanity as created "in the image

⁷⁸ See McFague 1993:99-102, Moltmann 1985:140-157 & Tinker 1992.

⁷⁹ See, especially, Austin 1988, also Boff 1995, Gustafson 1994, Haught 1990 & McGrath 2002:16f.

⁸⁰ See Brun 1994:83f.

⁸¹ See Conrad (2000) on the "messengers in the sky".

⁸² The theodicy problem is discussed in numerous contributions to an ecological theology. Bergmann (2005:226-245) offers a helpful overview of various contributions in ecological theology (e.g. Cobb, Altner, Moltmann, Link, Liedke & Duchrow, McFague, Sölle, Fox) to discourse on natural and human-induced suffering.

⁸³ Hefner (1994:527) identifies this as one of the most serious difficulties for a Christian theology of nature. See also Gilkey 1994.

⁸⁴ See Derr 1975:60f.

⁸⁵ See Faricy (1982:34-52), with reference to apocalyptic as an appropriate response to evil.

⁸⁶ See Wallace 1996:171-208.

⁸⁷ See the comment by Haught (1993:111): "We can accept the fact that the cosmos is not a paradise but only the promise thereof."

⁸⁸ This is a recurring question in the theological oeuvre of Jürgen Moltmann (see e.g. 1985, 1996).

⁸⁹ Vischer (1993) provides a helpful overview of ecumenical discourse on humanity and creation. For African contributions, see Conradie 2005, Gitau 2000, Mugambi 1987 & Ndyabahika 1996.

⁹⁰ Many contributions to an ecological theology emphasise that humans are "at home on earth" (the title of a work by Murphy 1989). See also Clark 1993:92-127, Cobb 1972:76-100, Edwards 1995:133-152, Hefner 1993, 1995, McFague 1993:99-130, Murphy 1989 & Scott 2003. See also my *An ecological Christian anthropology: At home on earth?* (Conradie 2005).

⁹¹ Thomas Berry is perhaps the most eloquent advocate for seeing humanity as an episode, a dimension of the history of the universe. He states, for example, that: "The human is less a being on earth or in the universe than a dimension of the earth and indeed the universe itself." (1988:195). Berry insists that humanity forms part of the earth community. Humanity is nothing but a brief episode in the history of the cosmos. He declares: "The human is that being in whom the universe comes to itself in a special mode of conscious reflection" (1988:16).

⁹² See the contribution by Gebara 1999:67-100. Gebara identifies relatedness, openness and evolution and mystery of origin as three constitutive dimensions of human personhood.

⁹³ The dignity of human beings need not be downplayed for the sake of otherkind. Perhaps the dignity which human beings deserve (at least from our human point of view) should serve as a paradigm for the integrity of the whole creation. See De Lange 1997:170f, also Conradie 2005:82f & McFague 1993:99f.

of God⁹⁴ be understood from an ecological perspective? Can it still be retained? What is the place of women and men in the household of God?⁹⁵ How should the relationship between human beings and the other animals be described?⁹⁶ Are human beings really the “crown of creation” or should this notion be discarded as arrogant and anthropocentric?⁹⁷ How should the notion of *dominium terrae* be reinterpreted?⁹⁸ This cluster of anthropological questions constitutes in many ways the crux of any ecological theology.

- * An ecological reformulation of the *doctrine sin* has to go beyond an assessment of the impact of human sin on the created order and on human existence.⁹⁹ It has to offer an ecological reinterpretation of the very nature of sin. How should the fall of humanity be understood from an ecological perspective? In many ecological theologies sin is understood as alienation from nature. Humanity has become estranged from nature because we have assumed a much too central position for ourselves. In other contributions towards an ecological theology sin has been described in several other ways, for example as “the disruption of universal connectedness” (Leonardo Boff),¹⁰⁰ the desire to be God and the denial of creatureliness (Steven Bouma-Prediger),¹⁰¹ anthropocentrism or self-centredness (see James Callicot),¹⁰² the distortion of the human ability to discern God’s glory in creation (Norman Habel),¹⁰³ “the attempt of the creature to escape its creaturehood”

⁹⁴ See the contributions by Conradie 2005, Gunton 1992, Halkes 1989:145-168, Hall 1986:61-112, John of Pergamon 1992, Vosloo 1999 & Welker 1999:60-73. Many other contributions include a short discussion of this question.

⁹⁵ See Ndyabahika 1995.

⁹⁶ See the many contributions by Linzey 1995, 2000, and the essays by Hauerwas & Berkman, Jung, McDaniel, Regan and Ruether in Pinches & McDaniel 1993.

⁹⁷ See the famous suggestion of Moltmann (1985) that the Sabbath, not human beings, should be regarded as the crown of creation. See also Conradie 1996:31-57.

⁹⁸ For a critical discussion on the notion of *dominium terrae*, see Behrends 1999, Conradie 2000, 2005:202f, Liedke 1989, Manenschijn 1988:76-94 & Rasmussen 1996:227-247. Numerous other contributions include a shorter discussion of this question.

⁹⁹ Storz (1991) suggests that human sin has systematically distorted relationships within the earth community. The fall of humanity as described in Genesis 3 was followed by a litany of distorted relationships: 1) Animal-earth (the serpent is told that it will move on its belly and eat dust), 2) Animal-animal (the serpent is cursed above all other animals), 3) Animal-human (there is enmity between the woman and the serpent), 4) Human-human (Eve will have pain in childbearing and will be ruled over by Adam), 5) Human-earth (the ground is cursed, Adam will toil and sweat, the earth will produce thorns and thistles), 6) Human-God (Adam and Eve is exiled from the garden of Eden and from God’s companionship).

¹⁰⁰ Boff 1997:81.

¹⁰¹ See Bouma-Prediger 1995:153.

¹⁰² See Callicot (1991:122-124) who interprets the knowledge of good and evil in terms of the emergence of self-consciousness (Adam and Eve realising that they were naked) and subsequently self-centredness.

¹⁰³ Habel 1998:19. Habel’s formulation is eloquent: “To violate the earth, therefore, is to tear God’s masks, to scar God’s physical face, to desecrate God’s earthly dwelling. The material medium through which God may be revealed to the eyes of faith has been corrupted, blurred and distorted. The capacity, therefore, for humans to discern God in creation is reduced. It is hard to see God’s glory in the sunset when smog fills the air; it is difficult to stand in awe of the rainforests when they are slashed and burned. Sin has blinded us to the beauty of God’s masks.” Elsewhere in the same article Habel describes sin as the disintegration of the bonds that hold the whole earth community together (1998:121-122). This calls for ecological doctrine of redemption as a reconciliation of all things (*ta panta*) through solidarity in suffering on the basis of the cross of Jesus Christ.

(Douglas John Hall),¹⁰⁴ an “indifference to God’s creative cosmic aim of maximising beauty” (John Haught)¹⁰⁵ “the refusal to accept our place” (Sallie McFague),¹⁰⁶ “a refusal to accept limits placed upon humanity on account of its creaturely status” (Alister McGrath),¹⁰⁷ “to pollute and to be polluted” (Colin Gunton),¹⁰⁸ “ecological disorder” (James Nash),¹⁰⁹ a new manifestation of hubris and limitless consumerist greed (Mika Vähäkangas),¹¹⁰ ecocidal addiction (Mark Wallace),¹¹¹ a breach of social harmony (Eugene Wangiri)¹¹² and the “violent and dangerous self-isolation of human beings from the rest of creation” (Michael Welker).¹¹³ How should such ecological redescriptions of sin be assessed? Does the sin of humanity have cosmic ramifications? Should the guilt of humanity before God be the central problem that ecological theologies seek to address?¹¹⁴

- * What is the legitimacy of a notion of ongoing creation? Can the *doctrine of providence* be equated with ongoing creation and how does this relate to evolutionary processes?¹¹⁵ If God’s continuing care for what God has created cannot

¹⁰⁴ Hall 1993:338.

¹⁰⁵ Haught 2000:138.

¹⁰⁶ See McFague 1993:112f.

¹⁰⁷ McGrath 2002:79.

¹⁰⁸ Gunton 1992:58.

¹⁰⁹ Nash 1991:117f.

¹¹⁰ Vähäkangas 2001:112-130.

¹¹¹ Wallace 2005:30-33. Wallace (2005:30) likens ecocide to alcoholism: we know that we are undermining the quality of our lives through ecocide but we can no longer stop ourselves from doing so. Environmental abuse is a manifestation of the “bondage of the will” in which we find ourselves unable to stop self-destructive behaviour.

¹¹² Wangiri 1999:73. From a Kenyan perspective, Wangiri argues that sin is not understood as an offense against a lawgiver, but in terms of a breach of social (and ecological) harmony.

¹¹³ Welker 1999:80.

¹¹⁴ Scholars such as Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox have suggested that the theology of sin and redemption (most notably of Augustine) which remains dominant in Western theology needs to be replaced by a new emphasis on creation theology, or as Matthew Fox (1993) suggests, of “original blessing”. Fox argues that the Christians creeds are overbalanced in favour of sin and redemption. The motif of creation has therefore become increasingly less important. The doctrine of sin has all too often been linked to nature itself in such a way that what is bodily or earthly has been regarded as of lower esteem, even as evil. Fox (1983:54) explains:

I believe that an exaggerated doctrine of original sin, one that is employed as a starting point for spirituality, plays kindly into the hands of empire builders, slave masters, and patriarchal society in general. It divides and thereby conquers, pitting one’s thoughts against one’s feelings, one’s body against one’s personal needs, people against the earth, animals, and nature in general. By doing this it so convolutes people, so confuses and preoccupies them, that the deeper questions about community, justice and celebration never come to the fore.

By contrast, Becker (1992) has argued that although the topic of original sin is usually avoided in ecological theologies, the doctrine of sin usually reappears in other forms. In fact, the sin of humanity is exemplified in the environmental crisis itself. The doctrine of sin is implied in the assumption that “something has gone wrong somewhere.” This suggests a need for a reformulation of the doctrine sin. In response to Fox’s rejection of a fall / redemption theology, Santmire (2000:21) concludes: “Soberingly, however, the real problem is not a bad idea, namely original sin, and its influence. The real problem is rather the finally undeniable reality of radical evil itself, to which the doctrine of original sin, in various ways, has historically – and sometimes inadequately – borne witness.” See also Clatworthy 1997, 1998, Conradie 2005, Field 1996:187f, Linzey 1998, Nash 1991 Roskos in Taylor 2005:312-314 & Ruether 1992:115-142.

¹¹⁵ This is the assumption of many process theologians and of those drawing on the work of Teilhard de Chardin. See Haught 1993, 2000 & Sideris 2003 for examples in this regard. Moltmann (1990:296) calls for a clear distinction between evolution and redemption though: “A Christus evolutor without Christus redemptor is nothing other than a cruel, unfeeling Christus selector, a historical world-judge without

be restricted to the interaction with humankind, how should God's providence be understood?¹¹⁶

- * How should a *theology of history* be constructed from an ecological perspective?¹¹⁷ Can the doctrine of particular divine election be reconciled with the cosmic scope of God's loving concern for creation? What is the place of the notion of predestination in an ecological theology?¹¹⁸
- * How can the doctrine of *creation and redemption* be integrated with one another without sublimating the one into the other?¹¹⁹ Is creation simply a stage on which the drama of human salvation is taking place? How can the anthropocentric tendency of such a notion of salvation be countered?¹²⁰ What is the relationship between natural history and salvation history? How can the separation of culture from nature, of human history from cosmic history, be overcome?¹²¹

b) On the doctrine of Christ¹²²

The following themes which are traditionally associated with the doctrine of Christ may be mentioned here:

- * How should the ecological significance of the *life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth*, with specific reference to his healing ministry,¹²³ his parables and his preaching on God's coming reign, be assessed? How should the interaction between Jesus and various members of the earth community (birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, etc) be understood?¹²⁴
- * What is the ecological significance of the classic *Christological symbols* of the incarnation,¹²⁵ passion, cross,¹²⁶ resurrection,¹²⁷ ascension and the coming of Christ (parousia)? How can a kenotic Christology contribute to the travail of nature?¹²⁸

compassion for the weak, and a breeder of life uninterested in the victims." Also quoted in Bergmann 2005:212.

¹¹⁶ See Osborn (1993:116-128) for a discussion of the doctrine of providence.

¹¹⁷ See especially the many contributions by Langdon Gilkey.

¹¹⁸ See the brief comments on predestination by Edwards 1995:126f.

¹¹⁹ See the discussion above and also the contributions by Daly 1989 & Morton 1984 (drawing on Teilhard's views). Nash (1991:124) also notes the danger of either an identification or a separation of salvation from creation, or of ontology from soteriology. He argues that separation can easily lead to docetism, while identification can easily lead to romanticism. The need for an integration of the doctrines of creation and redemption is a recurring theme in several recent contributions to ecological theology. See, for example, Bergmann 2005, Conradie 2005 & Deane Drummond 2000.

¹²⁰ This challenge is formulated sharply in the following rhetorical question raised by McDonagh (1986:62-3): "(Is) the twenty billion years of God's creative love simply ... a stage on which the drama of human salvation is worked out?"

¹²¹ See Hefner (1992) for an insistence that nature's history is our history and that human history is nature's history. Within this framework, natural history is the matrix within which salvation history transpires.

¹²² In an excellent essay Reid (2001) offers a survey of recent attempts to develop an ecological Christology.

¹²³ See Daneel (1999:151-205) on the ecological significance of an emphasis on Christ as healer, with specific reference to the African context.

¹²⁴ See Echlin 1997, Gebara 1999:173-192.

¹²⁵ See Edwards 1995, Gunton 1992:69-98, Hill 1998:98-109, Scott 2003:169-200 and the essays by Reid 2001 and Vanin 2001. See also the comment by John of Damascus: "Because of the incarnation, I salute all remaining matter with reverence." Quoted in Chryssavgis 2000:85. Gregorios (1990:43) likewise emphasises that the Incarnate One assumed and transformed that which is material: "He took matter into himself, so matter is not alien to him now. His body is a material body – transformed, of course, but

- * Which of the contemporary *Christological models* (including prophetic, wisdom,¹²⁹ sacramental, eschatological, process and liberation Christologies) are conducive to an ecological theology?¹³⁰ How should the ecological significance of the work of Christ and especially the doctrine of atonement¹³¹ be assessed?
- * What is the ecological significance of a *cosmic Christology*?¹³² How should the “scandal of particularity” (Emil Brunner), that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, be understood in such an ecological Christology? What is the difference between a cosmic Christology and a christic cosmology?¹³³
- * Does an ecological theology provide new perspectives on the position of *Mary*?¹³⁴

c) On the doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is usually discussed with reference to the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is usually associated with themes such as creation, redemption, the means of salvation (including the inspiration of Scripture), the formation of the church, the sacraments and the ministries in the church and the completion of God’s work (eschatology). The following themes may be mentioned here:

- * Does an ecological theology open new perspectives on the *person of the Holy Spirit*, for example in terms of the importance of the immanence and the indwelling of the Spirit?¹³⁵ Is the Spirit best understood as an impersonal power or as a personal

transformed matter. Thus he shares his being with the whole created order: animals and birds, snakes and worms, flowers and seeds. All parts of creation are now reconciled to Christ.”

¹²⁶ See Altner 1989:409-423, Faricy 1982:48-52, Habel 1998, Rasmussen 1992, 1996:282-294, Vähäkangas 2001 & Westhelle 1995. Rasmussen describes the ecological significance of the cross in terms of “the only power that can truly heal and keep the creation is power instinctively drawn to the flawed places of existence”. He concludes:

Therefore it is not enough to say simply, “Being with the gracious God means loving the earth.” We must also say, “being with the gracious God means loving this Jesus.” That means Jesus on the cross, and it means the way of the cross as God’s ethic and ours. Love the earth, yes, but to redeem the planet, go to the places of suffering and find God and God’s power there (1992:50).

¹²⁷ For brief comments on the resurrection of Christ, see Boff 1997:181-184, Edwards 1995:85f & George 1990.

¹²⁸ On the significance of kenosis for the relationship between creation and redemption, see Edwards 2002, Gunton 1992:79-98 & Polkinghorne 2001.

¹²⁹ See the important study by Edwards 1995. Edwards develops an ecological theology on the basis of the notion that Jesus is an incarnation of the wisdom (Sophia) of God. He shows how the universe is altered by this incarnation. Wisdom Christology then opens out into a view of the trinitarian God at work in an ongoing creation. See also Deane-Drummond 2000:35-72.

¹³⁰ See the important essays by McFague (2000, 2001) on various models for an ecological Christology.

¹³¹ See Carter 2000 with reference to oeuvre of Jürgen Moltmann.

¹³² See, especially, the full length study by Edwards 1995 as well as Boff 1997:174-186, Fox 1988, Gunton 1992, McFague 1993:159-196, Nash 1991:108 & Sittler 1972, also in Bouma-Prediger & Bakken 2000:191-201.

¹³³ For a critique of McFague’s Christology that plays down this “scandal of particularity”, see Santmire (2000:133):

For McFague, quite explicitly, Jesus Christ is not the body of God, surely not in any singular or unique sense: the cosmos is the body of God. Her cosmic Christology is, in fact, a christic cosmology. As she explains, her proposal “is to consider Jesus as paradigmatic of what we find everywhere: everything that is the sacrament of God (the universe as God’s body)” (the reference is to McFague 1993:162).

¹³⁴ Berry (1991:157) provides a brief interpretation of Mary as not only the mother of Jesus Christ and all believers but also as a symbol for the earth as our mother.

¹³⁵ A sizable number of contributions on an ecological pneumatology have been published over the last decade or so. See the contributions by Bergmann 1995, 2005, Chryssavgis 2000, Daneel 1992, 1999:207-

- presence?¹³⁶ Does the Spirit work independently of Christ in the cosmos? What implications would this have for the classic *filioque* controversy?¹³⁷
- * What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is called the “Giver of life”?¹³⁸ How can a pneumatological orientation help to ensure a trinitarian doctrine of creation and to integrate the themes of creation, providence, redemption and the completion of God’s work?
 - * How can a personalistic reduction of the doctrine of redemption be avoided?¹³⁹ Is the earth anything more than a mere stage on which the truly important drama of human salvation is played out? What is the ecological significance of the doctrines of justification and sanctification?¹⁴⁰ How can we make it clear that humans are redeemed *with* the material created order, not *from* it?¹⁴¹ What is the relative adequacy of traditional soteriological concepts such as forgiveness, healing, liberation, reconciliation and sacrifice (or amnesty, exorcism, expiation, nourishment, reconstruction) from an ecological perspective?¹⁴² How should the cosmic scope of the *redemptive work* of the Holy Spirit be understood?
 - * Most contributions to ecological theology emphasise the responsibility of the Christian church towards the environment. In this way they contribute to a new understanding of the mission of the church in the world. However, very little work has been done from the perspective of ecological theology on a reformulation of the doctrine of the church itself.¹⁴³ How should the identity and mission of the church be understood if God’s salvific purpose encompasses the whole earth? How does the reign of Christ in the church relate to God’s reign over the whole earth? In what sense can the church itself be understood as an ecological community?¹⁴⁴ What is

238, Jantzen 1995, McFague 2001:181-202, Moltmann 1992, 1997, Müller-Fahrenholz 1995, Rae 1994:81-93, Scott 2003:201-232, Sittler 1968 in Bouma-Prediger & Bakken 2000:59-75, Wallace 1996, 2000, 2005 & Welker 1994. Daneel (1992, 1999) argues from the perspective of African Christian theology that the “Earthkeeping Spirit” is Saviour, Healer, Protector and Liberator of the whole creation.

¹³⁶ Mark Wallace notes that the Spirit is not portrayed in the biblical roots of Christianity as a sky god, but as an Earth Spirit. He traces references to the Spirit as quickening and healing life force in terms of the four categories of earth, air, water and fire, for example as animating breath, healing wind, living water, cleansing fire and divine dove bearing fruit symbols such as an olive branch. See Wallace in Taylor 2005:377-9, Wallace 1996, 2005.

¹³⁷ See the discussion above. On the Spirit who dwells in the cosmos, with specific reference to the *filioque* controversy, see Boff 1997:158-173.

¹³⁸ See Edwards 2001, 2004. He suggests that the life-giving Spirit is the source of novelty in creation. The Spirit dwells in creation, but at the same time is also the power that enables creatures to transcend themselves (thus allowing for evolutionary change). He says: “The Spirit is the one who empowers the evolutionary unfolding of creation precisely as the one who relates each creature, bringing each into communion with the Trinity, and thus undergirding and enabling the communion of creatures among themselves” (Edwards 2001:56). See also Deane-Drummond 2000:113-152 & Johnson 1993.

¹³⁹ See the discussion on creation and redemption above. See also Daly 1988, Kehm 1992, Santmire 1985:217f & Theokritoff 2001.

¹⁴⁰ On the doctrine of justification, see the chapter on the “justification of life” in Moltmann 1992:123-143 and the doctoral dissertation by Arpels-Josiah 2006.

¹⁴¹ See Gregorios 1990:41.

¹⁴² See the index to the bibliography for some references in this regard. Soteriological concepts such as healing and liberation have been more popular in ecological theologies than others.

¹⁴³ For such contributions, see Field 2001, Golliher 1996, Santmire 2000:118f and the essays by Conradie *et al*, Hessel and Pedersen in the volume *Earth habitat*, edited by Hessel & Rasmussen 2001.

¹⁴⁴ See Daneel 1999:21-65, Jegen 1987 & Rasmussen 1987. Daneel (1999) describes the way in which the self-understanding of African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe has shifted from “faith-healing hospitals” to that of a “socio-political liberator” to a “deliverer from poverty” to an “environmental healer”.

the ecclesiological significance of the root metaphor of the household of God (“oikos”), especially if the scope of this household is extended beyond ecumenical fellowship to include a “wider ecumenicity” and the earth itself? Can the Christian notion of the “communion of the saints” be extended to include not only a ritual communion, the realm of saints, spirits and ancestors, but also the whole earth community?¹⁴⁵

- * How can a sacramental vision of the earth be conducive to an ecological ethos?¹⁴⁶ What is the ecological significance of the Christian sacraments,¹⁴⁷ with specific reference to the symbols of water, bread and wine?¹⁴⁸ What is the ecological significance of the sacraments of baptism and the holy communion? Could baptism, for example, be understood as a cleansing ceremony that includes the whole earth?¹⁴⁹ How can a eucharistic vision inform an ecological theology?¹⁵⁰
- * How should the Christian hope for a “new heaven and a new earth” be understood?¹⁵¹ Does Christian hope not harbour either a form of earth-denying escapism or the danger of unleashing the environmentally destructive myth of progress, the dream of future progress?¹⁵² What vision of Christian hope can do justice to the victims of past, including the non-human victims of environmental destruction? How should the continuity between the present world (the earth) and the new earth be understood? How should the finitude (mortality) of the cosmos, the earth and human beings be assessed?¹⁵³ Does Christian hope include the expectation that (human) mortality would be overcome in the eschaton? What is the ecological significance of the Christian hope, at a personal level, for the

¹⁴⁵ See McDaniel 1995, 1996 and Santmire 2000:102f for some reflections in this regard.

¹⁴⁶ Brinkman (1991, 1999) has perhaps done the most thorough investigation of the significance of the sacraments from an ecumenical / reformed perspective. He emphasises the eschatological relationship between creation and sacrament. In the sacramental vision, the whole creation in all her joys and sorrows is taken up in God’s love that enfolds the whole universe, that is given to us in Jesus Christ, and that is celebrated in the Eucharist. He argues that the relationship between creation and sacrament should be understood eschatologically. The celebration of the sacraments provides a sign of the eschaton. It constitutes something of heaven already on earth. The aim of creation is therefore understood through the sacraments. The whole creation must become a sacrament, that is, a sign of God’s gracious presence (1991:14). Brinkman also emphasises the discontinuity between creation and sacrament. Salvation is not the product of creation, nor can it be extrapolated from creation. The brokenness of creation remains an important problem even after the incarnation. Although what is earthly may become a carrier of salvation, salvation itself is not contained in the earth; it comes from God. See also Habgood 1990.

¹⁴⁷ See Hill (1998:123-154) on the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, penance and marriage. See also Ickert 1995.

¹⁴⁸ See Boucher-Colbert 1994, Cummings 1994, George 1990 & Scott 2004:243ff.

¹⁴⁹ See the brief comments by Santmire 2000:85f.

¹⁵⁰ See Bruteau 1991, George 1990, Grey 2005.

¹⁵¹ For contributions on eschatology and ecology, see the books by Conradie 2000, Haught 1993 and Moltmann 1989, 1996 and the articles by Auer 1985:271f, Barns 1998, Brett 2001, Bridger 1990, Conradie 2000, Deane-Drummond 2000:153-193, Haught 1996, Klink 1994, McCall 2004, McFague 1993:197-212, Olivier 1989, O’Loughlin 1999 & Schloemann 1973.

¹⁵² Thomas Berry argues, for example, that the Bible’s looking toward a future messianic age has set loose a drive toward progress and limitless development that is draining the earth of its natural resources at a calamitous rate. It is the biblical injunction to transform the world that has inspired and legitimated ecological recklessness. See Berry 1988:204-206, Haught 1993:16.

¹⁵³ See Betcher (1998) for a vigorous plea for “a cessation of the war against transience, limits and corporeality.”

resurrection of the body?¹⁵⁴ Can the ecological significance of the Christian notion of eternal life still be retrieved in the light of the widespread critique against the impact of Hellenistic dualism on Christian theology? What about traditional Christian discourse on the notions of heaven and hell and the final judgement?

- * How can the work of Father, Son and Spirit to create, sustain, redeem and consummate the whole created order be integrated with one another into a single history of salvation without subsuming one aspect into another?¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

These questions obviously cannot be addressed here in any detail. Although much work has already been done, there remains a need for a systematic discussion of each of the classic Christian doctrines from an ecological perspective.

¹⁵⁴ For a response to this question from an ecofeminist perspective, see Ruether 2000. See also the article by Green 1996, drawing on the work of Halkes, Johnson, McFague, Primavesi, Ruether, and Sölle. See also Conradie 2002 & Haught 1993:113-142.

¹⁵⁵ See Gregorios 1990:43 & Kehm 1992.

CHAPTER 10

Models for an ecological Christian theology

10.1 Various typologies

The proliferation of literature in ecological theology has led to the need for a clarification of the myriad of approaches which are followed in this regard. Various typologies have been proposed to distinguish different approaches to an ecological theology. In the discussion below a number of these typologies will be briefly mentioned.¹ Most of these typologies focus on the various ways in which the place of humanity in creation is understood. In the discussion below I will list a number of these typologies in alphabetical order. The typology proposed by John Haught will then be used as a point of departure for a survey of current approaches to a Christian ecological theology. This typology is in my view particularly helpful since it focuses on a theological rationale for earthkeeping.

- * Sigurd Bergmann distinguishes three paths for theological responses to ecological challenges on the basis of the ways in which theological convictions are related to contextual considerations. The first approach described as “conjunction” poses a fundamental distinction between faith and life, God and nature, before attempting to reconcile these. A thick description of Christian confessions is followed by attempts at translating the implications of such convictions for ecological challenges. The second “syncretistic” approach (e.g. Matthew Fox) eliminates the boundary between an interpretation of faith and of life. It redescribes an ecological understanding of nature in the (Christian) language of mysticism and spirituality. Bergmann favours an approach of “critical integration” where theological descriptions of faith offer a specifically Christian interpretation of life and of nature.²
- * James Gustafson’s typology focuses on the position of humanity in creation and in relationship to God. He distinguishes between the position of humanity: 1) as despots over nature, 2) as having dominion over nature, 3) as being stewards of God to nature, 4) as being subordinate to nature, and 5) as participating in God’s nature.³
- * Douglas John Hall’s typology also focuses on the place of humanity in nature. He distinguishes between views of humanity “above” nature, “in” nature and “with” nature.⁴

¹ See also other typologies proposed by McPherson 1991, Osborn 1993, 1995 (based on the contrast between confessional-reconstructive and liberal-constructive) & Scharper 1998:23-52. See also the overview by Smith (1997) in the “What are they saying about ...?” series.

² Bergmann 2005:41-47.

³ Gustafson 1994:77-110.

⁴ Hall 1990:191-214.

- * In a thorough chapter on “The flowering of ecotheology”, Michael Northcott proposes a typology that distinguishes between the following three approaches to an ecological theology:⁵
 - * *Humanocentric* approaches where the focus is on the unique position and responsibility of human beings and on a concern for human justice. In this category Northcott includes diverse thinkers such as Teilhard de Chardin (and his followers such as Thomas Berry and Sean McDonagh), evangelicals such as Francis Schaeffer, Robin Attfield, and Lawrence Osborn, the covenant theology of the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox emphasis on humans as priests of creation, the contributions by Pope John Paul II and Rosemary Ruether’s feminist critique of patriarchy.
 - * *Theocentric* approaches where the classic Christian distinction between God and the world is retained. Northcott cites the oeuvre of Jürgen Moltmann as the prime example, together with contributions from James Nash, Stephen Clark and Andrew Linzey.
 - * *Ecocentric* approaches where the focus is on God’s presence in the world (often leading to a form of panentheism). Here Northcott cites the contributions of process theologians (such as John Cobb and Jay McDaniel), together with those of Matthew Fox and various feminist theologians (such as Grace Jantzen and Sallie McFague). He argues that such approaches offer no grounds for distinguishing the being of God from the life of creation. For Northcott, this approach cannot offer a defensible account of moral evil.⁶
- * Max Oelschlaeger divides Christian and Jewish accounts of caring for creation into four groups: conservative, moderate, liberal and radical.⁷ This typology is based on methodological considerations and related to the ways in which theologies relate the creation story to the natural sciences. In “conservative” approaches the biblical story forms the point of departure. By contrast, the scientific reconstruction of the story of the universe is regarded as primary in “radical” approaches.
- * A less interpretative typology is proposed by Parker & Richards who simply distinguish between contributions from denominational and ecumenical theologians, liberation theologians (including Latin American, ecofeminist / ecowomanist and indigenous theologians), process theologians and official church declarations.⁸
- * In the concluding essay to the important edited volume on *Christianity and ecology* (2000) Rosemary Ruether suggests that Christian ecological theologies fall into two different types, which she describes as the *covenantal* and the *sacramental* types. The covenantal type is popular among Protestant Christians and draws inspiration from the Bible and the covenantal tradition to emphasise a commitment for right relationships within the earth community. The sacramental type draws on the Bible and on patristic and medieval mysticism to speak to the heart, to inspire a vision of the sacred and to express an ecstatic experience of communion within the earth

⁵ Northcott 1996:124-164.

⁶ Northcott 1996:162.

⁷ Oelschlaeger 1994. See also the assessment of this typology in Scott 1998:10-13.

⁸ Parker & Richards 1996.

community.⁹ Ruether argues that these two types of ecological theology can complement one another.

- * In his work, *Nature reborn*, Paul Santmire distinguishes three forms of ecological theology, namely apologetic, reconstructionist, and revisionist approaches. This typology is based on the way in which various ecological theologies defend (see Thomas Derr, Richard John Neuhaus), completely reconstruct (see Matthew Fox) or revise (see Joseph Sittler, James Nash and Santmire's own work¹⁰) the Christian tradition in its classic (Nicene) manifestations. One key issue that distinguishes these three approaches is that of stewardship. For apologists, stewardship is an ethical keystone. Reconstructionists reject the notion of stewardship altogether as a result of its inescapable managerial and manipulative nuances. Revisionists often share this critique and seek to reshape the notion of *dominium terrae* thoroughly.¹¹ (See the discussion on stewardship below.) Santmire argues in favour of such a revisionist approach.¹²
- * Peter Scott proposes a fourfold typology based on two contrasts, namely between provincialist / secularist approaches and modernising / anti-modernising approaches. Provincialist approaches draw heavily on traditional Christian doctrinal resources, while "secularist" approaches call for a thorough reinterpretation of the Christian faith in the face of contemporary knowledge of the world and philosophies of nature. The anthropology of modernising approaches assumes that knowledge of God is mediated through the structures of human consciousness and tends to stress human dominion over nature. By contrast, anti-modernising approaches focus on the doctrine of creation which is understood Christologically or pneumatologically. This leads to a fourfold typology which distinguishes between "modernising provincialism", "anti-modernising provincialism", "modernising secularism" and "anti-modernising secularism".¹³

10.2 John Haught's typology

In his work *The promise of nature*, John Haught has identified three basic approaches for an ecological theology, namely an apologetic, a sacramental and an eschatological approach.¹⁴ In the discussion below, Haught's typology will be followed for more detailed a survey of various forms of ecological theology.

a) An apologetic approach

According to the first model, neither the Bible nor Christianity, but our failure to accept its core message, lies at the root of the environmental crisis. We therefore need to bring our environmental policies into conformity with the time-tested message of the Christian gospel.

⁹ See Ruether 1993: 205-253, 1995, 1999, 2000.

¹⁰ See, especially, Santmire 1970, 1985, 2000. For a critical discussion of his work, see Fowler 1995:92ff.

¹¹ Santmire 2000:132, n25.

¹² Santmire 2000:6f.

¹³ Scott 1998.

¹⁴ In a later contribution Haught (2003) renames these in the following way: a tradition-centred approach, a sacramental approach and a cosmic purpose approach. See also the contribution by Mortensen (1995) in which he employs the same categories to offer a review of different approaches to ecological theology.

The anthropological thrust of this model is to move beyond a theology of dominion understood as domination.¹⁵ The notion of “man” (!) as the master, the lord of creation, which is to be subdued and ruled over, is rejected. For too long this notion allowed people to plunder and ravage nature for its resources. The command in Genesis 1:27 is not interpreted as domination or military conquest, but as caring,¹⁶ protecting, nurturing, gardening, cultivating or serving (i.e. as suggested in Gen 2:15). Creation is not there purely for the sake of human beings. On this basis, there is a widespread consensus that the two motifs that (a) human beings have been created in the “image of God”, and (b) that human beings have been given “dominion” over the earth, cannot be used to legitimate the exploitation of the earth.

A theology of stewardship is proposed as an alternative to such domination. This suggests a more harmonious and environmentally sensitive relationship between humanity and creation. Human beings should be regarded as the stewards, caretakers, priests,¹⁷ custodians, shepherds or guardians¹⁸ of creation. The metaphor of the shepherd may be used to epitomise stewardship: The good shepherd nurtures, sustains and protects the flock but does not refrain from using sheep as a source of meat, wool and hides.¹⁹ The task of stewardship is the Benedictine one of “tending the garden.”²⁰ This fosters an environmental ethos where emphasis is placed on using resources wisely and justly,²¹ remembering that they are not our own, but only entrusted to us for our care. Humans retain this dominion only as long as humankind cares for the land

¹⁵ This is the thrust of a number of early contributions, often in response to Lynn White’s critique of Christianity. See Barr 1972, Black 1970 & Schaeffer 1970. For a discussion of such contributions, see Callicott 1991.

¹⁶ See Abraham (1994:69) and Hallman (1994) for the notion of an “ethics of care”.

¹⁷ Gregorios (1987:82f) argues that humanity has a special vocation as the “priests of creation, as the mediator through whom God manifests himself to creation and redeems it. Sherrard (1987) argues that humanity is the mediator between heaven and earth, God and God’s creation. It is only through fulfilling this role as mediator that the world itself can fulfil its destiny and be transfigured in the light of the presence of God. Human beings are the priests of God, offering the world to God in praise and worship. Ware (1997:22) comments that: “As cosmic priests we stand within nature, not above it. With creation, we give praise to the Creator and offer, in gratitude, to God what God has given to us: bread and wine.” See also Getui (1996) and Kallistos of Diokleia (1997). For a critical assessment of the anthropocentrism and hierarchical orientation underlying the notion of being “priests of creation”, see Bauckham 2002 & Northcott 1996:131-135. For a response to such criticisms, see Theokritoff 2005. She argues that priesthood is one of several complementary images in Orthodox theology and that human priesthood should not be confused with a sacerdotal universe. Priesthood language cannot be understood apart from a cosmic liturgy in which all creatures participate. She then suggests that “the praise offered by all creation is not an end in itself, but a mode of being intended to culminate in the transfiguration of all things in Christ” (Theokritoff 2005:357). The non-human world, too, awaits its salvation.

¹⁸ Osborn 1993.

¹⁹ See Desjardins, J 2006. *Environmental ethics: An introduction to environmental philosophy*. Toronto:Wadsworth, p. 39.

²⁰ See the title of the volumes of essays edited by Granberg-Michaelson (1987). For Granberg-Michaelson, the Bible stresses God’s care for the earth and our duty to nurture creation. He remains ambivalent about the notion of stewardship itself and emphasises a deep, complete caring (as is indicated in the metaphor of “tending the garden”). This is distinct from the notion of human authority in a hierarchical universe.

²¹ See Bauckham 2006:43: “The value of the notion of stewardship is that it formally introduced the notion of justice into the human relationship to nature ... As steward responsible to the divine King, humanity has legal obligations to administer the earth justly and without cruelty.”

properly. Haught argues that the vast majority of Christian theologians follow such an apologetic approach.²²

The work of Douglas John Hall provides perhaps the best example of such a theology of stewardship. In his influential study on stewardship, *The steward, a Biblical symbol come of age*,²³ Hall describes a steward as “one who has been given the responsibility for the management and service of something belonging to another, and his [sic] office presupposes a particular kind of trust on the part of the owner or master.”²⁴ The steward is, on the one hand, the rightful representative of the employer – even though he or she may be a servant or even technically a slave. On the other hand, the steward is strictly accountable to the employer and can be deprived of his or her commissioned authority.²⁵ The steward is therefore manager and servant at the same time. The English word steward is a translation of the Greek *oikonomos*. Stewardship therefore requires *oikonomia*, that is, responsibility and accountability for planning and administering the affairs of the household (*oikos*).²⁶ For Hall, stewardship implies that we are responsible for the whole earth, that we are together responsible for the whole earth, that this responsibility includes the non-human as well as the human world, that this responsibility must seek to express itself in just and merciful political forms and that this responsibility must be exercised in the light not only of the immediate situation, but of the near and distant future as well.²⁷ Stewardship therefore cannot be understood as a licence for exploitative subjugation. From this assertion, Hall develops the following dimensions of the symbol of stewardship:

- * A *theological* dimension: It is God whose affairs the steward is to manage. Against all human presumption, it has to be confessed that all authority is ultimately from God. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.
- * A *Christological* dimension: Jesus Christ fulfills the office of steward, redefined as servant. Our stewardship is not only exemplified by Jesus; it is the prior stewardship of Christ into which we are initiated by the Spirit and through faith. It is his stewardship in which, by God’s grace, we may participate. A theology of stewardship is one of grace, not only of law. Stewardship can only spring from first receiving the gift of new life.
- * An *ecclesiastical* dimension: The church is a stewarding community. As the body of Christ, the community of disciples is being incorporated into the work of the great steward. Disciples thus become servants and followers of the Suffering Servant.

²² See Douglas John Hall (1986, 1990) for one of the most important attempts to retrieve an ecological notion of Christian stewardship. See also Cooper 1990:41f, DeWitt 1994, 1996, 1998, 2006, Fowler 1995:76-90, Osborn 1990, 1993, Watson 2004:58-86, Wilkinson 1991:275-340 & Zylstra 1999. A recent volume of (mostly previously published) essays entitled *Environmental stewardship* (edited by RJ Berry 2006) offers an overview of the history of the notion of stewardship, the various criticisms which have been expressed against it and a survey of attempts to consolidate and apply the notion of responsible stewardship. Most of the contributions in popular reformed literature in South Africa focus on a theology of stewardship as well. See, for example, Du Plessis 1988, Du Toit 1989, Engelbrecht 1988 & Robinson 1991, 1993. For contributions from elsewhere in Africa which adopt the imagery of stewardship, see Akhong’o 1994, Chakanza 2002, Gecaga 1999 & Gitau 2000:104-106, 143f.

²³ See Hall 1983 (revised edition 1990) as well as his two subsequent studies on stewardship (Hall 1985, 1986).

²⁴ Hall 1990:32, with specific reference to the Old Testament use of this metaphor.

²⁵ Hall 1990:34.

²⁶ Hall 1990:41.

²⁷ Hall 1990:148.

Furthermore, the church is not an end-in-itself. Against the pursuit of ecclesiastical power and ambition, the steward community exists to serve the needs of the world.

- * An *anthropological* dimension: Not only Christians but all human beings have stewardship as their vocation. The metaphor is therefore applicable to humanity as a whole who are called to serve one another. In this way a “new humanity” (Col 3:10) may emerge.
- * An *eschatological* dimension: The life of a steward is one of being conscious of the coming End. Stewards must be watchful (Luke 12), trustworthy (1 Cor 4:2) and without blame (Titus 1:7). The impending judgment will begin with the household of God (1 Pet 4:17).²⁸

The pathos of Hall’s theology of stewardship is to affirm God’s love for the world (*kosmos*) and to counter a form of Christianity that is docetic, idealist, world-denying and retains the abiding Hellenistic suspicion, perhaps even the Manichean disdain for matter.²⁹ Drawing on Bonhoeffer, he urges that the world must not be prematurely abandoned. He says: “This world, for all its pain and anguish of spirit, in spite of its injustice and cruelty, the deadly competition of the species and their never wholly successful struggle to survive – this world is the world for which God has offered up his ‘only begotten Son’.”³⁰

The connotations of the category of stewardship can be further developed. In his somewhat reactionary work, *Guardians of creation*, Lawrence Osborn suggests that stewardship implies preservation and nurture. Firstly, we have the right to use natural resources for human sustenance. However, that should be done in a sustainable way. The principles of sufficiency and frugality suggest that we should be content with the satisfaction of immediate needs, that we should respect the integrity of non-human creation and that we should recognise the inter-dependence of human and nonhuman creatures. Here Osborne draws on Calvin’s classic formulation of such frugality:

We possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition, that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits, that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred or ruined by neglect. Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let every one regard himself as a steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.³¹

Secondly, Osborn suggests that, beyond mere maintenance, we are called to interact freely and creatively with the nonhuman world. This allows for arts and crafts, for science and technology and for the encouragement of diversity and novelty in creation.³²

²⁸ Hall 1990:42-48.

²⁹ Hall 1990:255.

³⁰ Hall 1990:120.

³¹ See Calvin’s discussion of Gen 2:15 in his *Commentary on Genesis*, also quoted in Osborn 1993:141-142.

³² Osborn 1993:140-144.

Osborn suggests that these connotations are captured by the notion of being “guardians” of nature.

Within the Orthodox tradition, human beings are often portrayed as the “priests” and not so much the “stewards” of creation. In his important study, *The human presence*, Paulos Mar Gregorios argues that humanity has a special vocation as the “priests of creation”, as the mediator through whom God manifests himself to creation and redeems it. Humanity acts as the representative of creation, offering the world back to the Creator, just as the priest offers bread and wine to God on behalf of all people. Moreover, following the example of Christ, humanity has to function as the mediator between heaven and earth, God and God’s creation. Christ has become part of creation, and in his created body he lifted creation up to God. Humankind must participate in this eternal priesthood of God.³³ It is only through fulfilling this role as mediator that the world itself can fulfil its destiny and be transfigured in the light of the presence of God. Human beings are the priests of God, offering the world to God in praise and worship. Kallistos Ware suggests on this basis that: “As cosmic priests we stand within nature, not above it. With creation, we give praise to the Creator and offer, in gratitude, to God what God has given to us: bread and wine.”³⁴ Several ecological characteristics may indeed be associated with such a notion of human priesthood: mediation, prayer for creation, righteous action and self-sacrificial service on behalf of others.³⁵

However, the notion that humans are the priests through which creation praises the glory of God has been criticised as anthropocentric since it seems to encourage the remaking and hominisation of the whole biosphere in the human image and for the needs of humans.³⁶ Ruth Page adds that an emphasis on human priesthood fosters the presumption that there is no relationship between God and the natural world unless this is mediated through human beings. This is typically based on claims for human uniqueness: since humans alone are conscious of God, humans have to mediate between insentient creatures and God. This view misses the point that God is as conscious of the non-human creation as humankind, and that God therefore does not depend on human mediation.³⁷ Richard Bauckham adds that the non-human creation does not need humans to offer praise to the Creator on its behalf. The whole of creation can sing God’s praises without human aid.³⁸

The strengths of a theology based on the notions of stewardship, guardianship or priesthood are many. One of the core elements of the metaphor of stewardship is its emphasis on human responsibility.³⁹ Another strength is related to the recognition that God acts in the world in and through human (and other forms of) agency, epitomised in the life and work of Jesus Christ, and not in an interventionist way “directly from above”. In an article entitled “Stewards of shalom”, South African theologian David Field identifies the following strengths of the notion of stewardship:

³³ Gregorios 1987:82-89. See also Zizioulas 1993.

³⁴ Ware 1997:22.

³⁵ See Osborn 1993:144-149.

³⁶ See Bauckham 1999, 2000 & Northcott 1996:131-135.

³⁷ Page 1996:162.

³⁸ Bauckham 2000:104.

³⁹ See also Hall 1990:25-29.

(1) It emphasizes that the earth belongs to God and not to human beings and thus human beings do not have the right to use and abuse the earth as they please. (2) It emphasizes that human beings are responsible for the way in which they use the earth and its inhabitants. (3) It emphasizes that humanity is commissioned to protect, care for and promote the flourishing of the nonhuman creation. (4) It emphasizes the dignity and value of human persons as representatives of God in creation. The symbol has thus been particularly attractive to those who are disempowered and oppressed by the dominant political and economic order. (5) The model for the steward is the self-sacrificial life and death of Christ and hence stewardship involves a lifestyle of sacrifice on behalf of both fellow human beings and the nonhuman creation.⁴⁰

Despite its considerable influence in the church and beyond, the metaphor of stewardship *as metaphor* has often come under severe criticism in ecological theology. The following arguments may be noted in this regard:

- * The notion of stewardship is often regarded as a *too managerial, androcentric⁴¹ and Eurocentric concept* to support the ecological ethos and vision of the place of humanity in creation which is needed today.⁴² The managerial steward is a sanctified version of the technocrat!⁴³ It is too reminiscent of the ideals of Victorian colonialism, carrying the same implicit assumptions of superiority over inferior beings, and justifying lordship and mastery instead of fellowship and companionship.⁴⁴ The term stewardship is the flipside of the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Stewardship is “the ideology of ‘civilisers’ who had promulgated neo-European ways laced with imperialistic and racist notions.”⁴⁵ Any notion of stewardship as “subduing the earth” therefore may well be rejected by those who have been subdued in the process. It builds on the false assumption that we are skilful enough to manage everything, including ecological systems.⁴⁶ It still reduces nature to nothing but an object given into our hands for safekeeping and good management.⁴⁷ Even though the emphasis is on responsibility instead of domination, the management model assumes that we human beings know the best.⁴⁸ As Michael Northcott argues: “The fundamental problem with this metaphor is the implication that humans are effectively in control of nature, its managers or, as Heidegger prefers, its guardians. And yet so much of recent environmental history teaches us that we are not in fact in control of the biosphere. Climate, oceans, ecosystems are all affected dramatically by human actions but these actions frequently produce consequences which were entirely unforeseen by their human progenitors. ... Human experience teaches us that this kind of master-servant

⁴⁰ Field 2002:383-384.

⁴¹ This has led to an incisive critique of the notion of stewardship in ecofeminist literature. See Johnson 1993, McFague 1993, Praetorius 1994, Ruether 1983, 1992 & Stortz 1991.

⁴² See, for example, Granberg-Michaelson 1990:12.

⁴³ See Hall (1990:234f) who acknowledges this danger of overestimating our managerial skills. Hall argues that the symbol of stewardship is nevertheless more appropriate than any other available metaphors.

⁴⁴ Page 1996:159.

⁴⁵ Rasmussen 1996:235.

⁴⁶ See Oelschlaeger 1994:44.

⁴⁷ Gregorios 1987:84.

⁴⁸ Hallman 1992:64f, 101, 1994:6.

relationship is not so likely to produce care and responsibility as a more participative sense of shared responsibility.⁴⁹

- * The notion of stewardship still *assumes human supremacy among the species*. It sets humans beings over non-human nature and therefore cannot avoid an anthropocentric theology. The category of stewardship “falls into the conceptual trap of the hierarchical otherness of humans *vis-à-vis* nonhuman creation.”⁵⁰
- * Furthermore, the notion of stewardship tends to *assume a relationship between humanity and nature*. This is based on a relational anthropology where our threefold relationships, namely with God, fellow human beings and nature are typically discussed. Such a relational anthropology may be criticised for being rather formalist and arid. It encourages human beings to view themselves as distinct from and superior to the nonhuman creation. As Anna Peterson notes: “The stewardship ethic still places human beings apart from nature, describing them as qualitatively different from and thus somehow responsible for the rest of creation.”⁵¹ To speak of a relationship between humanity and nature (even a harmonious relationship) tends to maintain and not prevent a harmful hierarchy and alienation. I do not have a *relationship* with my own body. I *am* my own body. This may be affirmed as long as bodiliness is not regarded in a reductionist way.
- * The theology of dominion or stewardship subsequently *fails to accentuate that we belong to the earth more than it belongs to us*, that we are more dependent on it than it is on us, that we are *of* the earth and not living *on* the earth.⁵² It seems to retain an affinity with an anthropocentric worldview and ethos.⁵³ An ecological theology needs to enhance our understanding of the place of humanity *in* and with nature.⁵⁴ It must show that creation has a value because it is God’s creation and not because of its utility for humanity. The problem which has to be addressed here goes much deeper than the responsible management of something (nature) which exists outside of ourselves.⁵⁵ An ecological theology needs to enhance our understanding of the place of humanity *within* the earth community. An ecological understanding of the place and vocation of humanity in the earth community should therefore explore alternatives such as companionship⁵⁶ (literally sharing bread with one another), solidarity,⁵⁷ and a co-existence with other species based on gratitude, mercy and respect for otherness.⁵⁸
- * A theology of stewardship *fails to recognise that ecosystems have thrived for millions or years without human assistance*. Astrophysicists and biological scientists suggest that human beings are simply an integral part of nature (and the evolution of natural ecosystems). Leonardo Boff notes that this emphasis on nature (especially life on earth) as an integrated organism (often referred to as *Gaia*) is perhaps the most

⁴⁹ Northcott 1996:129.

⁵⁰ Clifford 1995:185.

⁵¹ Peterson 2001:11.

⁵² See Haught 1993:101.

⁵³ Rasmussen 1996:232f.

⁵⁴ See Hall’s own proposal (1990:205-214) that the preposition “with” is more appropriate to express the presence of humanity with nature.

⁵⁵ Gregorios 1987:88.

⁵⁶ Cooper 1990:57, also Page 1996:154-158.

⁵⁷ This is the proposal of Clifford (1995), arguing from an ecofeminist perspective.

⁵⁸ See also Fern 2002:213-214.

basic intuition of the environmental movement.⁵⁹ Ruether agrees: “Clearly anthropocentric claims to have been given “dominion” over the Earth, and over all its plants and animals, appears absurd in the light of 4,599,600,000 years in which Earth got along without humans at all.”⁶⁰ Or in the words of Richard Bauckham, “... it may be that the image of stewardship is still too freighted with the baggage of the modern project of technological domination of nature. Can we entirely free it of the implication that nature is always better off when managed by us, that nature needs our benevolent intrusions, that it is our job to turn the whole world into a well-tended garden inhabited by well-cared-for pets.”⁶¹

- * The rhetoric of numerous appeals for proper stewardship is primarily *aimed at people in positions of authority and financial responsibility*. This assumes considerable social and economic power. The world’s poor, landless and marginalised are therefore not the primary interlocutors of a theology of stewardship. For the many millions of people who are poverty-stricken and own virtually nothing, the concept of stewardship is largely meaningless.⁶² Although all persons could exercise some responsibility for their immediate environment, the relatively powerless should not be burdened with an inappropriate sense of guilt in this regard.
- * There is, admittedly, a counter-argument to this criticism of the metaphor of stewardship. Larry Rasmussen argues that: “Both the Jews and early Christians understood “image of God” and “dominion” as a message of cosmic dignity that affirmed human agency and responsibility. From the perspective of the world’s less powerful ... to be named by God the custodians of creation is an empowering word. The steward model empowers such people to recognize themselves as created in the image of God – the subjects, not the objects, of history.”⁶³ Douglas John Hall, with reference to this argument of Rasmussen, insists that neither domination of the world, nor withdrawal from the world meet the requirements of the contemporary situation of environmental devastation. On this basis he criticises the newly acquired concern of the affluent classes who “assuage their incipient guilt about nature’s deterioration by discovering how truly they have always loved the wilderness” – a wilderness in which *homo sapiens* is nowhere to be seen.⁶⁴
- * Although corporate stewardship is possible, the metaphor of stewardship *appeals mainly to individual responsibility*, and may divert attention from problems rooted in the economic and political structures of society.⁶⁵
- * The metaphor of stewardship reflects a hierarchy of power which is based on an economic model of the ancient world. According to the metaphor of stewardship, *God seems to be viewed as an absent landlord* who has put human beings in charge of the master’s property.⁶⁶ God’s presence and actions in the world are mediated only through humans. Alternatively, this task to govern and order nature wisely is modelled on that of a benevolent monarch or patriarch. Neither of these two images of God seems appropriate to convey God’s loving presence in the world. Instead of

⁵⁹ Boff 1995:69.

⁶⁰ Ruether 1992:45.

⁶¹ Bauckham 2006:45.

⁶² Cooper 1990:57.

⁶³ Rasmussen 1996:233.

⁶⁴ Hall 1993:351.

⁶⁵ Cooper 1990:57.

⁶⁶ See Habel 2000:50, also McDonagh 1994:130.

this view of God, it may be far more appropriate to argue that it not human beings but God who is the *Oikonomos*.⁶⁷

- * It is *not necessarily clear that stewardship concerns the well-being of the whole earth community*. Debates on sustainability, environmental justice and the rights of future generations often remain anthropocentric in that the focus is on present and future human needs.⁶⁸
- * It is also questionable whether the image is *comprehensive enough to include the multifaceted relationship between humanity and the rest of creation* reflected in the biblical traditions.⁶⁹ Moreover, the terminology of stewardship is not directly used in the Bible and has been rarely used in the history of Christian theology to describe the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation.

In the light of these criticisms, David Hallman notes that, perhaps, "... we are in the early stages of a profound conceptual shift in theology that will move us far beyond stewardship theology as a response to human exploitation of God's creation."⁷⁰ The contributions to ecological theology from feminist theology and the insights emerging from indigenous peoples may indeed help us to move beyond the conceptual prison of human supremacy. Douglas Chial also argues that the jubilee ethic, the Sabbath as a day of rest for the whole creation and a Christ-like attitude that seeks to minister and suffer with creation, to heal and liberate creation, may signal such a shift.⁷¹ Chingota proposes a partnership model where humans act in partnership with both God and the earth to free the earth from the injustices to which it is subjected. He says: "Therefore humans should work in partnership with God whenever they work in partnership with the earth in order that eventually the whole creation, humans included, can offer to God sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving."⁷²

Can the notion of stewardship still be retrieved in the light of these criticisms? In an attempt to address such concerns, David Field creatively suggests that the metaphor of stewardship could be reinterpreted in terms of being God's stewards to participate in the actions of God's Spirit to bring God's *shalom* to the earth. We are therefore not primarily stewards of the earth, but stewards of God's *shalom*.⁷³ Nevertheless, one has to ask whether the imagery employed in the metaphor of stewardship *as metaphor* does not assume a bygone feudal dispensation. If there is a need in a democratic dispensation for a thorough reinterpretation of the metaphor of the "kingdom" of God, does the same not apply to the metaphor of stewardship?

Despite these many criticisms, the value of the notion of stewardship should not be denied. James Nash insists that an ecological commitment is far more important than verbal purity.⁷⁴ The most important question is not *whether* we are stewards, but *how* we exercise our stewardship, that is, our earthkeeping responsibilities.⁷⁵ John Cobb agrees

⁶⁷ See the notion of *God the Economist* suggested by Meeks 1989.

⁶⁸ See Van den Brom 1997, 1998:440-441.

⁶⁹ See Bauckham 2000.

⁷⁰ Hallman 1994:6.

⁷¹ Chial 1996:59.

⁷² Chingota 2002:18. See also Sanmire 2003.

⁷³ See Field 2002, especially 2002:393. On the basis of being stewards of God's *shalom*, Field develops an attractive trinitarian ecological ethics.

⁷⁴ Nash 1991:107.

⁷⁵ Wilkinson 1991:308.

that the most important question is how we should exercise our responsibility, not whether we have such a responsibility. We have dominion (responsibility) whether we like it or not.⁷⁶ The question is not whether humans should exercise a responsibility within their environments, but how (with what metaphors) this responsibility should be described.⁷⁷ Larry Rasmussen also senses that there is at least a shared consensus in the debates on the motif of stewardship that 1) human beings do not own the earth, and 2) that “the earth is the Lord’s.”⁷⁸ The strength of the image of steward is that it associates human dignity with human responsibility. Paul Santmire wisely suggests that the notion of responsible stewardship is not necessarily theologically wrong, but that it is too susceptible to distortion and that there are other key metaphors available which may be less vulnerable to abuse.⁷⁹ He says:

Traditionally, the words dominion and stewardship have been employed in this connection (“righteous cooperation with nature”), but I now believe that it is best to retire them, for the foreseeable future, so that we do not have to explain constantly to others and to ourselves what they really mean and can instead simply say with conviction what we really mean. These terms still carry too much baggage from the anthropocentric and indeed androcentric theology of the past; they are still too fraught with the heavy images of management, control, and exploitation of persons and resources.⁸⁰

In the choice of such metaphors to indicate human responsibility different contexts should be taken into account. There is no one metaphor which will be able to inspire human responsibility in all contexts. As Christopher Southgate has argued, “a range of different understandings of our human role (including that of stewardship) is needed in different contexts.”⁸¹ The problem emerges when one metaphor is generalised to describe the place of humanity in the earth community. More specifically, differences in power relationships have to be noted. The metaphor of stewardship (if understood as the manager appointed by an absentee landlord) reflects a position of considerable power. For people who do find themselves in management positions the metaphor of stewardship may provide an appropriate corrective. By contrast, the same metaphor may be used to keep persons with a relative lack of decision making power in servile positions. In other words: the metaphor of stewardship may be appropriate in contexts where people serve in management positions within particular ecosystems (for example on commercial farms or in forestry departments). It becomes problematic when the metaphor is extended to characterise the place of humans within the earth community in general.

Finally, it is important to note that, whatever metaphors are employed to describe the responsibility of human beings within their environments, the meaning of such

⁷⁶ Cobb 1992:112-113

⁷⁷ Berry (2006:10) refers to the “indispensable imperative of stewardship” but fails to recognise that, while the sense of responsibility may be indispensable, the metaphor of stewardship is not.

⁷⁸ Rasmussen 1996:236.

⁷⁹ Santmire 1992:64.

⁸⁰ Santmire 2000:120. Santmire (2003) proposes that a theology of “partnership with nature” be adopted instead of one of stewardship.

⁸¹ Southgate 2006:195. He describes a spectrum of positions in this regard, ranging from the view of humans as co-creators (Hefner), or even co-redeemers, to the absorption of humans within the natural world (deep ecology).

metaphors cannot be regarded as self-evident. Within a Christian context they have to be filled with the proper content so that the whole work of God as Father, Son and Spirit – creation, providence, salvation and eschatological completion – is taken into account. The danger is that a theology of stewardship, in particular, can all too easily be reduced to imply the maintenance of the present order, without recognising the Christian vision for the transformation of the whole of creation.⁸²

b) A sacramental approach

The second model which Haught identifies is that of a *sacramental* approach to ecological theology. It focuses less on normative religious texts and more on the sacral⁸³ and even revelatory character of nature itself. Whereas the apologetic approach would discuss the relationship between human beings and nature, the sacramental approach sacralises the unity of humanity with nature. The integrity of creation is sacred and must be protected through an ecological vision and ethos. The sacramental character of nature is rediscovered and the disenchantment of nature in Christianity is rejected. The notion of nature as sacrament implies that nature is a locus where the divine presence is revealed and where human beings should live and act in conscious awareness of this divine presence. To celebrate this divine presence, a re-enchantment of nature in ritual and in myth is called for.

Creation is also brought to the centre of theological attention instead of subordinating it to the theme of redemption. The history of humanity (and God's presence in the lives of human beings) is regarded as a mere episode in the history of the cosmos. The divorce of nature from history is thus rejected. Redemption is not anthropocentrically conceived as the redemption of humanity only, but as one aspect of God's creative presence in this cosmic history. This calls for innovative reinterpretations of the doctrines of revelation, God, the trinity, Christ, the Cosmic Spirit, creation, anthropology, sin, reconciliation, the church and eschatological consummation. A new spirituality, which encourages an enjoyment of nature as our true home *and* the abode of God, is also called for.⁸⁴

The following examples of such a sacramental approach to an ecological theology may be identified:

- * Albert Schweitzer's famous notion of "reverence for life" often serves as a source of inspiration for biocentric approaches to the sacredness of all forms of life.⁸⁵ It expresses a moral vision where a person "shatters no ice crystal that sparkles in the sun, tears no leaf from its tree, breaks off no flower, and is careful not to crush any insect as he walks."⁸⁶

⁸² See Rae 2006:310.

⁸³ For Granberg-Michaelson (1994:104) the question, "How holy is creation?" remains unresolved in ecumenical thinking. The Christian tradition has maintained a distinction between worshipping the Creator and the creation. However, since the immanence of God's Spirit is often stressed, a more careful discussion of this issue is required.

⁸⁴ Haught 1993:93-101.

⁸⁵ See Altner 1974, 1998 & Gansterer 1997. See McDaniel (1989) on the need for a life-centred ethic and spirituality. See Daly (1990) for a retrieval of Schweitzer's notion of reverence for life for ecofeminism.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Edwards 1998:135.

- * The creation spirituality of Thomas Berry,⁸⁷ Matthew Fox⁸⁸ and their followers such as Brian Swimme,⁸⁹ James Conlon⁹⁰ and others is particularly influential in this regard.⁹¹ This approach calls for an awareness, in awe and wonder, of the grandeur of God's gifts and presence in creation. In this way it hopes to restore a sense of wholeness and unity with God, humanity and the rest of the created world.
- * Many ecofeminist and ecowomanist contributions have promoted a spirituality in which values such as care, reciprocity and diversity, the sacredness of the world and the wholeness of body, sensuality and sexuality are emphasised. See the discussion in chapter 8.4 for more detail in this regard.
- * The vision of community, of the harmonious relationship of humanity and nature in indigenous theologies within a Native American, Latin American, Aboriginal, Philippine, Pacific or African context. See the discussion in chapter 8.4 for more detail in this regard.
- * Some Christian theologians have drawn wisdom from the sense of being-at-one with nature in the nature writing of (especially American) authors such as Annie Dillard, Aldo Leopold, John Muir,⁹² Gary Snyder and Alice Walker.⁹³
- * The critique of anthropocentrism in the "deep ecology" movement and the impact of this movement on some Christian theologies may also be cited as an example of such a sacramental approach.⁹⁴
- * Deep ecology is often associated with the vision of the earth as a single living, self-regulating organism as proposed in the "Gaia-hypothesis" by scientists like James Lovelock and Lynn Margolis. Although the Gaia-hypothesis is strictly speaking a broad scientific hypothesis concerning the complex dynamic of life on earth, it was soon transformed into a spirituality of the earth. Gaia thus refers to the Earth as a living, sacred and almost divine entity. The sense of unity of all life on earth is emphasised in this way.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ See the indexed bibliography for references to Berry's books (especially 1988, 1990, 1991, 1999) as well as numerous essays. For a critical engagement with Berry's vision, see the volume of essays edited by Lonergan & Richards 1987 and the article by Eaton 1998.

⁸⁸ See the indexed bibliography for references to Fox's work (especially 1983, 1991). In an attempt to retrieve some of the ecological wisdom in the Christian tradition, Fox has also written several books on the history of Christian spirituality (e.g. on Meister Eckhardt, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas). For a critical assessment of Fox's work, see Bauckham 1996, Boulton 1990, 1991, Breatly 1989, 1991, Dalton 1999, Keen 2002 & Santmire 2000:18f.

⁸⁹ Brian Swimme is a cosmologist who has worked with Thomas Berry to develop an integrated understanding of the story of the universe. He is widely respected for his ability to narrate scientific insights with poetic flair and moral passion. Although Swimme comes from a Catholic background, his contributions do not have a specifically Christian focus and orientation. Nevertheless, his insights are often appropriated by Christian theologians. See the indexed bibliography for numerous references to Swimme's contributions.

⁹⁰ See Conlon 1994, 1996.

⁹¹ For a discussion of creation spirituality in secondary literature, see the helpful overview by Scharper 1997.

⁹² See, especially, Anthony 2002, Austin 1987 & Callicot 1990.

⁹³ See Burton-Christie in Taylor 2005:311-312.

⁹⁴ For a critique of "deep ecology" from an evangelical point of view, see Bishop 1991.

⁹⁵ For attempts to relate the vision of *Gaia* to Christian notions of God, see Boff 1997, Bruteau 1991, Primavesi 1991, 2000, 2002, 2003 & Ruether 1992. See also the discussion by Deane-Drummond 1996:98-114, 2004:162-185, Osborne 2001 & Scott 2003:63-88. Osborne resists any suggestion towards redivinising the world on the basis of reverence for Gaia. Instead, he suggests that Gaia as an archetype may be related to the function of angels ("the code name for the numinous interiority of created things"), namely to praise

A common theme in these sacramental approaches to an ecological theology is the sacredness of nature. Human beings are called to respect and celebrate this sacredness. This insight forms the heart of the ecological ethos of the sacramental approach. Although this approach is theologically often quite radical, its environmental ethos remains curiously conservative. Its main thrust is to retrieve and to return to a sacralisation of nature. This seems to be regarded as the last best hope for the preservation of natural ecosystems amidst the onslaught of the late capitalist industrial economic order.

Haught points out that societies where nature was or still is regarded as sacred have nonetheless destroyed their natural habitation throughout the centuries. In this sense a sacramental approach can be somewhat naive and perhaps too romantic. According to Haught, a purely sacramental approach cannot easily accommodate the shadow side of nature⁹⁶ (including the sins of humanity as a particular part of nature!). McFague also argues that the creation spirituality of Berry and Fox cannot do justice to the sense of oppression and injustice that is part and parcel of the awesome mystery of life on earth. There is an ungrounded evolutionary optimism which is perhaps due to the attempt to replace the hegemony of a fall/redemption theology by an emphasis on creation theology (only). Nevertheless, creation spirituality presents a utopian, eschatological vision not of how things are but how they should be.⁹⁷

The sacramental approach may therefore mask the unequal and corrupted relations of power within existing organic communities. Haught argues that we do not need to cover up the inherent cruelty in nature. We can accept the fact that the cosmos is not a paradise but only the promise thereof.⁹⁸

Many of the ideas expressed in a sacramental model of ecological theology have been sharply criticised from an evangelical perspective. It is typically argued that this reduces Christianity to “New Age” thinking.⁹⁹

c) An eschatological approach

Haught proposes an eschatological approach to ecological theology. Instead of a retrieval of ecological wisdom from the cultures in the past, he calls for a transformation of an ecological vision towards the future. Any adequate ecological theology must be future orientated. Haught argues that this future-oriented promise and vision (and not only the notion of protective sacredness) is vital for an ecological spirituality.

An eschatological approach to an ecological theology is not without some serious pitfalls. For many, biblical eschatology, with its unleashing of a dream of future perfection, is inimical to environmental concerns. It harbours the danger of strengthening the myth of progress. Some critics sense in the prophetic vision of a better

God and to direct our attention towards God in doing so. He concludes: “Gaia, too, has the potential to point us towards God. It highlights the intricate interconnectedness of all living creatures ... if, in contemplating Gaia, we see the hand of a caring God, Gaia will have performed the traditional angelic role of divine messenger” (2001:20-21).

⁹⁶ See Haught 1993:111.

⁹⁷ McFague 1993:71.

⁹⁸ Haught 1993:112.

⁹⁹ On the relationship between Christian faith and the ecological wisdom in “New Age” thinking, see Bauckham 1996, Bishop 1991, Cooper 1990:103-144, Land & Moore 1992 & Wilkinson 1987, 1991.

future an ecologically dangerous feature of Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as Nietzsche and other critics realized, Christian eschatology has all too often supported forms of escapism and otherworldliness that are clearly not conducive to a commitment and responsibility towards this earth.

There is indeed a clear need for an ecological reinterpretation of Christian eschatology. In the last decade a number of contributions have been published which explore the link between ecology and eschatology.¹⁰¹ Haught argues that the eschatological dimension of the prophetic tradition in Christianity and its characteristic emphasis on hope may perhaps form the distinctive contribution of Christianity to a global ecological vision, since most other religious traditions also emphasise the sacredness of nature. The orientation towards a vision of the future in the light of God's promises in the Christian (prophetic) tradition may indeed be vital for an ecological spirituality and praxis. A Christian environmental praxis can only be empowered on the basis of an adequate understanding of Christian hope. It is hardly possible to motivate people to care for the earth unless they are convinced that there is indeed some future for themselves and for the earth.¹⁰² Despair in the face of the environmental crisis will inevitably lead to a spirit of resignation.¹⁰³ Without any hope, without any vision of a future for the earth itself, an environmental praxis will soon lose its impetus. It will consciously be fighting a losing battle. If life becomes a struggle for basic survival, as is often the case in Africa, it becomes increasingly difficult to resist environmental destruction. Only where there is hope, can life become meaningful.

One of the results of the environmental crisis is that it has led to exactly such a widespread sense of despair. David Hallman comments that, "The problems of ecological destruction and global poverty are certainly of a magnitude and intractability to elicit unmitigated despair."¹⁰⁴ Despair can certainly become a "sickness unto death" (Kierkegaard). Furthermore, despair becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when it leads people to think that action is futile. Only a persistent hope which can continue to care for the earth amidst environmental degradation can therefore energise an environmental praxis.

Haught identifies the following examples of such an eschatological approach to an ecological theology:

- * Jürgen Moltmann's eschatological doctrine of creation;¹⁰⁵
- * The extension of liberation theology towards a vision of liberation for the whole creation;¹⁰⁶
- * The ecumenical vision of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC);¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ See Haught 1993:106.

¹⁰¹ See the indexed bibliography for references in this regard.

¹⁰² See Haught 1995:196.

¹⁰³ Haught (1993:24) asks: "If this final wreck and absolute extinction is the last word about the universe, then why seek now to preserve it against the inevitable void that seems to be its destiny?"

¹⁰⁴ Hallman 1994:8. He immediately adds that what emerges from literature on the environment is often not resignation but an astonishing conviction, vision, celebration, humour and hope.

¹⁰⁵ Among Moltmann's many contributions to ecological theology, see especially Moltmann 1979, 1985, 1989, 1996. For secondary literature on Moltmann's theology, see Bouma-Prediger 1995, 1996, Carter 2001, Deane-Drummond 1992, 1997, Schuurman 1987, 1995 & Walsh 1987.

¹⁰⁶ See the discussion in chapter 8.4.

¹⁰⁷ See the discussion in chapter 11.

- * Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary cosmology;¹⁰⁸
- * The orientation towards an open future in process theology.¹⁰⁹

Haught's own emphasis is on the dynamic, process character of creation. He argues against the cosmic pessimism and nihilism of scientific materialism. This cosmic pessimism is acutely formulated in the second law of thermodynamics: in a closed system (which the universe is not!) all energy will eventually degenerate into a state of entropy. Instead, Haught defends the "promise of nature" (the title of one of his major works).

For Haught the material world itself is saturated with promise. Billions of years before the appearance of human beings in evolution, nature was already seeded with promise. Nature itself is inherently restless refusing to acquiesce in trivial forms of (sacramental!) harmony. Anyone who might have witnessed the Primordial Flaring Forth (Berry's poetic name for the "Big Bang") or the formation of the earth would never have anticipated the arrival of human beings billions of years later. Scientists are no longer trying to formulate the eternal laws of nature, but are trying to tell the story of the universe (including the coming into being of the present seemingly stable order). Haught describes the history of God's creation as an ongoing adventure story (the history of nature) that is still unfolding before our eyes. Haught says: "Science has increasingly and almost in spite of itself taken on the lineaments of a story of the cosmos. The cosmos itself increasingly become a narrative, a great adventure ..."¹¹⁰ The history of humanity is but an episode in this cosmic history.

Christian eschatology resonates with this promise of nature and provides a clue to the ultimate meaning of this cosmic story. The authentic life of Christian faith and hope is one of looking to the fulfilment of God's promise, based on the experience and trust in God as a promise keeper (e.g. the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus Christ).¹¹¹ For Haught, an environmental ethos is based on this Christian hope. To destroy nature is to turn away from a promise.

It is not necessary to offer a more detailed discussion and critique of Haught's own version of an eschatological approach to ecological theology here.¹¹² In the next chapter the prophetic style of theology, which is typical of ecumenical contributions to ecological theology, will be investigated in more detail.

10.3 A theological rationale for earthkeeping

A Christian environmental ethos, praxis and spirituality requires theological reflection on the convictions, beliefs, stories, symbols, worldviews, values, traditions, rituals, institutions and religious experiences which may encourage and support it. Indeed, why should Christians *as Christians* engage in earthkeeping in the first place? Despite the wealth of literature in ecological theology there is still a lack of clarity on this very basic

¹⁰⁸ For an assessment of the environmental legacy of Teilhard de Chardin's work, see especially the editions of *Ecotheology* 10.1 & 10.2 (2005) as well as Santmire 1985. Many other ecological theologies (see the contributions by Berry, Boff and Haught) draw on Teilhard's work.

¹⁰⁹ See the discussion in chapter 8.4 in this regard.

¹¹⁰ Haught 1990:173.

¹¹¹ Haught 1993:102.

¹¹² See section 14.2 of my *Hope for the earth* (Conradie 2000/2005:186-193) in this regard.

theological question. Within Christian discourse on ecological concerns there are distinct ways of explaining a theological rationale for earthkeeping.

One may argue that, despite the (valid) criticisms which could be raised against all three of the approaches discussed above, these three approaches to ecological theology may be compatible with one another. All three of these models provide a distinct theological rationale for caring for the earth, but the temporal focus of each approach is different. The sacramental approach emphasises that the earth is a sacred gift from God (in the *past*) which should therefore be treated with due respect. The eschatological approach emphasises a vision of the *future* of the earth in God's presence. This vision serves as an inspiration for an environmental praxis in the *present*. Such an environmental praxis is guided by the conviction that "the earth is the Lord's" and may be described with concepts like stewardship, gardening or earthkeeping.

One may therefore formulate a theological rationale for earthkeeping in the following way:¹¹³

- * The earth is a *sacred gift* from God. The *beauty* of the earth proclaims the glory of the Creator. The earth and everything in it is the Lord's and must therefore be treated with respect, humility and in awe. The earth itself becomes a place where God's presence can still be discerned – for example, in the rest of the Sabbath, in the celebration of the sacraments, in the temple, in the church, and in the grandeur of nature.
- * The whole cosmos is the object of *God's continuous, creative, loving and nurturing care*. This love of God for the earth is exemplified in the life, ministry, and suffering of Jesus Christ who came so that the whole cosmos may share in the abundance of eternal life. In Christ the whole creation is reconciled with God (2 Cor 5:19). As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to treat others, including otherkind, with the same loving, nurturing care and respect.
- * The Christian hope is that *the Holy Spirit will renew the whole creation*, that God will establish a new heaven and a new earth, that our own bodies, together with the rest of creation will finally be taken up in God's presence. To destroy ecosystems is to turn away from this promise of God. To live in this hope implies that Christians will erect concrete signs of the new earth, of the coming of God's reign, here on earth, as it is in heaven.

In my view much further work needs to be done in this regard. There remains considerable confusion in Christian circles on the relative adequacy of pragmatic, anthropocentric, biocentric, ecocentric and theocentric approaches to earthkeeping – which are debated at length in philosophical contributions to environmental ethics.

In my view, any theological reflection will have to relate a rationale for earthkeeping to the trinitarian and soteriological heart of Christian theology. It has to be born from an understanding of who God is and what God is doing in this world. This may be expressed in the following two provisional theses:

¹¹³ See Conradie & Field 2000: 62-63, Conradie 2004, 2005. For a discussion of ten arguments, theological and otherwise, why we should care for the earth, see also Bouma-Prediger 2001:163-179.

- * Christians who are engaged in earthkeeping activities confess themselves to be part of the history of the earth community which is shaped by the creative, hurt, corrective, redemptive and innovative love of God.
- * Christians who are engaged in earthkeeping confess that this God has become known through the presence of God's Spirit within the earth community, and most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. On this basis, Christians may trust that the origin, life and destiny of the whole earth community are in the hands of the triune God.¹¹⁴

If Christians are urged to engage in earthkeeping in order to make a contribution to a collective effort to retrieve a generalised form of ecological wisdom from the world's religious traditions, it will only be supported by the few who are already convinced of the need for earthkeeping on other grounds. Instead, earthkeeping practices have to be born from an encounter with the Christian gospel itself. As Larry Rasmussen has often argued, earthkeeping will not be sustainable in a Christian context unless we are able to relate it clearly to the deepest convictions and symbols of the Christian tradition.¹¹⁵

While much work has been done in this regard, there is a need for more full-length studies on each aspect of Christian doctrine, within each of the main branches of Christianity and with references to each of the main figures in Christian theology. Among numerous others, the work by Paul Santmire on *The travail of nature*,¹¹⁶ outlining the ambiguous theological promise of Christian theology, and the volume of essays entitled *Earth revealing – Earth healing*, edited by Denis Edwards,¹¹⁷ pave the way for further work in this regard.

¹¹⁴ I have explored these two theses in talks on Christianity and earthkeeping and hope to develop them in an envisaged book provisionally entitled "Christianity and earthkeeping: In search of a theological vision". See also chapter 5 and 6 of my *Waar op dees aarde vind mens God? Op soek na 'n aardse spiritualiteit* (Conradie 2006 – "Where on earth can one find God: In search of an earthly spirituality").

¹¹⁵ See Rasmussen 2000.

¹¹⁶ Santmire 1985.

¹¹⁷ Edwards 2001.

CHAPTER 11

Ecumenical reflections on ecological theology

Perhaps the most influential attempt to reassess the message of the Christian gospel in the light of the environmental crisis has come from within the context of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In this chapter the contributions to ecological theology from within the ecumenical movement will be discussed in more detail.¹ The impact of all three the models that were discussed in the previous chapter is evident in ecumenical discussions as well. Such ecumenical discourse is treated here in a separate chapter because of its distinct focus.

11.1 Towards a just, participatory and sustainable society

The roots of concerns for creation are deeply situated in the history of the ecumenical movement.² The environment surfaced on the ecumenical agenda following an address by Joseph Sittler to the WCC Assembly in New Delhi in 1961.³ In his paper, entitled “Called to Unity”, Sittler challenged the church to expand the scope of its Christological vision to include nothing less than all of reality.⁴

In the following WCC assembly in Uppsala in 1968, the churches’ responsibility towards the environment was considered seriously. This assembly discussed the problem of managing the earth’s resources in relation to social justice concerns around poverty and hunger. It recognised the harmful side effects of science and technological applications and the rapidly diminishing non-renewable resources.⁵

In response to the increasing awareness about environmental deterioration and in preparation for the world conference on the environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the WCC produced a study document on the environment, entitled *The global environment, responsible choice and social justice* (1971). At a consultation in Bucharest in 1974, organised as part of a WCC study on “Science and technology for human development”, the implications of the recently published report on *Limits to growth* (1972) were discussed. This meeting apparently introduced the notion of sustainability into international discourse, but was unable to resolve tensions between those who emphasise a need for justice and those who emphasise the critical importance of a sustainable society.

¹ For an overview of the theme of creation in ecumenical theology, see Van der Bent 1988 and various contributions by Per Lönnig 1983, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1995.

² For literature on the historical background to the JPIC programme, see Chial 1996, Granberg-Michaelson 1994, Gerle 1997, Houtepen 1988, 1990, Niles 1989, 1992, Richardson 1992 & Vischer 1993. See also the excellent overview by Chial (1995) and the volume of essays edited by Best & Granberg-Michaelson (1993) on the relationship between Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and the Faith and Order movement.

³ See Prediger & Bakken 2000:38-50.

⁴ Bouma-Prediger 1995:61.

⁵ Cf. *Uppsala Report*, 1969, 43.

The environment received a more prominent place in the social agenda of the World Council of Churches since its Nairobi assembly in 1975.⁶ This assembly commissioned the continued exploration of “the contribution of faith, science and technology in the struggle for a just and sustainable society”. This assembly expressed its concern over the notion of “limits to growth” and initiated a programme calling for a “Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society”. Within this context, a programme on “Energy for my neighbour” was also launched. In this way churches were sensitised for the energy problems faced by developing countries. In a subsequent report which served at the central committee of the WCC in 1979, the concept “sustainability” is theologically grounded in “the faithfulness of God to his lasting covenant ... God blesses continually his creation, preserving it from destruction and leading it to the fullness of life abundant.”⁷

The Church and Society sub-unit organised a major conference on “Faith, Science and the future” at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology in 1979.⁸ This conference discussed the social and environmental impact of the use of sophisticated forms of technology. It highlighted challenges to the dominant scientific-technological worldview, as well as the differences between technologically developed and technologically developing countries. It helped churches to understand both the promise and the threats posed by modern technology.

The Church and Society sub-unit also hosted a hearing on nuclear disarmament in 1981. This hearing noted the increasing danger of nuclear war at that time. The report, *Before it's too late*, contains a treatment of theological and ethical concerns over nuclear weapons. It affirmed that nuclear war can never be just or justifiable since nuclear war is unlikely to remain limited.

11.2 Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

The Vancouver assembly of the WCC in 1983 decided “to engage member churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation” (JPIC).⁹ This motto became the focus of the so-called “Conciliar process” in which churches all over the world committed themselves to this agenda.¹⁰ Neville Richardson notes that 1) The scope of this programme was considerably wider than its

⁶ See Abrecht (1978) for the preparatory documentation for this conference. The conference reports were published in two volumes, containing the plenary papers (edited by Shinn 1980) and the recommendations (edited by Abrecht 1980).

⁷ Quoted in the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement (2002:625).

⁸ See Abrecht 1978, 1980.

⁹ There is an extensive literature on the programmes towards Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. See, the bibliography by Veldhorst and Langenwerf (1988) as well as the contributions by Bührig 1989, 1992, 1995. See also the two volumes of essays edited by Niles 1989, 1992. The second volume of essays has contributions on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation from the perspectives of Latin America (by Peres), Europe (by Noll), Asia (by Bock), Catholic Christianity (by Coste), Orthodox Christianity (by Limouris) and women (by Padolina). See also the edition of *Concilium* 1991/4 entitled *No heaven without earth* (Metz & Schillebeeckx 1991). For (South) African reflections on “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”, see Asogwa 1992, Hulley 1991, Kandusi 1991, Mugambi 1987, Niwagila 1997, Olivier 1991, Richardson 1992, Sarpong 1998 & Wilson 1997.

¹⁰ On the “conciliar process”, see Castro 1992, Gerle 1997, Nash 1987, Reuver 1992, Selling 1990, Van Harskamp 1990, 1991 & Vischer 1989.

predecessors, 2) that the essential interconnectedness of its concerns was stressed, and 3) that the involvement of churches at the local level was emphasised.¹¹

Since 1983 numerous attempts have been made to clarify the use of the somewhat vague¹² notion of the “integrity of creation.”¹³ One problem of the use of this term is its association and possible confusion with the notion of a “status integritas.” The term is perhaps also too often linked to a lyrical notion of the overflowing fullness (*pleroma*) or goodness of God’s creation. It seems that especially three connotations contribute to the meaning of this notion.

- * It is often emphasised that the whole creation as a one-time endowment has its own intrinsic integrity and dignity that has to be acknowledged and protected – like any person’s dignity. From a theological perspective the dignity of the whole creation is derived from the confession that the earth is the Lord’s. The Christian God is the God not only of the poor, but of all creatures whose integrity is violated.
- * Secondly, the integratedness, the wholeness of creation, the mutual dependence and integral functioning of all forms of life and ecosystems as a whole, is of vital importance.
- * Thirdly, the term suggests the internal relationships between social and environmental justice since creation is at its very roots a shared home for all forms of life. The notion of “integrity of creation” thus portrays a vision of shalom – of a just, equitable and peaceful community of creation.¹⁴

At a meeting in Annecy, France in 1988 an influential and more or less satisfactory working definition of the notion of the “integrity of creation” was formulated:

It refers to the value of all creatures in themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God.¹⁵

Niles suggests that the notion of the integrity has proved useful in ecumenical reflections for especially two reasons, namely a) that it has given new prominence to the doctrine of creation, and b) since the integrity of creation refers to more than environmental concerns, it has offered a context within which concerns for justice and peace may be situated.¹⁶

In 1988, the World Council of Churches called a major consultation on JPIC at Granvollen, Norway. This consultation reflected on the threats posed to the global environment and the challenge to reformulate a theology of creation. The voices of

¹¹ Richardson 1992.

¹² According to Granberg-Michaelson (1994:102) and Niles (1989:58), its vagueness and ambiguity may have been one of its strengths since it invited new ecumenical discussions.

¹³ For a critical discussion of the notion of “integrity of creation” see especially Hall 1987, Houtepen 1990, Kaiser 1996, Limouris 1992, Mugambi 1987:13-19, Preston 1989, Rasmussen 1994, 1995, 1996:98f & Van Harskamp 1991. See Praetorius Fehle *et al* (1991) for feminist perspectives in this regard.

¹⁴ See also Rasmussen (1996:98-110) who identifies six dimensions of the “integrity of creation”, that is, 1) the integral functioning of natural transactions, 2) the restless self-organising dynamism of nature, 3) earth’s treasures as a one-time endowment, 4) the integral relation of social and environmental justice, 5) the divine source and integral dignity of creation, and 6) the ethical implications of the goodness of God’s creation.

¹⁵ McDaniel 1990:165.

¹⁶ Niles 1989:58.

indigenous peoples, women and orthodox theologians were prominent here. George Tinker, for example, argued that the sequence of JPIC should be reversed to give priority to the integrity of creation because this is foundational for justice and peace. The consultation concluded that the drive to have mastery over creation has resulted in the senseless exploitation of natural resources, the alienation of the land from people and the destruction of indigenous cultures.¹⁷

The discourse on JPIC culminated in a World Convocation (not a council) which took place in Seoul in 1990.¹⁸ Some rather high hopes were expressed for this meeting: to be a “council” at which Christians from all confessions would speak with one voice on urgent problems in such a way that the world would have had to listen. This did not materialise due to some tensions between Christians from the North and from the South. Some emphasised the urgency of environmental degradation while others argued that issues of poverty and economic justice should receive a priority.¹⁹ Nevertheless, ten affirmations and four “covenants” were eventually accepted. The four covenants focused on 1) a just economic order, 2) security for all in non-violent cultures, 3) cultures which live in accord with creation’s integrity, and 4) an end to racism and discrimination. Two of the ten affirmations focus specifically on the environment:

Affirmation VII speaks of creation as beloved by God and calls on Christians to resist human exploitation of creation, the extinction of species, consumerism, pollution, climate change and policies that would lead to the destruction of life.

Affirmation VIII states that the earth is the Lord’s and claims that human use of land should allow the earth to replenish its life-giving resources and to provide the necessary space for all its creatures.²⁰

To concretise these affirmations, the Seoul document called participants to enter into a covenant of solidarity and to commit themselves to building a culture which can live in harmony with creation’s integrity. The concern for creation focused on the threat of global warming and the ways in which Christians can combat destructive changes to the earth’s atmosphere.

A few months after the Seoul meeting a preparatory consultation was held at Kuala Lumpur to prepare the way for the 1991 general assembly of the WCC in Canberra.²¹ The theme of both these meetings focused on a theological understanding of the relationship between creation and the Holy Spirit. The Canberra meeting reflected on the theme “Come Holy Spirit – Renew your whole creation.” This clarified the intimate and redemptive presence of the Spirit in creation.²² The mystery of all life has its source in the triune God: the God that creates, redeems and gives new life. A paper by Chung Hyun-Kyung on the conference theme sparked considerable controversy at Canberra.

¹⁷ For a discussion of ecumenical consultations in Europe in the 1990s, see Bruce & Pickering (1998) and the response by Gerle (1998).

¹⁸ For literature on the meeting at Seoul, see Best 1992, Bührig 1992, Chial 1996, Granberg-Michaelson 1994, Hall 1992, Hulley 1991, Niles 1992 & Schraivesande 1990.

¹⁹ For South African contributions to this debate, see Chikane 1990 & Richardson 1992.

²⁰ See Niles 1992:164-190.

²¹ For literature on the meeting at Canberra, see Chial 1996, Kerr 1991, Kinnamon 1991, Stendahl 1990 & Williamson 1992.

²² For reflections on the political economy of the Holy Spirit, see De Santa Ana, Raiser & Duchrow 1990.

She associated the work of the Holy Spirit with the indigenous Korean notion that the land is permeated by spirits full of Han.²³ This spurred orthodox and evangelical resistance that called for a closer link between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ.

In 1992 the WCC hosted a major ecumenical gathering at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. In this way the spiritual dimensions of the ecological crisis were highlighted. It also helped to develop proposals towards an Earth Charter.

11.3 The “theology of life” programme

In January 1994, after a process of restructuring, the central committee of the World Council of Churches approved a “Theology of Life” programme in Unit III on Justice, Peace and Creation. This programme seeks to integrate the concerns of “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” formulated at the World Council of Churches’ Vancouver assembly (1983) verbally, thematically and programmatically.²⁴

The main concern of the theology of life programme was not to fathom the rich philosophical and theological heritage of reflection on the concept of “life”. Relatively few contributions have been made from within the context of the World Council of Churches to explain the theological and ethical content of a theology of life.²⁵ Instead, the programme constituted an attempt to do theology from below in that it focused on grass roots experiences of the struggle for life. It started with twenty-two case studies of churches and movements undertaken in different parts of the world, each investigating one of the ten affirmations from the world convocation on JPIC in Seoul and seeking to understand what this implies in their own context and how such local issues fit into a global analysis. The process was exemplified by the Sokoni encounter (a Swahili term for an African market place), held in January 1997 near Nairobi, Kenya.²⁶ Here the gift of life was celebrated amidst the stark economic realities on the African continent.²⁷ The case studies were complemented by a historical study of ecumenical social thought in the context of the WCC.

If one subsequently reflects on the pathos of this “theology of life” programme, the following features emerge:

²³ Kyung 1991.

²⁴ There is a wealth of material available on initiatives and themes related to the “theology of life” programme on the website of the Justice, Peace and Creation task team of the World Council of Churches. Since this guide to the literature generally excludes website material, more detailed references to such documents are not provided here. See www.wcc-coe.org.

²⁵ For literature on the notion of a “theology of life” within the context of the World Council of Churches, see Brinkman 1995, 1999:45-56, Granberg-Michaelson 1994, Mudge 1998:140-164, 1999, Raiser 1996, Rasmussen 1994, Robra 1996, 2001 & Santa Ana 1995.

²⁶ For a report on this event, see the edition of *Echoes* 1997/11. Robra (2001:94) notes that “Sokoni became the symbol and clearest expression of the TOL [Theology of Life] process and spirit.”

²⁷ Orteza (1997:3) comments: “Long after the last bonfire where Kenyan traditional storyteller Bantu Mwaura had told one of his engaging tales, the spirit of Sokoni remained in the hearts of those who participated in this unprecedented event in the life and world of the World Council of Churches. The beating of the drums, the singing and dancing, the children’s poetry, the youth’s creative passion, the women’s dramatic presentation of their agonies, aspirations and dreams - these, along with symbols, various art forms, traditional costumes, colors and sounds have created enduring images for the people who came.”

a) The notion of a theology of life should be understood within the context of grassroots experiences of the threats to life, that is, the powers of *death*: violent conflict, injustice and environmental degradation.²⁸ This calls for a Christian praxis of resistance against the powers of death that destroys communities of life for the sake of political and economic power. A theology of life is thus born within the context of a struggle for survival²⁹ amidst the threats of death. It emerges from the experiences and perspectives of those for whom life is denied and in solidarity with these struggles. It seeks a life that is more than biological existence – life in the sense of self-sufficient, cultural, spiritual, political and economic sustainability.³⁰ Life is understood here concretely to include land, houses, work, food, health, education, environment, participation in social life, and cultural and religious celebration.³¹ The struggles of the helpless for fullness of life in this way exemplify the survival of humanity as a whole and of all life on earth.

b) Within the struggle between life and death, a theology of life affirms faith in the God of life and denounces the idols of death. Or, in the words of Pablo Richard, “Where there is life, God is present; where there is death, there stands idolatry.”³² The vision of God as the Giver and Sustainer of life and hope proclaims an alternative in which all will have life and nature will be whole.³³ Rooted in grass-roots experiences of conflict, injustice and degradation, a *theology of life* seeks to offer thanks and praise to God’s gracious gift of life in fellowship with all other living creatures. A *life-centred ethos*, based on such a theology of life, needs to reflect not only on a reverence for life (Albert Schweitzer), especially for the weaker, more vulnerable forms of life (an extension of the “preferential option for the poor”), but also on the material base of creation, that is, the material goods that permit life.³⁴ A *spirituality of life* would perceive in land, health, housing and work that enhances life, manifestations of God’s glory.³⁵

c) Precisely in the midst of this struggle for survival, the church as the household (*oikos*) of God may emerge as a sign of new life. If local Christian communities continually receive God’s Spirit in fresh ways, they may embody the household rules (economics) that will foster life through the power of forgiveness, solidarity, and hospitality. In this way the local church may share in a mutual upbuilding (*oikodomé*)³⁶ of the larger, more global household, the household of the entire inhabited earth (*oikumene*).³⁷ The notion

²⁸ See, for example, the contributions from women and indigenous peoples to the edition of *Echoes* 1996/10.

²⁹ “Survival” is an important motif in many earlier contributions to an ecological theology. While these contributions speculated on the question whether (human) life on earth will survive, a new emphasis on survival is beginning to emerge, that is, how to survive in a life threatening (economic) system (see, e.g. Antonio 1994, Getui 1993). An emphasis on “survival” may challenge an altruistic environmental ethos (while the rich may see beauty and grace in the movement of an animal, the poor may regard it as a source of food). The lives of many people in South Africa are indeed accurately depicted as a basic struggle for survival. Strangely, even the affluent often slip into a mode of “survival” by trying to protect what they have at all costs - amidst the real threats to life, property and employment security.

³⁰ See George Tinker’s contribution (1996) to a theology of life.

³¹ Richard 1994:95.

³² Richard 1994:95.

³³ Richard 1994:96.

³⁴ See Rasmussen 1994.

³⁵ Richard 1994:95. Richard refers here to the dictum of Irenaeus “Gloria Dei vivens homo, gloria autem hominis visio Dei.” The glory of God is manifested in the flourishing of human and all other forms of life.

³⁶ See Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:108f) for a discussion of “ecodomy” as an upbuilding of the house of life. See also Hessel 2001:192-193.

³⁷ See Mudge (1998:147-148) for a discussion of this household of life as an eschatological paradigm.

of the whole household of God has indeed become a powerful new root metaphor for contemporary ecumenical theology. The notion of the household of life also indicates the need for an alternative way of doing theology in which the household constitutes a safe place to listen to the stories of others, including clergy and laity, the powerful and powerless.³⁸

d) In this task women play a crucial role to give birth, to nurture life and to create the necessary conditions for life in community to flourish. In an African context, Bernadette Mbuy-Beya describes a life-centred spirituality for women in the following words:

She gives life. Out of the child that she carries in her womb and whom she brings into the world, she tries to make the beginnings of a man or woman. She initiates the child to speech, to the mother tongue, to life in society and to spiritual and cultural values. In traditional society, the task of tilling the field is entrusted to the woman. She holds the secrets of the earth's fertility and develops a spirituality linked to the earth, which is expressed through songs and prayers to God at the beginning of each season. Protectress of life, she also plays the role of mediatrix in her family and her circle. She joins other women to try and ward off death that comes through war or family conflicts. She helps preserve social order by respecting the traditions which favor life.³⁹

A theology of life therefore celebrates the gift of life amidst the struggle for survival. Life itself is a mystery that exists, theologically speaking, *in all its transitoriness*, in the abundant life of God. Rooted in grass roots experiences of conflict, injustice and degradation, the theology of life therefore seeks to offer thanks and praise to God's gracious gift of life.

A life-centred ethic, based on this theology of life, needs to reflect on the material base of creation, that is, the material goods which permit life. In his ground-breaking essay on an ethics of life, Rasmussen identifies two aspects of the material base of life: 1) The need for space, an adequate habitat for life to flourish, and 2) The use and abuse of power in sharing this space with other creatures.⁴⁰

11.4 “Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth” (AGAPE)

Over the last decade discourse on globalisation has increasingly dominated ecumenical discourse on the environment. For some, globalisation is an inevitable process which will bring “salvation”, that is, economic prosperity to impoverished people. They maintain that there is no alternative to a neo-liberal, globalised market economy. For others, globalisation represents a new expression of hell since it reflects and exacerbates the asymmetrical and unjust distribution of power and wealth on planet Earth.⁴¹ This is epitomised by those who are excluded or marginalised by the processes of globalisation: street people, homeless people, youth gangs and refugees.

³⁸ See Robra (2001:96-97) on an alternative way of doing theology associated with the theology of life programme.

³⁹ Mbuy-Beya 1994:73-74.

⁴⁰ See Rasmussen 1994.

⁴¹ See Robra 2001:83.

It seems clear that globalisation has led to an unprecedented concentration of power in financial centres of the global market and that this contributes to the weakening of the function of nation states. It also seems clear that those who resist economic globalisation cannot escape the reality of electronic and social forms of globalisation which follow from the interaction of people from different cultures, bioregions and continents and which is symbolised by the use of the internet and email and the international availability of local forms of music, food and clothing. This recognition has stimulated ecumenical reflection on different modes of globalisation, for example globalisation “from above” and globalisation “from below”.⁴² The WCC task team on Justice, Peace and Creation has stressed the link between globalisation and imperialism and colonialism and has focused on “corporate globalisation”, that is, globalisation guided by the neo-liberal economic model and supported by modern technology, media and military presence and on the cultural, ecological, ethical, religious and ecclesiological implications of such corporate globalisation.

The World Council of Churches assembly in Harare in 1998 discussed, among other issues, the impact of globalisation on people, communities and the earth. The assembly noted that “increasingly, Christians and churches find themselves confronted by the new and deeply challenging aspects of globalization which vast numbers of people face, especially the poor”. It clearly recognised the challenge of globalisation:

The challenge of globalization should become a central emphasis of the work of the WCC. The vision behind globalization includes a competing vision to the Christian commitment to the oikoumene, the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth.

The Assembly recommended that ...

The logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity. Christians and churches should reflect on the challenge of globalization from a faith perspective and, therefore, resist the unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalization. The search for alternative options to the present economic system and the realization of effective political limitations and corrections to the process of globalization and its implications are urgently needed.⁴³

The central committee of the WCC meeting in Germany in January 2001 approved a policy on economic globalisation that directed the WCC to focus on searching for alternatives to economic globalisation, based on Christian values, in the following three areas:

- * the transformation of the current global market economy to embrace equity and values that reflect the teachings and example of Christ;
- * the development of just trade;

⁴² See Robra 2001:84.

⁴³ See *Together on the way, the WCC assembly report* (WCC 1999), pp. 183-184. Also quoted in Robra 2001:84 and in the document *Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:46-47).

- * the promotion of a just financial system, free from debt bondage, corrupt practices and excessive speculative profit-making.⁴⁴

The World Council of Churches sent a delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which was held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002. This delegation stressed that globalisation have failed more than two-thirds of the world population who live in poverty, that the agenda for sustainable development was increasingly shaped by corporate interests and that justice is a core requirement for sustainability. The WCC hosted three consultation at the WSSD, namely on 1) the ecological debt owed by the North to the South, 2) corporate accountability and 3) climate change, calling for solidarity with those most affected by climate change.

In preparation for the Porto Allegro Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2006, the Justice, Peace and Creation produced a document entitled *Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A background document*. This document entails a call to churches to move beyond a critique of neo-liberal globalisation in order to suggest how God's grace can transform this paradigm. This call is expressed in the theme of the Porto allegro assembly: "God, in your grace, transform the world". The theological vision behind this document is that life can only flourish in just and loving relationships and that the Christian notion of God's abounding grace and life-giving love can transform current economic structures.⁴⁵ It argues that the unquenchable thirst for more power, more profits and more possessions is unsustainable and deprives many communities of the ability to meet their own needs in harmony with the environment. Churches are called to become transformative communities demonstrating viable alternatives within which life can flourish. On ecological concerns churches and congregations are called to:

- * care for the web of life and the rich bio-diversity of creation;
- * become engaged for a change of unsustainable and unjust patterns of resource extraction and use of natural resources, especially in respect of Indigenous Peoples, their land and their communities;
- * support movements, groups and international initiatives defending vital common resources against privatization, such as water and biodiversity;
- * advocate for resource and energy efficiency and a shift from fossil fuel-based energy production to renewable energies; this implies that the churches themselves adopt appropriate policies;
- * encourage public engagement in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions beyond the targets of the UNFCCC, and work with churches on adopting policies and programmes for peoples affected by the sea level rise;
- * strengthen the eco-justice movement that involves the wider ecumenical family.
- * Churches in rich and affluent societies should work for sustainable consumption and production patterns by adopting self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyles and resistance to dominating patterns of consumerism.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:47-48).

⁴⁵ See World Council of Churches 2005. The concept of transformative justice emerged within the context of the WCC's programmes on overcoming racism (including environmental racism).

⁴⁶ See *Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth* (WCC 2005:58-59).

It seems clear that the debate on globalisation will continue to dominate the ecumenical agenda on issues of justice, peace and creation for the foreseeable future.

11.5 Towards an ecological ethos based on eco-justice

One of the values of the call for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation has been its recognition of the very close relationship between the issues of (economic) justice, (political) power struggles and environmental issues. It also sets a clear agenda for the responsibility of the churches in society.

Since 1992 the focus of ecumenical contributions towards an ecological theology shifted increasingly towards a number of ethical concerns, while in-depth theological reflection perhaps received less emphasis. The following initiatives may be mentioned in this regard:⁴⁷

- * The initial vision of formulating an Earth Charter which could articulate an appropriate ecological ethos came to fruition after 1998. After an extensive period of consultation, the Earth Charter was eventually adopted on 24 March 2000. Christian theologians and ecumenical forums made significant contributions to this process.⁴⁸
- * The link between economic inequalities and environmental degradation was the theme of a WCC-related consultation, sponsored by the Visser 't Hooft Fund in 1993. The proceedings of this consultation were published under the significant title: *Sustainable growth: A contradiction in terms?*⁴⁹
- * The WCC published an important volume of essays entitled *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* in 1994. This anthology includes a number of creative essays and captured ecumenical discourse on the environment at that time.⁵⁰
- * Since 1994 the issue of climate change, as one of the most threatening environmental concerns, became a major focus for ecumenical discourse on the environment.⁵¹ A task team from the WCC led by David Hallman participated in international negotiations on climate change treaties. In 1996-7 the WCC sponsored an international petition campaign to build public pressure on the governments of industrialised countries to take action to reduce their emissions. In such campaigns it is emphasised that industrialised countries are responsible for the production of such emissions while impoverished countries and future generations will suffer most as a result of climate change.⁵²
- * As part of its work on climate change, the WCC also produced a report on ethical issues around transport and mobility with the significant title, *Mobile but not driven: Towards equitable and sustainable mobility and transport.*⁵³

⁴⁷ See the website of the Justice, Peace and Creation task team of the World Council of Churches for a wealth of material in this regard. See also the entry on the environment by David Hallman in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (2002).

⁴⁸ See, especially, Rockefeller 2001.

⁴⁹ See Béguin-Austin 1993.

⁵⁰ See Hallman 1994.

⁵¹ See, for example, Hallman 2001, also Mugambi 2001, 2002. There is a sizable corpus of material on climate change available in electronic format, including regular reports from the WCC working group on climate change. Such electronic material is not incorporated in this bibliography.

⁵² See World Council of Churches 1998, 2000.

⁵³ See World Council of Churches 1998, 2002.

- * The UN Decade on Fresh Water (2005-2015) points to the fact that water is a vital ingredient for both the diversity of life on earth and for human well-being. Since access to fresh water supplies is becoming an urgent matter of life and death across the planet, churches and ecumenical organizations have formed an Ecumenical Water Network in order to improve their cooperation.
- * Biotechnology and genetic engineering has also been identified as a key environmental concern since such technologies touch on our deepest convictions about the value of human life and human dignity.

Such an ethical orientation also brings us to the question of the next main part: What concrete contributions can Christianity make in response to the current environmental crisis?

PART C

A Christian environmental praxis, ethos and spirituality

CHAPTER 12

An ecological ethos: Christian perspectives

12.1 Introduction

John Zizioulas observes that what the world needs is a new ethos, not so much a new ethics. He adds: “not an ethic, but an ethos. Not a programme, but an attitude and a mentality. Not a legislation but a culture.”¹ This comment calls for a clear distinction between ethos and ethics (the systematic second-order reflection on ethos). Ethos is primary. Ethics is secondary. Nevertheless, Christian ethics can make a significant contribution to foster such an ecological ethos. It is also important to remind oneself that environmental ethics is not merely a specialised branch of Christian ethics.² Any adequate ethos has to be an ecological ethos – or else it will lead to a truncated ethics.

Environmental ethics as a sub-discipline of Christian ethics shares the methodological disputes which characterise other forms of ethics.³ This certainly applies to the classic debates between proponents of consequentialist (typically based on moral values) and deontological approaches (typically based on moral duties or obligations) to moral decision making. It also applies to a number of other recent approaches to ethical theory. Insights derived from virtue theory⁴ and an ethics of responsibility⁵ have been retrieved within the context of Christian environmental ethics. There have also been attempts to retrieve the natural law tradition in ethical reflection.⁶ Others have explored the significance of a myriad of feminist⁷ and other postmodern approaches (to environmental ethics) for Christian theology.⁸

In my view any adequate theory of environmental ethics has to distinguish between especially four ethical categories, namely visions, virtues, values and obligations. There is a need for an appropriate *vision* for a sustainable society, the ongoing task of the formation of ecological virtues in moral communities, and for responsible decision

¹ Zizioulas 1992:61.

² There remains, of course, a need for an environmental ethics in the more specialised sense of the word. For monographs on a Christian environmental ethics, see Auer 1985, Deane-Drummond 2004, Irrgang 1992, Lochbühler 1996, Manenschijn 1988 & Van Hoogstraaten 1988. See also Birnbacher 1980.

³ For a good overview of these debates, in conversation with philosophical contributions to environmental ethics, see Northcott 1996:86f. See also Taylor’s encyclopedia article in Taylor 2005:597-608.

⁴ See the discussion on ecological virtues below.

⁵ See Jonas 1984, Kroh 1991, Küng 1990 & Nash 1989. Numerous other contributions emphasise the notion of responsibility, without necessarily drawing on ethical theories of responsibility. See the indexed bibliography for further references.

⁶ For a recent defence of the legitimacy of the natural law tradition, see M’Gonigle 2000, Nash 2000 & Northcott 1996:199f. Nash argues that the realist emphasis in the natural law tradition is important in the quest for common values that are crucial for any environmental ethos. See also Deane-Drummond 2004:38-41.

⁷ For a discussion focus on a feminist *ethics* of nature, see Deane-Drummond 2004:186-213.

⁸ See especially the two volumes of *Ecotheology* 9.2 and 9.3 on postmodernity.

making based on a recognition of appropriate social values and obligations – which may be expressed in the form of rules, duties and rights.⁹

In the discussion below each of these concepts will be addressed briefly.

12.2 A vision of sustainability

The focus of many Christian contributions to environmental ethics is to clarify a *vision* of the good society. Such a vision is often expressed in ecclesial documents or in prophetic witness. In the South African context, numerous resolutions have been adopted on environmental matters in ecclesial documents.¹⁰ In response to the World Summit on Sustainable Development a discussion document, entitled *The land is crying for justice*, was produced. This document engages in a critique of church theology and not only in prophetic critique of contemporary society.¹¹ A similar document “The Earth belongs to God”¹² offers African church perspectives on a vision for a sustainable society.

The public rhetoric on a vision for the good society is currently dominated by discourse on the notion of “sustainable development”, especially following the Brundtland report on *Our common future* (1987) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. Nevertheless, as we noted in chapter 4, several Christian ethicists remain sceptical about the notion of sustainable *development* and regard it as an oxymoron that can only fail in its attempt to harmonise economic growth on a finite planet and concerns for environmental sustainability. One influential proposal is that the notion of “sustainable community”, instead of sustainable development, may serve as the root metaphor for an alternative economic vision.¹³

12.3 Ecological virtues

Since the publication of Alisdair MacIntyre’s influential work, *After virtue*, many environmental ethicists have emphasised the need to focus not only on such a vision for the good society, but also on ecological *virtues* and vices.¹⁴ Environmental problems can only be addressed adequately by ecologically-minded people, people of good moral character, people who embody ecological virtues. Alternatively, one may emphasise the need for appropriate *attitudes* towards the natural environment.¹⁵ There are numerous stories of people who have embodied such virtues in their own lives. These stories

⁹ The distinction between a vision for the good society, virtuous persons and responsible decision-making, based on appropriate values and obligations, describe three important moral quests. This distinction is also used to structure courses in ethical theory at the University of the Western Cape. See Conradie, EM *et al* 2006. *Morality as a way of life*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.

¹⁰ For examples of such ecclesial resolutions, see Conradie & Field 2000:108.

¹¹ See Conradie, Mtswetwa & Warmback 2002.

¹² Incorporated in Warmback 2002:112-113.

¹³ On the notion of sustainable community, see especially Rasmussen 1996 & Wellman 2001. For a critical analysis and assessment of this notion, see Conradie 2000, 2002.

¹⁴ On the emergence of an ecological virtue ethics, see especially Blake 1996, Bouma-Prediger 1998, 2000, 2001:137-160, Deane-Drummond 2003, 2004 & Van Wensveen 1999, 2000. Nash lists nine ecological virtues, namely sustainability, adaptability, relationality, frugality, equity, solidarity, biodiversity, sufficiency and humility.

¹⁵ For analysis of various “attitudes towards nature, see Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:17-31, also Deane-Drummond 2004.

include examples of “ecological saints”, epitomised by Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen, but also numerous contemporary figures who have devoted their lives to various environmental causes.

In the literature on ecological virtues the need to retrieve virtues such as asceticism,¹⁶ care,¹⁷ compassion, frugality,¹⁸ generosity, gratitude,¹⁹ hospitality,²⁰ humility,²¹ justice,²² moderation, restraint (*temperantia*),²³ sufficiency and wisdom²⁴ is often discussed. A further clarification of these virtues, retrieving the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude,²⁵ as well as the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, is required, especially given the emergence of a now global consumerist culture. A few further comments on current discourse on the virtue of simplicity may be appropriate here:

Excursus: The virtue of simplicity

In Christian literature on the environment many have called for a simple lifestyle.²⁶ As Bill McKibben has put it: “living with simple elegance is more pleasurable than living caught in the middle of our consumer culture.” Such calls are usually related both to the environmental impact of present patterns of consumption amongst the affluent and to the widening gaps between the rich and the poor. This is expressed in the now famous statement by Charles Birch: “The rich must live more simply so that the poor may simply live.” This is also the gist of a famous comment from Gandhi: “The earth satisfies the needs of all, but not the greed of those bent on insane consumption.”²⁷

In a helpful contribution, Elgin addresses a number of misconceptions regarding voluntary simplicity. Firstly, simplicity does not imply a call to poverty or an ameliorising of poverty. He says: “Poverty is involuntary and debilitating, whereas simplicity is voluntary and enabling.”²⁸ Secondly, simplicity does not entail a denial of progress or development. Instead, it calls for alternative dimensions of such development that would include a spiritual dimension: “True growth ... is the ability of a society to transfer increasing amounts of energy and attention from the material side of life to the nonmaterial side and thereby to advance its culture, capacity for compassion,

¹⁶ See Sherman 1994. Chryssavgis (2000:92) comments: “Asceticism is not another or a better way of acting; it is, in fact, a way of inaction, of stillness, of vigilance. We are called to remember that the present ecological crisis is a result precisely of our action – of considerable human effort and success to ‘change’ or ‘better’ the world – and not only of our greed or covetousness.”

¹⁷ See Deane-Drummond (2004:194-200) on a feminist ethics of care applied to caring for animals.

¹⁸ See, especially the excellent article by Nash 1995, also 1998.

¹⁹ See Ware (1997:22): “In thanksgiving we become ourselves. Without gratitude we are not human but subhuman, or rather antihuman.” See also Hallman 2000.

²⁰ See Fox (1983:108-116) on the notion of cosmic hospitality.

²¹ See the meditations on humility by Helder Camara 1995, Fox 1983:57-65, Hallman 2000 & Murphy 1989:128-144.

²² See Deane-Drummond 2004:45-47.

²³ See Cooper 1990:88f, also Hallman 2000 & McKibben 1989:214.

²⁴ See, especially, Deane-Drummond (2000) for a retrieval of the virtue of wisdom, with specific reference to the role of the sciences (most notably biotechnology) in addressing environmental concerns.

²⁵ See, especially, Deane-Drummond 2004:1-28.

²⁶ See the recent South African study on simplicity by Nicol (1996) and the classic studies by Sider 1977 and Foster 1981. See also the contributions by Cobb 1992, Conradie 1997, Simon 2003 & Taylor 1975.

²⁷ Quoted in Boff 1995:21.

²⁸ Elgin 2000:399.

sense of community, and strength of democracy.”²⁹ Thirdly, a search for simplicity does not necessarily imply a longing for a rural lifestyle of a bygone era. Instead, it calls for a new appreciation of life in one’s present location. Finally, simplicity cannot imply a denial of beauty or the adoption of a rigid, dry and barren lifestyle. Simplicity should be aesthetically attractive in order to liberate one from the artificial homogeneity of a consumerist culture.³⁰

These calls for a simple lifestyle must also be understood within the context of simplicity as a spiritual discipline and the classic Christian virtue of voluntary poverty that finds joy in the simple life and charity in communal owning and distributing of goods and services. The Christian gospel does not entail a disdain for that which is earthly, bodily or material. It affirms the value of creation and finds joy in life and the many gifts that support life. At the same time, the Christian virtue of simplicity emphasises the inner freedom that liberates one from the devouring desire to hoard possessions, to consume and to control.

Accordingly, many Christian theologians have argued that we need a new understanding of what it means to live within the limits of scarcity (in contrast to the myth of unlimited growth). Unlimited economic growth and consumption are bound to a culture of death and not to a theology of life. The notion of sustainability implies a theology of finitude,³¹ but also a sense of “satisfaction”, a sense of knowing when you have had enough (*satis*).³² We need to know when “Enough is enough” (the apt title of John Taylor’s study on simplicity).³³ This requires a retrieval of the classic virtue of *temperantia* or moderation. In an industrialised world this also requires a “renunciation of force”, (e.g. measured by the yardstick of converted energy) on the part of human beings and an ethos of self-limitation: to live within the limits of nature – which are not ours to determine!³⁴ The affluent need to learn how to enjoy the simple things in life (which is there in abundance) and to celebrate the gift of life in all its fullness. Instead of the vaulting and devouring ambition of Ecclesiastes 2, the affluent need to learn the more simple lifestyle of Ecclesiastes 9:7-9.³⁵ This lifestyle is crucial – especially since there has been little sign of any impact on the materialism and consumerism that pervades industrialised countries.³⁶

Despite the spiritual depth of such calls for a simple lifestyle, there are several objections that can be raised against such pleas for simplicity. In his book *Sustainability* John Cobb acknowledges the severe difficulties of changing one’s lifestyle voluntarily. Moreover, slight lifestyle changes may be possible, but will also have relatively little environment impact. For the urban middle class it is especially difficult to adopt a lifestyle that is not harmful to the environment. Cobb suggests that what people are most willing to do, is to support changes in legislation that are beneficial to the environment, even if some cost

²⁹ Elgin 2000:400.

³⁰ See Elgin (2000:401-403) for a list of 18 tendencies which are evident amongst those who have opted for simplicity.

³¹ See Olivier 1991.

³² See Rolston 1988.

³³ Taylor 1975.

³⁴ See Gibellini 1995:129.

³⁵ See Conradie 1997.

³⁶ Hallman 1994:5.

to them is involved, for example clean air and clean water legislation, efficiency in cars, progressive forms of taxation, etc.³⁷

In his excellent and thorough discussion, James Nash identifies the following ecological virtues: Sustainability, adaptability, relationality, frugality, equity, solidarity, biodiversity, sufficiency and humility.³⁸ He suggests that it is perhaps virtue of frugality and not so much simplicity that is called for:³⁹ “Frugality connotes thrift, moderation, temperance, and material sufficiency. As such it is the antithesis of the overconsumption and prodigality that are central characteristics of the American dream but are also the driving forces behind economic maldistribution and ecological degradation.”⁴⁰ He argues that frugality constitutes economic subversion. He identifies four characteristics of such subversion:

- * Frugality rejects the popular assumption that humans are insatiable creatures, ceaselessly acquisitive for economic gains and goods and egoistically committed to pleasure maximization.
- * Frugality resists the temptations of consumerism and the ubiquitous pressures of advertising.
- * Frugality struggles against the various psychological and sociological dynamics that stimulate overconsumption.
- * Ethically conscious frugality rejects the prevailing ideology of indiscriminate, material economic growth.⁴¹

12.4 Values supported by a Christian ecological ethos

There is, of course, a need for people with an appropriate ecological vision and who are embodying ecological virtues to engage in responsible and ecologically sensitive decision making and to clarify the relevant social priorities (*values*) and responsibilities (*duties, obligations*) in this regard. The aim of a discussion of ecological values is to concretise a vision of the good society towards policy making in the context of specific environmental threats. The values and the “middle axioms” formulated by ethicists may be valuable here. A clarification of such values is necessary precisely as a result of a clash of such values that are typically evident in particular ethical dilemmas.

There is a considerable degree of consensus amongst environmental ethicists that the system of values supporting the dominant economic order has to be challenged. There have been several major attempts to formulate an alternative set of values and obligations that could guide environmental decision making. The most significant of these are perhaps the project towards “A global ethic” under the leadership of Hans Küng⁴² and especially the Earth Charter movement.⁴³

Several Christian scholars have therefore tried to articulate the values that could support an ecological ethos. The following contributions may be mentioned in this regard:

³⁷ Cobb 1992.

³⁸ Nash 1991:63f.

³⁹ Nash 1995.

⁴⁰ Nash 1996.

⁴¹ Nash 1995.

⁴² See Küng 1990, Küng & Kuschel 1995, Küng & Schmidt 1998 and the discussion in chapter 15.

⁴³ See <www.earthcharter.org> and the discussion in chapter 15.

- * Rasmussen identifies the following appropriate social values: Ecological sustainability, sufficiency or sustenance, community through work, participation by all, and respect for diversity.⁴⁴
- * In their *Christian environmental ethics: A case method approach*, James Martin-Schramm & Robert Stivers identifies four norms for an ethic of ecological justice: sustainability, sufficiency, participation and solidarity.⁴⁵
- * Holmes Rolston (III) a prominent reformed environmental philosopher and ethicist also emphasises the need to concretise environmental values in several of his recent works.⁴⁶ He distinguishes between intrinsic value, instrumental value and systemic value. This allows him to argue that rivers have less intrinsic value than amoebas, which have less than insects, which have less than baboons, which have less than humans. By contrast, instrumental value is roughly inversely proportional to intrinsic value. Rivers and grasses are of more use value than squirrels or humans. The notion of systemic value refers to the value of an ecosystem. The system transcends the instrumental value of individual organisms in that it has a “projective” thrust through which life in all its fecundity has emerged and flourished.⁴⁷ On this basis he identifies a whole range of values “carried” by nature.

12.5 Ethical reflection and environmental policy making

There is a whole range of specific environmental issues which call for ethical reflection. Many Christian theologians have contributed to the global, secular and inter-religious debates on these issues. The specific contribution that Christian theologians can make to these debates is not necessarily at the level of understanding the extent of particular problems. The task of the environmental and economic sciences is to gather the necessary information and to develop tools for analysis. The contribution of Christian theology may also not be at the level of possible solutions to these problems or the development of policy guidelines in this regard.⁴⁸ This is the task of the various forms of government or management, although there is certainly a role for Christian advocacy here.

Nevertheless, Christian ethicists have made important contributions in numerous areas. The following areas are simply listed here, more or less in alphabetic order, with references to some of the relevant literature from the perspective of a Christian ecological theology. In all cases further references can be easily multiplied.

- * Agriculture, the use of farmland, organic farming and models for sustainable agriculture;⁴⁹
- * Animal welfare,⁵⁰ animal liberation (Peter Singer) and animal rights discourse (Tom Regan, Andrew Linzey), with contributions on the moral status of “otherkind”,

⁴⁴ Rasmussen 1994:127, 1996:142f.

⁴⁵ Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:37-45.

⁴⁶ See especially Rolston (1988).

⁴⁷ Rolston 1988:186-88, 216f, 1994:171-177. See also Bouma-Prediger 2001:134, 172.

⁴⁸ On the need for policy discourse and the political impact of such policy discourse, see the contributions by Nash 1991:192f, 1996 & Randolph 1996.

⁴⁹ See the many contributions by Freudenberger, also Cobb & Daly 1994:268-282, Kirschenmann 1991, Marlett 1998, & Wirtz 1998.

cruelty to animals as a result of experimentation with animals,⁵¹ cruelty to domestic animals and pets, the plight of animals on commercial farms,⁵² genetic manipulation of animals,⁵³ trade with animal products, the culling of wildlife stocks and (trophy) hunting.⁵⁴

- * Atmospheric pollution,⁵⁵ including issues such as global warming,⁵⁶ climate change,⁵⁷ ozone depletion, acid rain, etc.;
- * Biodiversity⁵⁸ and the effects of deforestation;⁵⁹
- * Biotechnology, genetic engineering and (animal) cloning;⁶⁰
- * Economic justice, issues of globalisation and its effect on the global economy, financial systems and taxes,⁶¹
- * Energy,⁶² including issues such as the use of non-renewable sources of energy (e.g. fossil fuels), nuclear energy and nuclear waste,⁶³ the search for alternative sources of energy, the need for mobility and transport;⁶⁴

⁵⁰ A discussion of these issues has led to a wealth of literature, also within the specific context of Christian theology. An ethical concern for the welfare of animals has in the process been transformed into an “animal theology”, that is, a reinvestigation of the full range of disciplines in Christian theology (the Bible, the history of Christianity, Christian doctrine, Christian praxis and spirituality), from the perspective of animal welfare. See, especially, the many contributions by Andrew Linzey 1976, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1998, Linzey & Regan 1989, also Cowdin 2000, Pinches & McDaniel 1993, Regan 1987, 1990. For a critical assessment of Linzey’s work, see Deane-Drummond 2040:60-65, Palmer 2003.

⁵¹ Linzey 1995:95-113.

⁵² See Comstock 1993, French 1993.

⁵³ See Hessel 1994, Linzey 1995:138-155.

⁵⁴ See Linzey 1995:114-124.

⁵⁵ See Chadzingwa 1995 & Mugambi 2001.

⁵⁶ See Gibson 1992, Hallman 1990, 2000, 2001 & McDonagh 1999:62-84.

⁵⁷ The Working Group on Climate Change within the World Council of Churches has done significant work in this regard. See the reports from this working group (World Council of Churches 2000, 2002, also the website at <www.wcc-coe.org>), also Hallman (2001) and the detailed report of this working group in Mugambi 2001:8-34. See also the contributions from Cromartie (1995:37-71) and from Catherine Keller (1993, 1999) on apocalyptic discourse regarding climate change. See also the popular booklet, *It’s God’s world: Christians, the environment and climate change* published by the Eco-justice Working Group, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

⁵⁸ See Deane-Drummond 1993, Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:140-197, the volume of essays edited by Edwards & Worthing 2004 and the essays by Andrianarivo, Davies and the Diocese of Mpawapwa in Gollhofer 2004.

⁵⁹ In many parts of the world women are taking the lead in steps to halt deforestation (e.g. the Chipko movement in India, where women hug trees to save them from felling, and the Kenya Green Belt movement in Kenya which initiates tree planting projects under the leadership of Nobel Peace prize winner Wangari Mathaai). See, for example, the contributions by Boff (1997:86-103) on the Amazons, Daneel (1991, 1992, 1994, 1999) on Zimbabwe, Hedström (1988, 1990) on Latin America, Lockmann (1991), Martin-Schramm & Stivers (2003) on the USA and Ribeiro (1995) on the Amazons, McDonagh (1990:74-106) on the Philippines. See also the two chapters in Rasmussen (1996:196-219) on the ecological symbolism of trees.

⁶⁰ There is a growing corpus of literature on biotechnology from a Christian theological perspective. Such literature does not always focus on the wider environmental aspects of this debate explicitly – and is therefore not taken into account here. See, especially, the many contributions by Deane-Drummond 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2004:86-110, also Hessel 1994, McDonagh 1999:119-192, Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:278-310 & Miller 1991.

⁶¹ See chapters 3 & 4 for more detail on contributions in this regard.

⁶² Many studies have focused on the production and use of energy. Some studies have focused on the specific problem of the production of nuclear energy, the storage of nuclear waste and the implications of this for future generations. Many studies have encouraged the investigation of alternative forms of energy production and the allocation of research funds in this regard. Liedke (1979) and Duchrow & Liedke

- * Food issues,⁶⁵ including genetically modified sources,⁶⁶ the distribution of food supplies, malnutrition, hunger and famine,⁶⁷ the need for a (more) vegetarian diet,⁶⁸
- * Health and healing, including the link between the environment and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS;⁶⁹
- * Human sexuality,⁷⁰ sexual orientation with reference to gay & lesbian perspectives,⁷¹ human bodiliness, also with reference to persons with bodily impairments;⁷²
- * Industry, the impact of the manufacturing sector on the environment and on workers;⁷³
- * Land issues, such as land ownership and use,⁷⁴ land reform, sustainable agriculture⁷⁵ (organic farming, the use of fertilisers and pesticides), the role of women in farming, urban farming, the sustainable use of natural resources, soil erosion, “slash-and-burn” practices, desertification,⁷⁶ etc. These issues call for a theology of land ownership,⁷⁷ land distribution and the sustainable management of land.⁷⁸
- * Marine resources, over-fishing, pollution at sea;⁷⁹
- * Military concerns, the impact of war on the environment, violent conflict over scarce resources, the allocation of resources for the sake of security – amidst the threats of terrorism;⁸⁰
- * Nature conservation including wilderness areas,⁸¹ the protection of wildlife,⁸² hunting, the problem of poaching, the preservation of endangered species, and the ambivalence of ecotourism;⁸³

(1987) has used the conversion of energy as a yardstick for the environmental impact of economic activities with specific reference to the unequal ratio of energy consumption in First World countries compared to Third World countries. Using the Norwegian peace researcher John Galtung’s conflict theory, they have argued for a minimising of violence in interactions between humans and otherkind. See also the essays by Bingham, Browning, McGervey, Oliver & Rukirande in Gollhofer 2004 as well as the contributions by Maya 1995, Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:198-217.

⁶³ See Buess 1978, Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:218-252.

⁶⁴ See the apt title of the study project by the World Council of Churches (2002): “Mobile – but not driven”. See also Rogerson (1998/1999) and the instructive chapter by Thomas Berry (1999:150-158) on the “petroleum interval”.

⁶⁵ See the articles on food-related issues by Adams, Deane–Drummond & Steele-Kaza in *Ecotheology* 9 as well as the essays by Mann, Jyakaran and Beresford in Gollhofer 2004. See also Deane–Drummond 2000, De Gruchy 2002, DeWitt 1996:49-58, Freudenberger 1984, 1990, Lenkabula 2005, Levett-Olson 2004, Owens 1997 (on Malawi) & Sölle 1995.

⁶⁶ See the occasional paper developed by the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (2001).

⁶⁷ See, for example, Mulholland 1988:31-40.

⁶⁸ See Adams 1990, 1993, 2000, Cooper 1990:217-249 & Linzey 1995:125-137.

⁶⁹ See Ackermann 2004 on HIV/AIDS and the indexed bibliography for further references.

⁷⁰ See the reflections on bodiliness from an ecofeminist perspective by Korte 1995 & McFague 1993.

⁷¹ See Clark 1993, Spencer 1996 & Spencer in Taylor 2005:789-793.

⁷² See Hallahan 2001.

⁷³ Cobb & Daly 1994:283-297.

⁷⁴ See Bahr 1991, Cobb & Daly 1994:252-267 & Kirschenmann 1991. For African contributions, see Clobus 1991, Conradie 1992, Daneel 1995, Hinga 1996, Nürnberger 1992, Field & Masengwe 2002, Kritzinger 1993, Moyo & Katerere 1995.

⁷⁵ On commercial agriculture and sustainable agriculture, see the many contributions by Freudenberger (especially 1990), also Moyo & Katerere (1995) and Roos (1995) on Zimbabwe.

⁷⁶ See especially Freudenberger 1990.

⁷⁷ See, in a South African context, Kritzinger 1993 & Nürnberger 1992.

⁷⁸ For contributions towards a theology of land, see Hart 1984 and the indexed bibliography.

⁷⁹ See McDonagh 1999:85-97 & Rasmussen 1996:155-167.

⁸⁰ Cobb & Daly 1994:332-360.

- * Nuclear threats: the threat of nuclear war, terrorism with nuclear weapons, nuclear disasters;⁸⁴
- * Pollution: visual pollution, air pollution, pollution of water supplies, the impact of toxic substances on ecosystems;⁸⁵
- * Population and consumption,⁸⁶ taking issues such as the carrying capacity of the land, family planning,⁸⁷ the use of contraceptives and issues around abortion into account, also with reference to the International Conference on Population and Development held in Caro (1994);⁸⁸
- * Racism and the quest for environmental justice;⁸⁹
- * Technology, the search for appropriate and sustainable forms of technology, the focus of and funding for scientific research,⁹⁰ the impact of technology on the human condition;⁹¹
- * Urban planning, housing, the built environment, the use of energy, systems of transport, pollution, the quest for a sustainable communities in an urban context;⁹²
- * Waste: the production and proper management of various forms of waste (municipal, toxic, medical, nuclear) in an urban-industrial society⁹³ and in the settlements of the urban poor;⁹⁴
- * Water: water pollution, the sustainable use of water resources, the protections of wetlands and river systems.⁹⁵

⁸¹ See Nunez (2000) for a postmodern critique of elitist, androcentric and unjust notions of wilderness and an exploration of what it means for Christian environmental ethos to “go wild”.

⁸² See the contribution by Rolston 1992.

⁸³ For a South African contribution on ecotourism, see Field 1999.

⁸⁴ See, especially, McDonagh 1999:98-118 & Moltmann 1989:19f.

⁸⁵ See the early contribution by Berry 1972.

⁸⁶ See the contributions in Christian theology by Bratton 1992, Cobb & Daly 1994:236-251, Coward & Maguire 2000, Curlin 1996, Keller 1994, Maguire 2000, Maguire & Rasmussen 1998, Martin-Schramm 1992, 1996, 1997, 2000, McDonagh 1990:38-73, Múnera 2000, Toolan 1994, as well as the special issue of *Theology and Public Policy* 8:1-2 on “The ethics of population, consumption and the environment.”

⁸⁷ For issues relating to family planning in an African context, see Kinoti 2002, Nürnberger 1988.

⁸⁸ See Martin-Schramm (1994) and the indexed bibliography for further references.

⁸⁹ From a Christian perspective, see Rasmussen 2004 and the essays by Marable, Gelobter and Hoyt in Hessel 1996.

⁹⁰ See Berry 1988:50-69, Barbour 1980, Ferré 1993, Fritsch 1994, Ledger 2004 & Wilkinson 1991:255-273. Ferré argues that a new worldview has to be constructed out of the debris of modernity. The dichotomies between religion, philosophy, science and technology has to be regarded as too-narrow construals of a single but polyvalent, organic world. He suggests that an interim worldview that he calls “multi-mythic organicism” will help humanity to recover the spiritual dimensions now lacking.

⁹¹ See Hefner 2003 & Scott 1998, 2004.

⁹² See Cobb 1992:34-53, Gorringer 2002, Kjellberg 2000, 2004, Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:80-111, & Rasmussen 1999.

⁹³ See, e.g. Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003 & Peters 1989.

⁹⁴ Gebara (1999:3) argues that the urban poor are victims of waste generated elsewhere, for example by polluting industries, nuclear power plants, or military headquarters. The poor are not the principal consumers of canned and packaged goods. However, the poor are the first to be hurt by the various kinds of waste which are produced. She acknowledges that the poor do generate a small amount of garbage and that it ends up all around them, but argues that it is virtually impossible for them to change the rules of a game created by others, a game that requires material wealth to live in places far from the garbage one produces.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Turton 2004 and the study on “Water for life” by the World Council of Churches (2006). See the indexed bibliography for further references.

There can be no doubt about the urgency of further contributions on each of these concerns. In such discourse reflection on the efficacy of policy making is required. Moral decision making on each of these concerns will be necessarily complex. Since one is typically confronted with a clash of the core values which are at stake, there are no clear moral methodologies that would be applicable to all situations. Instead, what is required is for people in positions of power and responsibility is to exercise wisdom and restraint. The importance of such wisdom has been stressed in a number of Christian contributions on environmental ethics.⁹⁶

12.6 Ecological duties and environmental rights

Environmental concerns may also be expressed in the form of ethical categories such as obligations, duties, rules and (human) rights. As James Nash puts it in *Loving nature*, "Rights are a way of conceptualising the basic demands of justice."⁹⁷ The following aspects of this debate may be mentioned here:

a) In South Africa the right to a clean and healthy environment is included in the Bill of Rights. Section 24 of the Bill of Rights in South Africa's new constitution has the following environmental clause:

Everyone has the right –

- a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being; and
- b) to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that –

- * prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
- * promote conservation; and
- * secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

b) This right of the present generation to a clean and healthy environment is often coupled with the rights of future generations. Although it seems clear that humans have obligations and duties towards others which extend into the future, and may be applied to future generations, the "rights" of such future generations are more difficult to enforce in terms of a court of law.⁹⁸ It is also necessary to explore the relative weight of present obligations (to provide food for one's family) in comparison with future generations (to ensure that one's grandchildren will have access to arable land).

c) The rights of human beings to a clean and healthy environment focus on a concern for human beings. The reason why environmental degradation should be prevented is the risks posed to other human beings. This formulation remains anthropocentric in orientation. This observation has stimulated further discourse on biotic rights and the rights of nature. Two opposing views may be identified in this regard:

⁹⁶ See Deane Drummond 2000, 2004 & Moltmann 2003.

⁹⁷ Nash 1991:169.

⁹⁸ On the rights of future generations, see the collection of contributions in German discourse in Halter & Lochbühler 1999:94-150, also Leimbacher 1990, Visser 't Hooft (1993) and especially the volume of essays edited by Vischer (1990) from within the context of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

- * In an early contribution entitled, *In defence of people*, Neuhaus has argued against an environmentalism that puts the rights of nature above the rights of people.⁹⁹ In several contributions Thomas Derr has also defended a “Christian humanism” in which God’s concern for human beings is emphasised.¹⁰⁰ Others have defended a weak instead of a strong form of anthropocentrism, for example on the basis of the intrinsic value of all forms of life but not the equal intrinsic value.¹⁰¹ Some have argued that a certain anthropocentrism is hermeneutically necessary insofar as such discourse on the rights of nature remains *human* discourse. Others have introduced a distinction between anthropocentric and anthropogenic approaches.¹⁰²
- * Several contributions to an ecological theology have nevertheless defended the notion of the “rights of nature”, for example by arguing that every species has a God-given right to express itself according to its own nature.¹⁰³

d) Discourse on animal rights forms a special case within the larger debate on the rights of nature. The focus here is especially on the rights of sentient animals.¹⁰⁴ This is discussed with reference to the various ethical concerns around animals which were listed above. Since the right to life of all living organisms can scarcely be enforced given the functioning of the food chain in ecosystems, some have focused on the rights of animals to be protected from human abuse. If animals can suffer, they have a right to be protected from excessive suffering induced by humans.

e) There have also been a number of attempts to extend rights language to non-sentient forms of life (“Do trees have moral standing?”) and even to non-living entities (“Do rocks have rights?”).¹⁰⁵ The notion of biotic rights¹⁰⁶ raises some conceptual difficulties, given the functioning of the food chain and predator-prey relations. Moreover, one may question the rights of forms of life which pose a major threat to human beings (e.g. malaria carrying mosquitoes).¹⁰⁷ It should also be noted that such rights would not apply to interactions between non-human animals if they cannot be regarded as moral agents.

⁹⁹ Neuhaus 1971.

¹⁰⁰ See Derr 1975, 1995:85-104, 1996:17-103, followed by a response by James Nash.

¹⁰¹ See Deckers 2004.

¹⁰² See Allenby 2003, Rolston 1994:158-162. As Holmes Rolston (1988:112) suggests, non-sentient organisms “are valued, when humans encounter them, for what they are in themselves, and not just for the sake of human appreciation.”

¹⁰³ See, e.g. Moltmann 1999:117-134, Nash 1991:173f.

¹⁰⁴ See the contributions by Bondolfi 1989, Bowker 1994, Caldecott 1992, Linzey 1976, 1991, 1993, McDaniel 1998, Morris & Fox 1978, Regan 1990 & Young 1999.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of such conceptual difficulties in environmental philosophy, see Desjardins, J 2006. *Environmental ethics: An introduction to environmental philosophy*. Toronto: Wadsworth, p. 106f.

¹⁰⁶ For Christian discourse on biotic rights, see the contributions by Birch & Cobb 1981, McDaniel 1989:51-84, Nash 1991:146-91, 1993, Rasmussen 1996:107-9, 1999 & Rolston 1988. Nash (1991:186-9) identifies eight such biotic rights: 1) The right to participate in the natural competition for existence, 2) the right to satisfaction of their basic needs and the opportunity to perform their individual and/or ecosystemic functions, 3) the right to healthy and whole habitats, 4) the right to reproduce their own kind, 5) the right to fulfill their evolutionary potential with freedom from human induced extinctions, 6) the right to freedom from human cruelty, flagrant abuse, or frivolous use, 7) the right to redress through human interventions, to restore a semblance of the natural conditions disrupted by human actions, and 8) the right to a fair share of the goods necessary for the sustainability of one’s species.

¹⁰⁷ See also the contributions by Huber 1991, Moltmann 1989, 1990 & Sun 1998.

Despite these conceptual difficulties around biotic rights, the attempts to develop a legal framework within which human interactions with otherkind could be governed have to be applauded. It seems clear that much further work is required on the question underlying these debates, namely on an adequate understanding of the relationship between humankind and otherkind. Christian theology can make a significant contribution in this regard by articulating a moral vision of the place of humanity in the earth community.

12.7 Excursus: The equal intrinsic value of all forms of life?¹⁰⁸

As a result of the conceptual difficulties around biotic rights, some scholars have opted, instead, to return to the category of values. In order to avoid anthropocentric approaches to the instrumental value of natural resources, they have stressed the intrinsic value of otherkind.

Christian ethicists such as John Cobb, Jay McDaniel, James Nash, Larry Rasmussen and Holmes Rolston have consistently argued that all forms of life have *intrinsic* worth. They are not merely valuable because of their *instrumental* value for human well-being. Intrinsic worth is usually understood as the value which an entity has “of itself”. However, as Rolston points out, individual mountains, plants and animals have value apart from their usefulness for humans, but not in isolation from their environments. Their own intrinsic worth is inseparable from their being organic parts of ecosystems and, ultimately, of the earth community as a whole.¹⁰⁹ Intrinsic worth is best understood in terms of the relationships of creatures with other creatures and with God. The point is that such relationships cannot be based purely on instrumental value.

One of the advantages of the notion of “intrinsic value” is that it does not hinge on the question whether or not nonhuman creatures have rights. If such creatures have intrinsic value, humans as moral agents have a duty to protect them, regardless of whether rights language is applicable to such creatures.¹¹⁰ If anything, the vulnerability to suffering, related to capacity for sentience, suggests the obligation not to inflict avoidable suffering on otherkind.¹¹¹ Such human duties towards nonhuman creatures seem to be consistent with a theological emphasis on God’s desire that all forms of life in the earth community should flourish.

An emphasis on intrinsic value, important as it may be, does not yet resolve the question whether *all* forms of life are of *equal* intrinsic value. A recognition of intrinsic value does not necessarily imply equal value. John Cobb suggests that: “The obligations we owe to inanimate things, to plants, to other animals, and to human beings differ and the differentiation involves an ascending scale. The fact that we should not kill other human beings does not necessary entail that we should not kill other animals.”¹¹² A position which maintains the equal value of all entities would seem impractical in a world where living organisms have to eat others to survive. This is a hotly contested debate in which a

¹⁰⁸ This discussion is based on a section of my *An ecological Christian anthropology*. See Conradie 2005:121-128.

¹⁰⁹ Rolston 1988:186-188.

¹¹⁰ See Bouma-Prediger (2001:171), also drawing on insights from Holmes Rolston.

¹¹¹ See McDaniel (1989:59) with reference to the work of Peter Singer.

¹¹² Cobb 1992:33.

conflicting diversity of approaches including biocentric approaches,¹¹³ ecocentric approaches (for example, the wilderness preservation movement associated with John Muir and the land ethic associated with Aldo Leopold¹¹⁴), and radical approaches (for example, deep ecology, social ecology and ecofeminism) may be identified. These debates in environmental ethics cannot be resolved here.¹¹⁵

It is of course true that equality is not a precondition for recognising worth. Differential treatment is justified when morally relevant differences exist.¹¹⁶ The question is therefore whether such a morally relevant distinction between human and nonhuman forms of life may be recognised. Where human life is threatened by other species, should it necessarily have precedence? It is probably better to be honest about the scale of values which we do employ than to pretend that all organisms have equal value.¹¹⁷ Typically humans value the needs of their children more than the needs of household pets, not to mention household pests. My children and my dog may have intrinsic value. I have duties towards my children and my dog, also to protect my dog against my children's sadism where necessary. These duties are not on par with one another though. According to such an argument, all forms of life have intrinsic value but not equal intrinsic value. Holmes Rolston, for example, allows for a hierarchy of values. He argues that it is not only a matter of *equality* but also of *quality*, that is, of "value richness".¹¹⁸

A rationale for such a hierarchy of values may be provided in terms of the evolutionary process of increasing complexity and levels of consciousness.¹¹⁹ James Nash, for example, suggests a "graded model" where conative abilities may be used as a criterion to establish biotic rights.¹²⁰ The category of sentience is often introduced in a similar way. Other things being equal, the needs of sentient creatures have precedence over the needs of non-sentient ones in conflict situations. Likewise, the interests of living organisms such as plants should have precedence over the interests of non-living entities such as rocks or water. Paul Taylor suggests, for example, that "all organisms, whether conscious or not, are teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified, coherently ordered system of goal-orientated activities which has a constant tendency to protect and maintain the organism's existence."¹²¹ Other possibilities such as autopoiesis (Warwick Fox), being "a subject of a life" (Tom Regan), language and communication,

¹¹³ See Albert Schweitzer's notion of "reverence for life" and the defence of such a biocentric emphasis on "respect for life" in Taylor, P 1986. *Respect for nature: A theory of environmental ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹¹⁴ See Leopold's famous *A Sand County almanac* (1949) and the defence of such an ecocentric approach by Callicot and others. See also Scoville 2000.

¹¹⁵ For a helpful overview of these debates from within the South African context, see Hattingh, JP 1999. Finding creativity in the diversity of environmental ethics. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 19, 68-84. For a similar overview of various positions on the value of non-human life, see Bouma-Prediger 2001:127-134.

¹¹⁶ Nash 1991:168.

¹¹⁷ Bouma-Prediger 2001:132.

¹¹⁸ Rolston 1988:68, 73.

¹¹⁹ This is proposed by Edwards 1995:161.

¹²⁰ Nash 1991:179. Nash defines such conative abilities as "drives or aims, urges or goals, purposes or impulses – whether conscious or unconscious – to be and to do."

¹²¹ See Taylor, P 1986. *Respect for nature: A theory of environmental ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 122. Also quoted in Fern 2002:42-43. Fern concludes that: "the world is a better place when living creatures realize the ends proper to their own being."

reason, consciousness, moral capacity or “richness of experience” (Jay McDaniel) may also be introduced to defend the intrinsic but not the equal value of all forms of life.

The strengths of such a defence of intrinsic but graded value seem to be that it encourages a pragmatic approach and that it allows for differentiation in decision making processes. It also rejects a romanticised biotic egalitarianism which places all species on the same moral plane.¹²² The question which has to be addressed here is whether the introduction of such categories to defend the intrinsic but not equal value of all forms of life is not vulnerable to the criticism that it remains anthropocentric and privilege human cognition in the same way in which earlier Christian discourse on the *imago Dei* did. Does this not endorse a biotic pyramid where *man's* place at the top of the hierarchy is firmly secured? Can such a model of intrinsic but graded worth protect the inalienable dignity of all beings with a vigour which is comparable to the theological conviction that *all* humans and humans *only* are created in the image of God? The revolutionary significance of the affirmation of human dignity in the Jewish-Christian tradition is precisely this emphasis on equality. Human dignity assumes the equality of God's children – irrespective of official positions or duties, social status, talents or wealth, gender, race or nationality.¹²³ If complexity is the demarcation criterion, does this not again open the door, within the context of human rights discourse, for discrimination against the senile, the mentally handicapped, the unborn, or anyone who may be deemed of a lower intellectual or social standing? If, on the other hand, the emphasis is really on equal dignity, should the equal dignity of all forms of life then be affirmed too?

This appears to be real conceptual dilemma where moral discourse based on the category of values (utilitarianism) appears yet again to be in conflict with moral discourse based on the categories of duties and rights. If the strength of discourse on human dignity is the emphasis on *equal* dignity, can the intrinsic value of all forms of life be defended with a similar vigour without such a notion of equality? Should one affirm the dignity, the intrinsic worth as well as the equal value of all forms of life? Or should one affirm the inherent dignity of all life but allow for differentiated value, for example on the basis of levels of complexity?

I wish to offer three guidelines in response to such questions here:

a) Firstly, the health of the whole earth community, the biosphere, should necessarily take precedence over the well-being and interests of any species or specimen, including humans. This principle was famously expressed by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County almanac*: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”¹²⁴ This land ethic acknowledges our instincts to compete for a place in the biotic community, but at the same time requires us to cooperate with others in the earth community. This guideline applies to specific ecosystems as well, although most urban societies are detrimental to their immediate environments. Any action which threatens the very existence of an

¹²² Nash 1991:181. Stephen Clark (1993:115) counters this argument by pointing out that human egalitarianism does not entail indifference to the particularity of people, but seeks to ensure that the particular interests of some human beings are protected against the interests of others.

¹²³ See Huber, W. 1996. *Violence: The unrelenting assault on human dignity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p. 115.

¹²⁴ Leopold, A. 1949. *A Sand County almanac*. New York: Ballantine, p. 262.

ecosystem should obviously be avoided, if only on purely pragmatic grounds.¹²⁵ What is valuable in any ecosystem is its projective ability to let life flourish. While individual specimens are subjected to struggle, violence and death, the system as such allows for interdependence and ever-continuing life.¹²⁶

This emphasis on the earth community as a whole is admittedly vulnerable to the critique that no one (but God, presumably) is able to command an assessment of the well-being of the whole. The whole of reality will always elude our grasp. Moreover, the whole of reality is not only hidden, but is itself not yet there.¹²⁷ Our sense of the whole will necessarily be a *construction* of the whole from a particular and limited perspective. We cannot observe the whole, and can describe the whole only piece by piece. The much-used rhetoric of “holism” therefore has to be avoided and may perhaps be replaced by a rhetoric calling for a sense of integration. Moreover, such constructions of the whole may well be romanticised or totalitarian or, in the case of Fascism, both. A sense of totality is indeed all too often based on the erasure of difference and a unification which has to be enforced.¹²⁸

At the same time we need to recognise that such constructions of the whole cannot be avoided either. Perhaps the adequacy of any one construction of the whole is less important than an ability to pick up systemic distortions, that is, signals that the health of the whole is threatened and to identify the root causes of such systemic distortions. If we cannot avoid such constructions of the whole, we do need to search for relatively less totalitarian constructions of the whole.

This guideline may also raise the suspicion of “environmental fascism” (Tom Regan) for which proponents of a land ethic have been criticised. There is indeed a danger that an exclusive focus on the biotic community may allow the powerful to run roughshod over the good of individual specimens. However, to insist on the rights of every individual sentient being to live would simply be impractical (even Manichaeist) given the functioning of the food chain in every ecosystem.

b) The second and also secondary guideline suggests that every species received a directive from God to flourish, to be fruitful and multiply, and to enhance its own species. This directive also applies to human beings and implies that humans have a right to food, shelter, clothes and protection. This implies that humans may have to consume specimens from some species and protect themselves against others. We have a duty to enhance our own species, and may do so as long as the health and well-being of an ecosystem is not threatened in the process. While individual members of a species are consumed by others species in the food chain, the health of an ecosystem is endangered if a whole species is threatened. Predators do have an interest in their prey’s surviving and flourishing as a species. This suggests at the very least that humans have a duty to assist endangered species, especially where human interference is involved.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Hattingh (1999:77) notes that such an ecosystem ethics is often criticised for lacking a strong social theory and critique. Because the emphasis is placed on the ecosystem, the human origin of ecological problems may be neglected. The thought patterns embedded in the global economic system which threaten numerous ecosystems have to be addressed. See note 115 above.

¹²⁶ Rolston 1988:225.

¹²⁷ Moltmann 2003:13-14.

¹²⁸ See also Jüngel 2003:47.

¹²⁹ Nash 1991:179-185.

It should also be noted that many species have developed additional intra-species rules which apply to the interactions between members of the species and, more specifically, a particular social group. The forms of social organisation among bees, ants, various mammals and especially primates have been studied and documented. Within the human species such intra-species rules which regulate interaction among humans, especially within particular social groups, have become highly developed and intricate. Some of these intra-species rules are found in all or virtually all human communities. Most human cultures maintain that *all* the members of the human species have a right to live. We may not kill other members of our own species, unless this is clearly necessary for our own protection. We also have a duty to protect the lives of other humans as far as this may be possible. A lion killing a tourist is not violating any human rights, but other humans are if they fail to rescue the victim.¹³⁰ These intra-species rules are the product of cultural evolution in which religious convictions have played a crucial role. It is within this context that the egalitarian implications of the notion of the image of God are important. This provides important safeguards against hierarchical rankings among human groupings and thereby helps to oppose classism, racism and sexism.¹³¹

c) Such guidelines governing ecosystems and species are insufficient to describe human interaction with individual specimens. The preservation of a species will not be feasible without sufficient respect for individual members and without moral constraints against their destruction.¹³² Even if the preservation of viable populations of a species is ecologically more important than the fate of individual members, no species exists without individual specimens representing its genetic lineage and reproducing it. Any comprehensive environmental ethics needs two focal points: the one focusing on the integrity of encompassing wholes and the other engaging the well-being of individual entities.¹³³ This suggests the need for a third set of guidelines governing particular interactions between humans and other living organisms. Such guidelines would also need to cover human interactions with the non-organic aspects of an ecosystem: the building blocks of water, air, energy and the mineral constituents of soil on which all forms of life depend in order to flourish. For, as Holmes Rolston notes: "Nature is a fountain of life, and the whole fountain – not just the life that issues from it – is of value. Nature is genesis. Genesis."¹³⁴

It is at this level that the notion of the "equal" value of all organisms seems most problematic. Is it not better to accept a graded model where the precedence of human needs is acknowledged and legitimised, especially in cases where there are competing duties? My sense is that it would be very difficult to formulate a set of guidelines governing all interactions between humans and otherkind. Stephen Clark's advice here is probably sound: "Much of this must be left to concrete occasions and to careful agents, rather than being settled with a flourish of high principles."¹³⁵ Contextual factors will always have to be taken into account in order to balance the competing interests of all the species and specimens in an ecosystem. This constitutes the typical ethical problem

¹³⁰ See Rolston 1988:57.

¹³¹ See Nash 1991:182.

¹³² As Nash (1991:180) rightly argues.

¹³³ See Fern (2002:66) on the notion of a 'human holism' which addresses both individual well-being and holistic preservation.

¹³⁴ Rolston 1988:197.

¹³⁵ Clark 1993:115, also quoted in Page 1996:150.

of sorting out competing duties and values. Decision making in such a context would always be highly complex. A highly differentiated notion of various forms of value will have to be developed to govern all forms of interaction between humans, other organisms and the non-organic aspects of an ecosystem. The novelty and complexity of some organisms (most notably of humans) is indeed of enormous value here, but this is not the only relevant form of value. Holmes Rolston, for example, distinguishes between various ways in which nature is valuable for humans. He identifies the following values “carried” by nature: life-support value, economic value, recreational value, scientific value, aesthetic value, genetic-diversity value, historical value, cultural-symbolic values, character-building values, diversity-unity values, stability and spontaneity values, dialectical value, life value and religious value.¹³⁶

A detailed description and clarification of each of these categories is not necessary here. My argument is that a differentiated notion of value is required and that the complexity of an organism cannot be the only relevant criterion for moral decision making in cases where competing interests have to be addressed. Since human cultures exert such a powerful influence on ecosystems, we often have to take decisions which would benefit one species and inhibit others. We do this in our own interest whenever we plant crops for food and eliminate weeds. We are also able to do that through being custodians of wilderness areas where individual animal specimens may have to be sacrificed to allow the larger ecosystem to flourish. Of course, this requires considerable wisdom and also human humility, given our very limited knowledge of the incredibly intricate balance of ecosystems.

The three guidelines identified above suggest that a gradation of value should primarily be understood within a whole–part continuum and not only in terms of the graded value of specific organisms. The flourishing of ecosystems is more valuable than the survival of individual species, and the flourishing of species is more valuable than the life of individual specimens.

The rather radical implication of these three guidelines is that our human right to flourish as a species does not necessarily and always have precedence over the right of any other species to flourish. The health of the ecosystem has priority over the health of individual specimens, including humans. This implies, for example, that human population growth, together with human consumption, has to be curbed in order to allow other species to flourish too. Each form of life has its own inherent dignity and requires our respect. Such dignity cannot be easily graded amongst the species. Although it may be true that humans (and humans only) are described in the biblical roots of Christianity as the image of God, this does not necessarily imply that other creatures have less dignity or that they are less loved by God. That humans are called to be the image of God suggests, instead, that the dignity attributed to us by God may serve as a model or an analogy for the dignity with which we are called to treat otherkind.

These guidelines allow for an affirmation of the *integrated* (if not equal) value of all forms of life (at the level of species) because of the integratedness of an ecosystem. The value of all forms of life, and the dignity of human life too, has to be derived theologically from the integrity of God’s creation – to use the famous phrase of the World Council of Churches. These guidelines do allow for the needs of species for food, shelter and

¹³⁶ Rolston 1988:3-27.

protection and therefore for the right to kill specimens of other species. Humans, to repeat, have the right to eat as long as they do not threaten or destroy an ecosystem in the process.

CHAPTER 13

The environment and a Christian lifestyle and praxis

13.1 Introduction

What contributions can local Christian communities make in response to environmental challenges? In recent literature on the environment one can discern at least six levels at which Christians can respond to environmental issues:

- * Christian can help to raise an environmental awareness.
- * Christians can make a difference where they live and where they work.
- * Christians can co-operate with and support existing environmental organisations.
- * Local Christian communities can become ecologically conscious communities.
- * There are numerous possibilities for and examples of environmental projects initiated by Christians.
- * Many churches have adopted resolutions on environmental concerns at a demonimational, regional or local level. In the same vein various pastoral letters and study documents have been produced.

Let us investigate these levels in more detail.

13.2 Raising an environmental awareness¹

One may well argue that an appropriate environmental praxis is far more urgent than an environmental awareness. From a Marxian perspective one may add that the key to environmental praxis is not awareness, but material processes which will stimulate or in the end force us to adopt more ecological practices. Indeed, one has to take the danger of false consciousness into account, especially with reference to the way in which environmental degradation is exacerbated by the pervasive ideologies of neo-colonialism, sexism, racism, classism and, in particular, consumerism. Moreover, the most appropriate way of raising an environmental awareness may well be to learn from and to follow available models of environmental praxis.

Any adequate response to environmental degradation will have to be at the level of praxis and not only at the level of theory, ideas or awareness. The problem is that even those who have become thoroughly conscientised often find it difficult to translate an awareness of ecological concerns into appropriate praxis. All too often environmental problems seem so daunting and overwhelming that it is difficult to know where to start. For the urban middle class it is especially difficult to adopt a lifestyle that is not harmful to the environment. One may take some modest steps such as recycling, reducing the use of electricity, water, transport, chemicals, re-using resources, etc. Such steps would

¹ This section is based on my article "How can we help to raise an environmental awareness in the South African context?" (Conradie 2003).

be highly appropriate to challenge the consumerist habits of the middle class. However, a guilty conscience and a 10% reduction in the use of resources would not be enough. As Patricia Mische comments:

... most people now know that we have serious ecological problems. But there is a lingering gap between knowing that we face serious ecological problems and acting on this knowledge in our personal, political and social choices. While more people have taken some modest steps, such as recycling, changes in people's worldviews, attitudes and behavior have not been commensurate to the gravity and global scale of the problems. Moreover, when in conflict, economic concerns and desires usually trump environmental ones.²

Despite these caveats, the choice of the word "awareness" indicates that the extent of environmental degradation is not yet sufficiently *recognised*. As the German ethicist Heinz-Eduard Tödt has argued, the recognition of a problem forms a prerequisite for responsible action. It is sometimes a matter of seeing the problem. For example, some people see that the present use of fossil fuels (for electricity, cars, aeroplanes) is damaging to the environment and that it is simply not sustainable for another 50 or 100 years, while others do not recognise the problem at all.³ Of course, as Tödt also argues, recognising a problem is not sufficient. It is also important to accept the problem, to consider available options, to evaluate such options in terms of social values, to take responsibility for a course of action and to evaluate this action afterwards in conversation with other role players.

We have reached a point where our senses have already been numbed by the evidence regarding environmental destruction. In the popular consciousness the sense of a looming environmental crisis lurks beneath the surface as a silent but pervasive fear for the long-term future of life on this planet. There is a deep-seated cognisance that environmental problems will not go away. We know intuitively that many of our present practices will not be sustainable in the years ahead. We now know that human well-being is dependent on the well-being of the land. We need to care for the land so that the land can care for us.

Nevertheless, an environmental awareness cannot be taken for granted; it must be fostered, nurtured, developed. Christian churches can play an important role in the task of raising an environmental awareness.⁴ South African sociologist Jacklyn Cock has called for a "rainbow alliance" in which scientists, nature conservationists (green), environmental organisations focusing on justice issues (the so called "brown" agenda),

² Mische 2000:592.

³ For a brief account of Tödt's analysis of six facets of moral decision making available in English, see Tödt, HE 1994. Towards a theory of making ethical judgments. In: Clark, DK & Rakestraw, RV (eds) 1994. *Readings in Christian ethics. Volume 1: Theory and method*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

⁴ In South Africa, the media as well as schools and Christian churches (because of their local influence in community life) have a special responsibility to help raise an environmental awareness. Cock (1994) argues that Christian churches should take the lead in addressing environmental problems since a) it has an organised space at the grassroots level to promote mass environmental awareness, b) it has the necessary leadership for moral transformation, and c) a holistic, ecological vision has deep roots in the Christian tradition. The church also has important resources in terms of staff, institutions, agencies, networks, buildings and infrastructure to address environmental challenges effectively.

labour movements (red), and religious groups (purple) should contribute to ensure that life may flourish on this blue planet.⁵

In more practical terms, one may identify various strategies which may be employed to help raise such an environmental awareness. Consider the following possibilities:⁶

- * In Christian contexts a concern for the environment is often expressed in the form of *prophetic warnings* (e.g. on the basis of an accumulation of ominous statistical evidence⁷). At best, such prophetic contributions show how environmental destruction is linked to other forms of injustice – to the poor, to women and children, to indigenous peoples. Prophets also call for obedience to God's commandments in order to care for the environment.
- * Environmental anxieties are often expressed in popular culture (and in religious sects) in the form of *apocalyptic forebodings* of an imminent environmental catastrophe.⁸ This is evident from numerous horror movies, cartoons, science fiction literature, or heavy metal rock music. These are full of images of cosmic horrors, featuring, for example, vengeful insects or rats or machines taking over the world, frequently in the aftermath of a nuclear catastrophe. In these latter-day apocalyptic portrayals of cosmic battles, the forces of the Light often save the day, but provide only temporary reprieve from the daily fears, cosmic despair and spiritual emptiness that pervade much of contemporary culture.⁹
- * A concern for the environment is also articulated in the many *stories of the victims* of environmental destruction. These are stories told by mine, factory and farm workers, by those who live in the unhygienic conditions in squatter camps, those who live and work on rubbish dumps, by indigenous peoples who have become

⁵ See Cock 1991, 1992:182.

⁶ James Gustafson's analysis of various modes of ethical discourse (i.e. prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy discourse) is helpful in this regard. Gustafson (1994:111-138) applies his analysis of various modes of ethical discourse to environmental debates.

⁷ On the inadequacy of frightening people with ominous environmental facts and figures, see Santmire 1989 & Wadell 1994. Wadell (1994:57) comments on the need for moral perception and moral vision: "These facts should frighten us, but fear is not enough. Fear should lead to a change of perception; it should engender a moral vision more adequate to justice not only for ourselves, but also for future generations and all members of the earth, human as well as nonhuman. We will not live differently unless we first see differently, acknowledging the relationships we have with the natural world ... ours is a time in which perception is critical to any kind of human future."

⁸ See Santmire 1989:266f & Keller 1993, 1995. Santmire (1989:265-266) expresses this almost apocalyptic sense of despair in quite graphic language:

The threat of mass catastrophe is now a commonplace of the popular mind. With the passing of each day, we are becoming more and more familiar with scenarios of global thermonuclear death and devastation, planetary ecological collapse, toxic pollution of our environment, vast blights of deforestation and soil erosion, constant economic crisis for the great majority of the earth's peoples, and rampant starvation in some regions of the world, all punctuated by the threats of nuclear accidents or terrorism and stories of increasingly capricious patterns of global weather. Hovering in our consciousness, as well, is the vague but dismal image of the end of cosmic history itself, ignominiously, eons from now, through some kind of universal "heat death." It is existentially thinkable today, perhaps as never before, that the final word being written across the pages of the whole human drama, and across the pages of the cosmos itself, is *finis*, termination, death with terror, torment, and excruciating moments of pain. These are apocalyptic times indeed. And the dark clouds of a future which is no future often flood backward, as it were, into the present, producing a deep-seated and widespread spiritual anomie.

⁹ See Santmire 1989:266.

environmental refugees, by the plight of women and children in remote rural areas, etc.

- * The sense of ugliness resulting from pollution and environmental destruction is acutely expressed in the *aesthetic sensibilities* of artists, musicians and poets, the so-called “antennae of society” (Ezra Pound).¹⁰
- * These prophetic and narrative forms of moral discourse on the environment would remain shallow without the contributions of scientists from many disciplines who have to engage in the painstaking process of assessing the *scientific evidence* of environmental degradation. This provides the raw material for further detailed analysis by economists, social scientists and ethicists. Such information is often used by the media and for education to persuade people with rational arguments why caring for the environment is in their own (long-term) interest.
- * Environmental concerns are often expressed in the *policy documents* of international, regional, national, and local forms of government, in planning and management processes in the world of commerce and business and in declarations from civil society. Numerous Christians have contributed towards this task, especially within the context of the ecumenical movement.

The adequacy on these strategies cannot be taken for granted. They have to be critically examined in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, these strategies have to be informed by an analysis and assessment of the economic roots and fruits of current environmental problems.

13.3 Individual lifestyle

There are numerous pamphlets and booklets available on a “green” personal lifestyle. These guidelines are not specifically Christian in origin but are usually supported by Christians concerned with the environment. There are also a few paperbacks on the “ABC of a Christian green lifestyle”.¹¹ Although these contributions often lack theological depth, they do provide useful practical guidelines, for example on issues such as the use of energy, the use of water, the use of non-renewable resources, the recycling of waste, transport, gardening, composting, patterns of consumption and environmental advocacy.

Unfortunately, these practical guidelines often assume the living conditions of a more affluent society where people can afford to use less energy (to use one example). Another important problem pertaining to this kind of literature on a Christian environmental praxis is that it seldom takes macro-economic realities into account.¹² Nevertheless, these practical guidelines do, at least, play an important role in stimulating and developing environmental values. It is indeed the affluent, more than the poor, who have

¹⁰ There are numerous examples of this aesthetic environmental sensibility. See, especially, Rajendra 1987, Roberts & Amidon 1991 & Sharper & Cunningham 1993. See also Baker-Fletcher’s (1998) use of poetry, song and dance to elicit “wordings from the heart” from an ecowomanist perspective.

¹¹ See *The recycler’s handbook: Simple things you can do*, published by the Aid Association for Lutherans, also Campolo & Aeschliman 1992, Greenhouse Crisis Foundation 1992, published by the Eco-Justice Working Group, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA), as well as Von Ruhland 1991.

¹² For one exception, see the excellent South African contribution on personal lifestyle and finances, *Making ends meet*, by Nürnberger (1995). Nürnberger’s analysis speaks to the different income groups and takes environmental considerations into account explicitly.

to change their lifestyles for the healing of the earth. In addition, there is a need to assist the victims of environmental degradation at a local level. This requires a spirit of service within local communities. For this task, not only prophets but also “environmental deacons” are required.¹³

13.4 Cooperating with other environmental networks and organisations

Since the first major international conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972 there have emerged numerous national and international organisations and networks focusing on environmental concerns. Such networks have been highly visible at subsequent international events such as the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. In South Africa, the Environmental Justice Networking Forum is the most significant such network.

The various levels of local, regional and national government probably remain the most important set of institutions that could ensure a healthy and sustainable environment. There are also numerous non-governmental organisations in civil society which are concerned with a wide range of environmental issues. These include initiatives around environmental education, nature conservation and wildlife preservation, community development, vegetable gardens, permaculture and sustainable agriculture, appropriate technology, the creation of employment opportunities, recycling and waste management, clean-ups, urban greening and beautifying projects, activist and resistance movements responding to emerging environmental threats and environmental monitoring groups providing scientific expertise on a wide variety of environmental issues. Many educational institutions contribute towards an environmental awareness.¹⁴

There is little need for Christian churches to duplicate the work of other environmental organisations. Churches should, instead, support the work of these organisations as far as possible, establish the necessary channels and networks of communication and encourage its members to participate in the work of these organisations. While Christians may *ultimately* have a distinct ecological vision, they could share the “penultimate” goals of many other environmental activists.¹⁵

Perhaps churches should take the initiative only if no other organisation is addressing a particular problem. This would continue the approach followed by many churches and mission organisations in the past. They established schools, hospitals, centres for the disabled and elderly people, and agricultural projects, whenever no one else was doing it properly. Many of these projects were eventually funded or taken over by the (local) government. Recently some churches have again taken some responsibility for schools in areas where the local government is struggling to manage these schools efficiently.

¹³ On the notion of “environmental deacons”, see Bratton 2000.

¹⁴ See Conradie & Field (2000:104) for a discussion of cooperation with such organisations within the South African context.

¹⁵ See the remarkable account by Daneel (1998, 1999) of such cooperation between the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC) and the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches in Zimbabwe.

13.5 Becoming an ecologically conscious Christian community

a) Models of environmental praxis in Christian communities

Local Christian communities can make an extremely helpful contribution by setting up examples of an ecologically conscious community. They can embody amongst themselves the vision of a sustainable community where justice and peace will prevail. In this way churches can become concrete and visible signs and witnesses of the coming of God's reign. This requires a self-conscious process of institutional greening.¹⁶

There are many ways in which this could be done. In a helpful analysis, Abraham has identified three models which congregations have followed towards a church-based environmental praxis:¹⁷

- * *An ascetic, monastic model:* This is perhaps the oldest form of response to environmental concerns. The emphasis of this model is on individual and communal lifestyle: "Living in harmony with nature and keeping their needs to a minimum, monastic communities proclaim the message that the earth is the Lord's and that it should not be used indiscriminately to satisfy human avarice and greed. They register a powerful protest against a wasteful life-style devoid of responsibility to the world of nature."¹⁸
- * *A sacramental / Eucharistic model:* In this model, life and all its relationships are brought through worship before the presence of God, where they are constantly being renewed. The emphasis of this model is on contemplation as a source of renewal. An environmental praxis is only indirectly derived from such sacramental contemplation.
- * *A prophetic model of liberative praxis:* According to this model the church must act in solidarity with the weakest part of the whole creation. In many cases this calls for caring for non-human forms of creation. The struggle for liberation is therefore broadened to include the poor, the weak, the disfigured and the over-exploited nature. Many examples of projects following this model are protest movements against particular forms of environmental degradation. These movements thus build on the *prophetic* witness of the church.

In a similar analysis, Duchrow & Liedke have identified the following models for implementing JPIC programmes:¹⁹

- * Peace churches building an alternative community,
- * A liturgical-eucharistic contemplative way of life,
- * Projects of the institutional church,
- * Communities of liberation living in solidarity with human beings and creation oppressed by violence.

¹⁶ See the major contribution by Hessel on institutional greening with reference to churches in the USA (e.g. Hessel 1996), to theological institutions (see Clugston 1996, Spencer 1996). Clugston identifies four directions of greening theological institutions, namely 1) the greening of theological disciplines, 2) the use of appropriate information technology, 3) the formation of sustainable communities on campus, and 4) the development of a coherent cosmological and ethical framework for theological education.

¹⁷ Abraham 1994:72.

¹⁸ Abraham 1994:71.

¹⁹ Duchrow & Liedke 1987:155f.

There are numerous concrete ways in which local congregations can engage in environmental praxis.²⁰ Institutions have to address the same range of issues that individuals and families have to in their own homes and personal lifestyles (see 13.2 above). In addition, Christian communities may practise an ecological ethos in the following ways:

b) Environmental education in the church

Through Christian preaching, catechism, Bible schools, and lay training centres, churches have a wonderful weekly opportunity to instruct people on an appropriate response to the challenge of ensuring a sustainable society. Many Christian groups and individuals have been involved directly and indirectly in environmental education in schools, through developing Sunday school material, Bible study material for discussion groups²¹ and through books aimed at the general public.

c) Making an environmental audit of church land

The church should not only care for the environment outside the premises of the church. It should also look at its own backyard. There are numerous creative suggestions for an environmental audit of the ways in which congregational activities have an impact on the environment, including the church premises, indigenous church gardens, “living” church graveyards, church functions, church excursions, nurseries, the recycling of office paper, the use of water and energy, transport to the church, the investment of church funds, and the parsonage.²²

d) In search of people of moral vision and character

The looming environmental crisis cannot be resolved only through spreading the necessary information to everyone. The problem of evil and sin goes much deeper than ignorance that could be resolved through knowledge and education. Christians *know* quite well that they should love their neighbours but often find themselves unable to do. The question is therefore: How can we build a people of moral vision and character who can actually make a difference?²³

The church can make a crucial contribution in this regard. Through setting personal examples that others could use as role models and through the moral education of

²⁰ There are numerous guides available for environmental praxis in local Christian communities. See Causey 1996, DeWitt 1994:49-71, 1996:184f & Lehman 1993.

²¹ In the South African context, see the excellent booklet developed by LUMKO (Kirchhoffer, O'Mahoney & Hay 2002).

²² See, for example, the *Greening congregations handbook* edited by Barnett 2002, also Causey 1996, Cooper 1990:250ff, Fritsch 1992 & Wilkinson 1991:361f. Hart (2004:134-142) identifies 12 such projects for local Catholic parishes: 1) Develop environmental inventories, 2) Use appropriate construction materials and alternative energy, 3) Diminish or eliminate use of minerals and materials threatening life or health, 4) Restore and conserve bioregions, 5) Develop restoration projects good for jobs, species and the environment, 6) Recycle for the environment and for community programmes, 7) Actively promote justice for the poor and for ethnic and racial minorities, 8) Analyse and alter unjust economic systems, 9) Reduce and eliminate harmful chemical inputs, 10) Evaluate the link between population, consumption and environmental issues, 11) Explore and implement the just distribution and redistribution of property in land, 12) Form integrated and active alliances and associations.

²³ There is a need for more contributions to ecological theology from the perspective of theories of moral formation. In particular, the ecological significance of the contributions of scholars such as Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon need to be explored in more depth. See the helpful essay by Wismer (1988) on “narrating creation”, drawing on insights from McClendon.

children by parents and Sunday school teachers, the church can foster a new generation of Christians with a moral sensitivity for the environment.

How is this possible? The vision of the church is that the Holy Spirit can indeed change people's lives. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the "fruit" of the Spirit. And the fruits of the Spirit are directly linked with the fruits of the soil. One may paraphrase Gal 5:22 from an environmental perspective in the following way:

Love God's creation, have joy in it, pursue peace with it, have patience with natural processes, be kind and good towards it, be faithful in our stewardship of it, be gentle with it, and exercise self control in our demands on it ²⁴

The need to care for God's creation has to be taught more consciously and systematically and has to be sought as a mark of Christian discipleship, both for the individual and for the Christian community, as an alternative to expressions of discipleship which are limited to the life of the individual.

e) Learning to appreciate and love creation

How can we create opportunities for young and old which will encourage a love for the environment? If one loves something, if one learns to appreciate the awesome beauty of God's creation, one will also learn to care for it. Again, the church can play an important role in this regard, especially in a country such as South Africa where far too many grow up with ugliness and pollution around them. Local congregations could therefore consider family outings, worship services in the context of nature, educational trips and other outdoor activities to enhance a sense of the beauty of creation. Opportunities to explore the natural environment in this way may lead individuals to become sensitive to the environment and to become more active in resolving environmental issues. This may foster a sense of fellowship that extends beyond human persons and includes the fellowship of the whole earth community in the presence of its Creator.²⁵

13.6 Church-based environmental projects

Churches do not only need to get their own house (oikos) in order by becoming an ecological community; they are also called to respond to the societal needs in their local contexts. Such a calling may be expressed in Christian categories such as mission, ministry, stewardship, discipleship and priestly duties.

Christians from all over the world have responded to environmental degradation by initiating their own local environmental projects. Stories on environmental projects initiated by Christians have been collected from all over the world. These include stories from within the South African²⁶ and Southern African²⁷ contexts, from elsewhere in

²⁴ See Cooper 1990:53-54.

²⁵ On the category of "loving nature", see Nash 1991.

²⁶ See Cock 1994, Conradie & Field 2000:110f & Warmback 2006.

²⁷ See especially the many contributions by Daneel (1991, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2000) on the work of ZIRRCO in Zimbabwe. The work of ZIRRCO is truly remarkable in terms of its success in establishing nurseries, its tree planting projects and its determination to ensure the survival of trees in adverse conditions. Despite numerous setbacks, more than three million tree seedlings have been successfully cultivated and distributed for planting over a period of 9 years (Daneel 1999:259). ZIRRCO and its affiliates have planted trees in well over 2000 woodlots spread throughout Masvingo Province and in Manicaland and

Africa,²⁸ from Asia,²⁹ Europe, New Zealand,³⁰ the USA,³¹ and from elsewhere in the world.

There is a wide range of such projects. In relatively affluent contexts there are projects on recycling, greening church gardens and graveyards, beautifying streets and degraded local spots, developing Christian eco-villages³² (with lower environmental impact in terms of energy usage), environmental audits, animal protection, wildlife conservation, family and group excursions to nature conservation areas, and so forth.

In impoverished contexts, such projects are often closely related to community upliftment, (sustainable) development, food security, food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, perma-culture, water harvesting, clean-ups, job creation projects, developing forms of appropriate technology,³³ and, especially, tree planting – for firewood, building and fencing material, fruit supplies, animal fodder, medicinal purposes, restoring the water table and the symbolic value of planting hardwood species for coming generations.³⁴ In many contexts environmental concerns are expressed in the form of prophetic witness and forms of resistance against environmental threats and a wide range of economic and environmental injustices.

While it is certainly vital to develop an encompassing vision, that is, “to think globally”, it is perhaps advisable to start with small, manageable projects at a local level, that is, “to act locally”. These local efforts are indeed vital. However, they will remain limited in their scale and effectiveness unless they are broadened to address the policy-making processes of governments and business (including trans-national companies). To be effective at this level, churches have to join with other activist groups, use the media or engage in direct political activity.³⁵ The united effort of individuals, local community organisations, non-government organisations, business corporations, governments, and international organisations is necessary to address global environmental threats adequately. In this sense, it is not only necessary to act locally, but also to act globally.³⁶

Matebeleland. What is even more remarkable is the way in which local communities have accepted collective ownership for the aftercare, maintenance and protection of these woodlots, despite the severe droughts of the early 1990's. In the process the staff members of ZIRRCO's nurseries have developed considerable expertise with regards to the reforestation of indigenous species. For an appraisal of Daneel's work, see Conradie 2002, Rasmussen 2003 & Zvanaka 2003.

²⁸ See especially the contributions by Mukusya (2001) on the Utooni community projects in Kenya and the many contributions by Daneel (especially 1999) on the work of ZIRRCO in Zimbabwe. See also the contributions of Clobus 1991 (on Ghana), Conradie et al 2001 (on various South African earthkeeping projects) Gitau 2000 (on various cases studies from Kenya), Mpanya 1991 (on the Congo) and Olivier 1998, 2002 (on the Goldfields Faith and Earthkeeping project in South Africa), as well as the essays by Kabugumila (on Tanzania), Mukushe (on Kenya) and Toh on Cameroon in Mugambi & Vähäkangas 2001.

²⁹ See Gnanadason 1994, Gustafson 1992 (on Thailand), Niles 1989:32-35 & Rajotte & Breuille 1992:98-118.

³⁰ See, for example, the study by Miskotte (1997) on New Zealand churches and the environment.

³¹ See Granberg-Michaelson (1988:65-82) for a collection of “hopeful signs”, Howell (1996) for a collection of case studies from Presbyterian Churches in the USA and Marlett (1998) for a case study on bio-dynamic farming in a Catholic context.

³² See Hudson 2002.

³³ See the critique of this concept in Mugambi 2001:40-42.

³⁴ See Gitau (2000:98-99) for a similar list of purposes of tree planting projects.

³⁵ See Allen (1991) on such an activist stance.

³⁶ See Béguin-Austin 1993:26f. See also Mische (2000:599f) on the need for churches to act globally. For one example of such a project which recognises this need with reference to attempts by local communities to address climate change, see Bodenham 2005.

13.7 Resolutions on the environment

Church resolutions are notorious for having little practical impact. Nevertheless, they do have an important symbolic role with an indirect impact on the dominant discourse of the day. In the longer term they prepare the way for a new vision of responsibility for the environment.

Numerous churches all over the world have adopted resolutions on environmental issues.³⁷ A number of churches in South Africa have also responded officially to environmental issues.³⁸ In addition to such ecclesial resolutions, many Christian denominations (Anglican,³⁹ Baptist,⁴⁰ Catholic,⁴¹ Lutheran,⁴² Methodist,⁴³ Orthodox,⁴⁴ Presbyterian,⁴⁵ and Reformed⁴⁶) and ecumenical organisations (the World Council of Churches⁴⁷, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches,⁴⁸ evangelical associations⁴⁹ and various national

³⁷ For a collection of church statements from elsewhere in the world, see Wright & Kill (1993:93f).

³⁸ For a number of church resolutions on the environment in the South African context, see Conradie & Field (2000:108). See especially the thorough overview of ecclesial responses to environmental concerns in South Africa in Warmback (2006:54f). Warmback discusses the role of the South African Council of Churches, denominational statements and pastoral letters, various important conferences, the role of earthkeeping organisations, ecumenical networks and inter-faith initiatives.

³⁹ See King (2000) on The Anglican Fifth Mission Statement and Gollither (2004) for a collection of contributions from within the Global Anglican Congress on the stewardship of creation (in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002). This text also contains resolutions on ecology from the 1998 Lambeth Conference. See also Warmback (2006:80-111) for a thorough overview of Anglican responses to environmental challenges. Warmback describes initiatives within the worldwide Anglican Communion and the Church of the Province of Southern Africa. He then focuses on earthkeeping initiatives in the Anglican diocese of Umzimvubu in South Africa (Warmback 2006:112-79). He discusses organizational structures, education and training centres, sustainable agriculture and development projects, celebratory events, the construction of a cathedral and expressions of prophetic witness within this diocese, with specific reference to the work of the former bishop Geoff Davies in this regard.

⁴⁰ See the booklet *Our only home: Planet earth – a gift from God*, published by American Baptist National Ministries.

⁴¹ See the excellent publication *Renewing the face of the earth – A resource for parishes and the “Environmental Justice parish resource”*, entitled *Let the earth bless the Lord: God’s creation and our responsibility – A Catholic approach to the environment*, both published by United States Catholic Conference. Many Catholic contributions analyse official Roman Catholic documents.

⁴² See the volume *Care for the Earth: An environmental resource manual for church leaders*, edited by Krause (1994) and the booklet *The recycler’s handbook: Simple things you can do*, published by the Aid Association for Lutherans (Berkeley, California).

⁴³ See Delgado (1994) for a “Handbook for Christian environmental groups”, published by the United Methodist Church in California-Nevada (USA).

⁴⁴ See the “Study unit for vacation Bible School” entitled *The Earth is the Lord’s: Caring for creation* (Education and Community Life Ministries 95/1) produced by the Orthodox Church in America.

⁴⁵ See the publications *Keeping and healing the creation* (published by the Presbyterian Eco-justice Task Force) and *Hope for a global future: Toward just and sustainable human development*, approved by the 208th General Assembly (1996), Presbyterian Church (USA).

⁴⁶ See the publication *The just stewardship of land and creation*, prepared for the Reformed Ecumenical Council (1996), edited by DeWitt (1996)

⁴⁷ See the indexed bibliography for numerous references to publications commissioned by the World Council of Churches. These publications are often published under the name of the World Council of Churches and not under the name of the author or editor.

⁴⁸ See the articles by Granberg-Michaelson (1994) and Opocensky (1994) in Volume 44 of *Reformed World*.

⁴⁹ See especially the Evangelical Environmental Network based in the USA. As Langmead (1998:162) notes, there has been a flurry of popular publications calling for Christian earthkeeping from an evangelical perspective.

church councils and environmental networks, for example in Australia,⁵⁰ Europe,⁵¹ Germany,⁵² the Netherlands,⁵³ South Africa,⁵⁴ Switzerland,⁵⁵ the USA⁵⁶) have published booklets and brochures to stimulate and foster an environmental awareness amongst Christians at a local level and to provide resources in this regard. Such publications help to popularise the insights that are discussed in the academic contributions mentioned elsewhere in this text.

Although church resolutions are often aimed at policy making in the context of government and civil society, they are not always effective in influencing such policy making. There is indeed a need for further reflection on the contributions which ecological theology can make towards public theology.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, although the impact of such church resolutions and ecclesial publications may be limited *outside* the communities within which they are produced, they do play a significant role *within* such communities in shaping the moral vision of participants. They may therefore be understood as contributions towards moral formation and not so much towards policy making.

⁵⁰ See the following two excellent contributions on the environment for churches in Australia: Uniting Church in Australia 1990. *Healing the earth. An Australian Christian reflection on the renewal of creation*. Uniting Church in Australia: Social Responsibility & Justice Committee. Anglican Church of Australia 1990. *Justice for the earth*. Anglican social justice statement. Perth: Social responsibilities Commission of General Synod.

⁵¹ See especially the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN).

⁵² See Halter & Lochbühler 1999:175-198 for a collection of ecclesial statements in German speaking contexts, also the statements by the Deutsche Bischofskonferenz / Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 1985, Deutsche Bischofskonferenz 1980.

⁵³ See the publication, A covenant for life: A letter of faith on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation published by the Council of Churches in the Netherlands.

⁵⁴ See Conradie & Field (2000), published by the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches and Davies (1995). See also the discussion document on Christianity and environmental justice published by the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (Conradie, Mtetwa & Warmback 2002) and the study document, *The oikos journey* published by Diakonia Council of Churches (2006).

⁵⁵ Christlicher Kirche in der Schweiz 1988.

⁵⁶ Hessel in Taylor 200:539-543 identifies five emphases in ecumenical responses to environmental concerns in the USA: 1) cultivating eco-theology and ethics, 2) fostering sustainable food systems and lifestyles, 3) advocating responsible energy and climate change policies, 4) community organisation for environmental justice, and 5) developing leadership for earth community ministry. See also the information package *God's earth our home: A resource for congregational study and action on environmental and economic justice*, and the publication *101 ways to help save the Earth* both produced by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. See also the recent open letter to church and society in the United States entitled "God's Earth is Sacred" (available from various websites).

⁵⁷ On ecotheology as public theology, see Pearson 2001.

Chapter 14

An ecological dimension to Christian ministry and spirituality

14.1 The liturgy

There is a widespread recognition that earthkeeping practices and an ecological ethos has to be related to the heart of Christian spirituality, namely Christian worship and the Christian liturgy.¹ This recognition has, in turn led to new ways of understanding liturgical theology. Moreover, ecological themes are slowly beginning to permeate different aspects of Christian liturgies,² for example doxology,³ worship,⁴ preaching,⁵ hymns,⁶ prayer,⁷ the reading of the law,⁸ the sacraments⁹ (especially the Eucharist¹⁰ and baptism¹¹), penitence, a confession of Christian faith¹² and a confession of guilt,¹³ testimonies, Christian architecture¹⁴ and art¹⁵ (e.g. icons¹⁶). The liturgy itself is a

¹ See, especially, the influential work of Zizioulas (1992, 1993) on creation as liturgy.

² On liturgical responses to the environmental crisis, see especially the contributions by Barns 1998, Habel 2004, Fragomeni & Pawlikowski 1994, Ingram 1996, Messenger 2001, McDonagh 1986:154-168, Mick 1997, Pop 1996 & Quinn 1994:137-146.

³ See Hoezee 1998.

⁴ See Theokritoff (2001) on the themes of creation and salvation in Orthodox worship. In an essay on an *urumwe* spirituality, Wangiri (1999:88) eloquently describes worship in the following way: "Hence I we re-learn this spirituality, worship will be come a gathering event where we will tell our stories through dance, poetry, music, song and laughter, and this form of worship will nourish us abundantly. First, it will bring unity and solidarity in the community as all bring themselves to God and to each other. As we share our stories, we will experience appreciation by others. We will also bring suffering and pain to the worship and in sharing it with the community, we will experience healing."

⁵ See Hessel 1985, LeQuire 1996, Vos & Müller 1991.

⁶ See Habel 2004 for a collection of "seven songs of creation".

⁷ See Causey 1996:75-80, Fragomeni 1994, Roberts & Amidon 1991, Sheldrake & Fox 1996:90-113.

⁸ For an example of an environmental decalogue, see McDonagh 1990:204f.

⁹ See the suggestive discussion by McDonagh 1986:169-186.

¹⁰ See the tree-planting Eucharist in AIC's in Zimbabwe as an example of liturgical innovation (Daneel 1991, 1999:66-92) as well as contributions by Foley *et al* (1994).

¹¹ See Daneel (1999:67) for some comments on the role of baptism as a healing and cleansing ceremony that is linked to the confession of ecological sins.

¹² See the contributions by Field (1996, 1997) for a discussion of the notion of confessing the Christian faith in the context of environmental degradation.

¹³ See Conradie & Field (2000:84-86) and Daneel (1999:67-73) on the confession of ecological sins.

¹⁴ See Santmire (2000:74) on the ecological impetus of Gothic cathedrals. See also the following comment by Chryssavgis (2000:84) from an Orthodox perspective: "The entire church building – with its architecture, frescoes, and mosaics – accomplishes through space and matter what the liturgy does through time and praise: The anticipation of the heavenly kingdom and the participation of the divine presence."

¹⁵ On the charism of art and its potential to transform nature, see Faricy 1982:53-61, also Bratton-Power in Taylor 2005:301-303 & Fox 1983:188f.

¹⁶ Among the many Orthodox contributions on iconography and ecology, see Chryssavgis 1996, Johnson 1994 & Skliris 1992, 1996.

celebration of God's presence in the midst of creation. There are numerous examples of set liturgies on environmental themes.¹⁷ Many of these liturgical innovations are associated to celebrations for Earth day, Arbor Day or Environmental Sunday¹⁸ (the Sunday before or after the 5th of June).¹⁹ Some contributions also focus on the traditional liturgical year, especially with reference to Advent,²⁰ Easter²¹ and liturgical seasons.²² Creative ideas abound on how to integrate ecological concerns in other aspects of the liturgy.²³

14.2 Christian formation and education

The environment has also become a concern in Christian education. A concern for the environment has become, almost spontaneously, a specific topic included in children's education,²⁴ catechism and the curricula of Christian ethics in schools and universities.²⁵ Moreover, there have been calls for an ecological transformation of education in Christianity itself (i.e. its philosophy, goals, basic values, etc). An ecological vision of sustainability should touch all aspects of the curriculum. Such a transformation certainly includes an ecological vision for the physical infrastructure of the institutions where Christianity is being taught.²⁶ In the United States important work has been done on appropriate pedagogical models for theological education on eco-justice issues.²⁷

14.3 Christian pastoral care

In some contributions to Christian pastoral care, ecological notions of parenting, teaching, counselling, therapy and holistic healing have been introduced.²⁸ At the same time, the notion of pastoral care itself has been broadened to include caring for the earth. In his book *Ecology of care* (1992), Robert Fuller argues both from socio-biological and psycho-social theories of development that altruism, caring for others, is genuinely possible for the human species and that it is essential for human fulfilment.²⁹ In an important contribution, entitled *Ecotherapy* (1996), Howard Clinebell develops the

¹⁷ For a discussion and examples of such environmental liturgies, see Conradie & Field 2000:81f, Deane-Drummond 1996:149f, Ingram 1996, McDonagh 1994, Palmer & Nash 1988.

¹⁸ See the historical overview of Schmidt (1991) with reference to American Protestantism.

¹⁹ See Davies (1996) for a list of possibilities of feast days related to environmental issues.

²⁰ See Wood (1986) and the brief comment by Santmire (2000:122) on the "notorious symbolic center of American consumerism, the season of Christmas": "Can that festival, which celebrates the Prince of Peace born in a stable, become something more for the general populus than an orgy of consumerism?"

²¹ See De Gruchy 1990, George 1996 & Wilkinson 1999.

²² See Habel 2004. In the South African context the Western Province Council of Churches (Conradie 2001) and Diakonia Council of Churches (Britton 2003) have produced Bible study booklets on environmental topics for use in a liturgical season.

²³ See, for example, Conradie & Field 2000:93f & Ingram 1996:254f.

²⁴ See the excellent contribution (for children of all ages) by Butterworth & Inkpen 1994.

²⁵ See Hill 1985.

²⁶ See Clugston 1996.

²⁷ See Spencer (1996) who identifies the following steps following the finding of appropriate points of entry (as a pre-step), 1) use the context as starting point, 2) Scientific and social analysis, 3) Theological and ethical reflection, 4) Planning for engagement.

²⁸ For a helpful review of ecological perspectives on pastoral care, see Kispert 1996. See also Clinebell 1992, 1994, 1996, Fuller 1992 & Kyomo 2001.

²⁹ Fuller 1992.

notion of ecotherapy in which healing for the earth also brings healing for ourselves. Human alienation cannot be healed without addressing our alienation from the earth itself. Theories of therapy and counselling therefore have to be extended towards a notion of ecotherapy.³⁰

A related concept is that of “Earth ministry”. This is also the name of a Seattle based organisation whose work “engages individuals and congregations in knowing God more fully through deepening relationships with all of God’s creation.”³¹

14.4 Christian witness and mission

Until recently, the church’s missionary task has only very rarely been linked with a Christian responsibility towards the environment.³² In 1991 the ecological scope of God’s mission was discussed at the annual conference of the Missiological Society of South Africa. A significant degree of consensus emerged from this conference that the responsibility of the church in the world is comprehensive. An adequate theology of mission therefore has to include an ecological dimension.³³ Mission may be regarded as a way of proclaiming and establishing God’s justice towards the whole cosmos. At the same time, the environmentally destructive legacy of the history of Christian mission should be acknowledged.³⁴ An ecological vision of God’s mission and a commitment to specific contextual environmental problems is perhaps exemplified by the tree-planting projects of Marthinus Daneel, together with the Association of Earthkeeping Churches in Zimbabwe,³⁵ and of Sean McDonagh who worked as a Columban missionary in the island of Mindanao in the Philippines for many years.³⁶

14.5 Ecological spirituality as mystic experience

The word spirituality is often used in a very loose way. This also applies to the notion of an ecological spirituality or “creation spirituality”. This notion is often closely related to an ecological “theology”. The various forms of ecological spirituality are typically based on one of the models of ecological theology that were discussed earlier. An ecological theology may simply be understood as a reflection on the cognitive content of a particular spirituality. A full discussion of various ecological spiritualities would therefore be repetitive.³⁷

It is nevertheless important to draw attention to the experiential dimension of these ecological spiritualities. Christian spirituality is the lived experience of the Christian

³⁰ See Clinebell 1996. For a South African contribution to pastoral care from an ecological perspective, see Müller 1994.

³¹ See Kearns in Taylor 2005:524-525.

³² See David Bosch’s editorial introduction to *Missionalia* 19:1, 1.

³³ See the contributions by Bischofsberger 1989, Blaser 1989, DeWitt & Prance 1992, Du Preez 1985, Getui 1993, Kritzinger 1991, Robinson 1991, 1993 & Thurber 1990.

³⁴ See Testerman (1992) on the ecological impact of Christian mission in Africa and Asia and Prance (1992) on the Amazons.

³⁵ See especially Daneel 1998, 1999. Daneel (1999:51f) describes the “extended missionary mandate” of the church that includes its earthkeeping responsibilities.

³⁶ See especially McDonagh 1986, 1990, 1994.

³⁷ For literature on an ecological spirituality, see Berry 1990, Bruteau 1990, Conradie 2006, Cummings 1991, Fox 1992, Gulick 1991, Velásquez 1995 & Wright 1996.

belief.³⁸ The concept “spirituality” may be defined as an experience of the presence of God and a conscious response (in worship, ritual, and praxis) to this presence of God.³⁹ God’s presence may of course be experienced in many different ways. In the history of the Christian tradition this presence of God has usually been explained through the notion of God’s revelation. God can only be known if God is revealed to us.

One of the core Christian convictions is that God has been revealed in the past *especially* in the history of Israel, in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the early church. In the present context, God is revealed through a meditation on the meaning of Scripture, through the worship, music, proclamation, service and fellowship of the church, through the examples of Christian people embodying something of God’s presence, through human conscience, through internal illuminations and mystic experiences in a person’s self-consciousness and self-reflection, etc. The Christian church has also acknowledge God’s presence in the grandeur of nature, in the order of creation, in the cultural achievements of human beings, in human reason, in the moral consciousness present in other religious traditions and in history in general.

The presence of God may therefore indeed be experienced in nature itself (sometimes referred to as “general” revelation). Some Christian theologians have feared that this acknowledgement may lead to a form of “natural theology” which represents an amorphous religious experience of a divine being. This is contrasted with the knowledge of God and God’s salvation through God’s “special” revelation in Jesus Christ. An experience of God’s presence in nature could therefore only lead to salvific knowledge of God if this knowledge refers to the God of Jesus Christ. This is only possible on the basis of a prior knowledge of God’s special revelation. General revelation can only confirm what is already attested to in Scripture. The relationship between God’s “general” and “special” revelation remains the subject of a long-standing debate in Christian theology – although it should be obvious that “special” revelation forms part of God’s general revelation .

Many ecological theologians have tried to emphasise a form of spirituality in which nature becomes a vehicle to experience God’s presence.⁴⁰ Leonardo Boff, for example uses the category of mysticism to point to the experiential dimension of spirituality. He emphasises the discovery of unfathomable mystery: “Mystery is the dimension of depth to be found in every person, in every creature, and in reality as a whole; it has a necessarily unfathomable, that is, inexplicable aspect.”⁴¹ Reality proves immeasurably greater than our human reason and our will to dominate it. For Boff, such mysticism is a religious experience of God’s presence and is exemplified, for Christians, in the incarnate Son and in the Spirit. Furthermore, it is this mystic experience that provides the inspiration for resistance against human oppression and ecological destruction. Mystic experience therefore has a socio-political significance and is inseparable from (militant) prophetic action.⁴²

³⁸ See Hill (1998:241) with reference to the work of Bernard McGinn.

³⁹ See my discussion of this working definition for Christian discourse on spirituality (Conradie 2006:17f.

⁴⁰ See Hill 1998:241-267 & Wright 1996.

⁴¹ Boff 1995:143.

⁴² Boff 1995:154-158.

Popular literature abounds on the need to foster such mystic experiences of God's presence in nature⁴³ and through human interactions with otherkind.⁴⁴ The typical themes that are addressed within this context include silence, detachment, prayer, fasting, repentance, contemplation, the rediscovery of the self⁴⁵ (i.e. as connected to the earth), spiritual exercises,⁴⁶ the need for spiritual direction, the need for a retreat which will bring one closer to nature,⁴⁷ etc.

14.6 Various expressions of an ecological spirituality

As I have argued above, there is often a close correlation between ecological theologies and ecological spiritualities. An ecological theology may be understood as a reflection on the cognitive content of a particular spirituality. This implies that theological reflection may also shape a particular spirituality. It is therefore not surprising that a wide range of expressions of an ecological spirituality have emerged. Such spiritualities often follow the confessional distinctions between the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, reformed, Anabaptist and Pentecostal traditions within Christianity. Such spiritualities may also emerge within the context trans-confessional theological movements. One important example here is the emergence of an ecofeminist or an ecowomanist spirituality.⁴⁸ Many ecofeminist theologians have suggested that the concrete experiences of women, including experiences of pain and suffering, provide access to God's presence in nature. They have emphasised the way in which women's more immediate and organic access to cycles of fertility in this regard.

⁴³ See Faricy 1982:62-74.

⁴⁴ See Larkin 2002.

⁴⁵ See Hill 1998:245f.

⁴⁶ See Wood 1994.

⁴⁷ See Brandt 1997.

⁴⁸ For literature on an ecofeminist spirituality, see Adams 1992, Kyung 1994 & Spretnak 1989.

CHAPTER 15

The environment as a new focus for inter-religious dialogue

15.1 The ecological need for religious wisdom

We have witnessed three decades of environmental conscientising, outcries, statistics, analyses, programmes and movements. Despite this huge effort, we have not been able to turn the tide of consumption, pollution, increasing population, deforestation and the exploitation of non-renewable resources.¹ Environmental degradation has worsened and will probably continue to do so in future. Why is this the case?

In chapter 5 we noted that the environmental crisis is a pathological sign indicating that the values underlying the dominant cultural and economic practices in the world today are bankrupt. We also noted that the ideological roots of this cultural crisis are intertwined with religious motifs (as Lynn White claimed). Nevertheless, it has now become clear that the way out of this dilemma is also essentially religious (as Lynn White also contended).² In their series foreword to the edited volume on *Christianity and ecology*, Tucker and Grim articulates the growing realisation that religious traditions will have to play a crucial role in this regard:

It is becoming increasingly evident that abundant scientific knowledge of the crisis is available and numerous political and economic statements have been formulated. Yet we seem to lack the political, economic, and scientific leadership to make necessary changes. Moreover, what is still lacking is the religious commitment, moral imagination, and ethical engagement to transform the environmental crisis from an issue on paper to one of effective policy, from rhetoric in print to realism in action.³

Patricia Mische adds the following:

Science and technology alone cannot resolve ecological threats. Nor can governments or the laws they promulgate. ... Sustaining the integrity of creation thus requires not only the external laws governments enact to deal with belligerent behavior, but also inner governance, laws internalised in our hearts and minds and the will to live by them. The need for inner governance is relevant not only to personal behavior, but also collective behavior through the economic, social and political systems we create and help maintain. Church praxis has special relevance for the development of inner governance and a culture of ecological responsibility. Religions carry the archetypes, symbols, meanings, values and

¹ Oelschlaeger (1994:4) labels this the “paradox of environmentalism”.

² As White (1967:1207) noted: “Since the roots of our ecological crisis are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.”

³ Tucker & Grim 2000:xix.

moral codes around which people coalesce and define themselves, their sense of the sacred, and their relationships with each other and the natural world.⁴

Accordingly, knowledge and information on the environment is insufficient to change people's behaviour. The problem is not simply one of a lack of education but also of a lack of moral imagination, spiritual vision and sensitivity. Solving the environmental crisis will demand much more than new, more appropriate forms of technology. What is required a fundamental change of orientation, in Christian terms a *metanoia*.⁵

In the light of these considerations, the *spiritual* dimensions of the environmental crisis have to be acknowledged.⁶ Despite the earlier criticisms concerning the apathy of religion towards ecological concerns, some observers have recognised the potential of the world's religious traditions to offer the necessary inspiration, spiritual vision, ecological wisdom, ethical discernment, moral power and *hope* to sustain an ecological transformation. Religious traditions can offer the mystic motivation and enthusiasm for earthkeeping projects that no other secular or government initiatives can muster on such a wide scale.⁷ Religious traditions can provide what science *qua* science cannot: they promise not only meaning but also survival power, deliverance, healing, well-being.⁸ Tucker and Grim again capture this need succinctly:

For many people an environmental crisis of this complexity and scope is not only the result of certain economic, political, and social factors. It is also a moral and spiritual crisis which, in order to be addressed, will require broader philosophical and religious understandings of ourselves as creatures of nature, embedded in life cycles and dependent on ecosystems. Religions, thus, need to be re-examined in light of the current environmental crisis. This is because religions help to shape our attitudes toward nature in both conscious and unconscious ways. Religions provide basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going. This comprises a worldview of a society.⁹

Can the great religious traditions of the world (whether literate or pre-literate) muster sufficient moral power and vision to turn the tide, to show a path out of the maze of ongoing environmental degradation? Indeed, can religious discourse really make a

⁴ Mische 2000:592-593.

⁵ See the perceptive observations by Bishop Kallistos Ware 1997:26, also Rossi 1997:63.

⁶ See Maguire 2000 and the various essays in Hull 1993.

⁷ See Daneel 1998. Daneel describes, in considerable detail, the religious beliefs and rituals that generated a vision, enthusiasm and commitment to ecological conservation within the context of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC). AZTREC managed to draw on spirit mediums, the chiefs (whose status have been restored through the "war of the trees"), kinship systems, the mystic communion with the guardian ancestors (who act as the ecological conscience of their living descendants), traditional ecological wisdom and a strong code of conduct. Indeed, the most outstanding feature of AZTREC's work is its ability to appropriate and revitalise some of the age-old ecological values within a contemporary programme of environmental reform. AZTREC's traditionalist leadership demonstrated their ability to motivate and mobilise rural society for large-scale environmental programmes (Daneel 1998:236). The long-term durability of AZTREC's programmes lies in its ability to draw on religious motivation in order to harness the people's love for the land and their willingness to sacrifice and to suffer so as to restore what is their only home.

⁸ See Rasmussen 1994:177, 1996:185.

⁹ Tucker & Grim 2000:xvi.

difference?¹⁰ It seems clear that this will require nothing less than a transformation of each tradition (preferably in terms of each tradition's own heritage and particularity). Larry Rasmussen has argued that all religious and moral impulses of whatever sort must now be matters of unqualified earthbound loyalty and care. Each faith has to become an earth-centred faith.¹¹

15.2 Initiatives towards inter-religious dialogue on the environment

The environmental crisis has become a concern in almost every religious tradition. Each religious tradition has had to retrieve some of the ecological wisdom in its own heritage. There have also been a number of important initiatives from a multi-faith perspective to retrieve ecological wisdom from the world's religious traditions:

- * The World Wide Fund for Nature initiated and sponsored a series of popular books on *World religions and ecology*. In this series, books on Buddhism, Christianity, First Nations, Islam, Judaism and Taoism have been published.¹²
- * Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim edited a volume of essays entitled *Worldviews and ecology* which provided an overview of attitudes towards nature in the world's religious traditions as a means of formulating a more global ecological ethos.¹³
- * Likewise, a comprehensive study by Baird Callicot, *Earth's Insights* (1994) offers a survey of the ecological ethos of Western traditions, the religions of South Asia and East Asia and selected indigenous traditions from Africa, Asia and North and South America.
- * The Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, in cooperation with the Center for Respect for Life and Environment and Bucknell University organised a series of conferences from 1996 through 1998 on "Religions of the World and Ecology." This has led to a further series of edited volumes on specific religions and ecology, with Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim as the series editors.¹⁴
- * In several contributions, Catholic theologian Hans Küng has argued for a new global ethos to address the global challenges that the earth community has to address. What is called for, is a minimum of shared ethical principles on which all people can agree. For Küng, this does not imply a uniform religion or a uniform ideology. At the level of religious visions of the ultimate, there should be room for difference among the world's religious traditions. However, it should be possible (at a penultimate level) to formulate a global ethos to which adherents of different

¹⁰ See Oelschlaeger 1994:47f. Oelschlaeger argues that religion has an indispensable role to play in addressing the ecological crisis. He defends this assertion from a socio-linguistic point of view. Religion continues to provide a powerful legitimating narrative within which people live and work. Environmental problems can only be addressed if the religious narratives (especially in the Judaeo-Christian tradition) can be redescribed in such a way that the need of a "caring for creation" can become evident.

¹¹ See Rasmussen 1996:10. See also Tucker (1996:147) who suggests that the challenge is to move from medieval theologies centred on God and from contemporary theologies focused on the human condition to twenty-first century theologies focused on the earth.

¹² See the volumes edited by Bachelor & Brown 1992, Breuille & Palmer 1992, Prime 1992 and Rose 1992 in this series.

¹³ Tucker & Grim 1996.

¹⁴ See the volumes on Christianity by Hessel & Ruether (2000), on Buddhism by Tucker & Williams (1999), and on Confucianism by Tucker & Berthrong (1999). See also the Fall 2001 edition of *Daedalus* in which contributions from a wide variety of religious traditions are juxtaposed.

religious traditions can subscribe to. Küng's argument is simple: There is no survival possible without a global ethos and a global sense of responsibility. There is no world peace without peace between the religions. And there is no peace between religions without dialogue between the religions.¹⁵

- * The environment was a major theme at the 1993 (Chicago), the 1999 (Cape Town) and the 2003 (Barcelona) gatherings of the Parliament of World Religions. The keynote address by Gerald Barney at the 1993 Parliament focussed on the urgency of the global environmental crisis and the need for world religions to respond to this crisis with an adequate environmental ethics. The contribution of Hans Küng on the need for a global ethic at the 1993 meeting was followed by several sessions on the significance of the Earth Charter at the 1999 Parliament (see the discussion below).
- * The *Earth Charter* movement is perhaps the most significant contribution from the world's religious traditions to foster an ecological ethos. A few comments on this background to and the significance of this document may therefore be appropriate.

The Earth Charter is the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation about common goals and shared values.¹⁶ It was born from the recognition that civil society needs an inspiring and shared ethical vision of fundamental values that can guide planning, policy-making and action. This leads to the realisation that effective policy-making and problem-solving in an interdependent world require partnerships and cooperation including all nations and peoples in all sectors of society. The Earth Charter process followed a 1987 call from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development for the creation of a charter that would set forth fundamental principles for sustainable development. It builds on more than 50 international declarations and treaties and more than 150 non-governmental declarations, charters and treaties adopted since the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. These declarations include the World Charter for Nature (1982) and many others. Representatives from government and non-government organisations worked to secure the adoption of an Earth Charter during the UNCED "Earth Summit" in Rio in 1992. This was intended to serve as the ethical framework for Agenda 21. However, this did not materialise. In 1994 a new Earth Charter initiative was launched by the Earth Council (led by Maurice Strong) and Green Cross International (led by Mikhail Gorbachev). An Earth Council was subsequently formed to pursue the unfinished business of UNCED and to promote the implementation of Agenda 21. In 1997 An Earth Charter Commission was formed to oversee the drafting of the Charter and the participation of people from different continents and diverse religious traditions in the process.¹⁷ The drafting process was spearheaded by Steven Rockefeller. After several drafts and contributions from thousands of individuals and hundreds of organisations from different regions, cultures and sectors of society all over the world, the final version of the Earth Charter was issued on 24 March 2000.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Küng 1990.

¹⁶ On the Earth Charter process, see Clugston 1997 & Rockefeller 1997, 2001, Rockefeller in Taylor 2005:516-517. See also Conradie 2003.

¹⁷ The brochure available on the Earth Charter claims that: "The Earth Charter initiative has involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in the drafting of an international agreement." Indeed, the drafting process was as important as the final product (Rockefeller 2001:107).

¹⁸ The Earth Charter Council has reserved the right to make adjustments to the text, if after four or five years there are very compelling reasons to do so (Rockefeller 2001:107).

The Earth Charter initiative has now entered a new phase that focuses on the implementation of its principles into action.¹⁹ The objectives are to disseminate the Earth Charter as widely as possible, to promote its educational use, and to encourage the use and endorsement of the Earth Charter by civil society, businesses and governments. The Earth Charter Handbook suggests that the Earth Charter can be used in the following ways: a) as an educational tool to develop an understanding of the critical choices facing humanity, b) as an invitation for internal reflection on fundamental attitudes and ethical values, c) as a catalyst for dialogue on global ethics and globalisation, d) as a call to action and a guide to sustainability, e) as an integrated ethical framework for policies and plans towards sustainable development, f) as a framework for designing professional codes of conduct and accountability systems, and g) as a soft law instrument that provides an ethical foundation for ongoing developments in the field of environmental law.

This remarkable document notes in its preamble that: “We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace.” The expanded sense of a community of life and an inclusive moral vision lie at the heart of the document. In a paragraph on influences shaping the Earth Charter, the *Earth Charter in Action 2000* notes the following:

In addition to international law instruments and NGO declarations, the ideas and principles in the Earth Charter are drawn from a variety of sources. The document Charter is influenced by the new scientific worldview, including the discoveries of contemporary cosmology, physics, evolutionary biology, and ecology. It draws on the wisdom of the world’s religions and philosophical traditions. It also reflects the social movements associated with human rights, democracy, gender equality, civil society, disarmament, and peace. It builds on the seven UN summit conferences on children, the environment, human rights, population, women, social development and food security, held during the 1990s (p. 46-47).

The Earth Charter then articulates 16 principles, grouped in four categories, for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. These principles are based on respect and care for the community of life (the first group of principles that serve as a statement of the Earth Charter’s moral vision).²⁰ This is concretised in three further sections on

¹⁹ See the two documents on the dissemination of the Earth Charter which are available from the Earth Charter website, i.e. *The Earth Charter Initiative Handbook* and *The Earth Charter in Action 2000*.

²⁰ Rockefeller (2001:113) notes that the nonhuman world is commonly treated in a utilitarian way as an object to be used. He suggests that the most fundamental cause of the environmental problems that afflict the planet is the lack of respect for nature that pervades modern industrialised countries. If understood within the context of solidarity within the community of life, such respect for otherness correlates with a Christian ethics of love in which the bonds of community and an appreciation for the possibilities of an enriching diversity is acknowledged. In this way the fundamental importance of love and compassion for the healing of Earth and social renewal is acknowledged.

ecological integrity,²¹ social and economic justice, and democracy, non-violence and peace. In this way the Earth Charter seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger earth community. It serves as a vehicle for addressing the issues facing the global community and for stimulating change. It calls on all people to search for common ground in the midst of diversity and to embrace a new moral vision.

One of the expressed aims of the Earth Charter initiative is to seek endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations General Assembly, although it should primarily be considered as a people's treaty more than as an inter-governmental instrument (for example a soft law document such as *Agenda 21*). This will enhance its status as a soft law document and increase its influence on governments and international law. Steve Rockefeller explains:

Unlike a hard law treaty, a soft law document such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is regarded as a statement of intentions and aspirations and it is not considered to be legally binding. Soft law documents ... frequently evolve over time into hard law. In addition, any declaration of fundamental ethical principles that gains wide acceptance can function as a soft law document that influences the development of international law even if it has not been formally endorsed by the United Nations.²²

15.3 Christian perspectives on inter-religious dialogue on the environment

Two important observations resulting from these initiatives towards inter-religious dialogue on the environment may be noted here:

1) These initiatives have stimulated renewed reflections on the notion of worldviews. What would constitute an ecological worldview? Does a project such as the Earth Charter succeed in articulating values which can be shared by all or most peoples on earth? In what ways would such an ecological worldview be different from the assumptions of modernity which are often criticised as being the root of the problem? Are there aspects of modernity that should nevertheless be sustained (e.g. the emphasis on critical inquiry and the political values of equality and justice)? How would such an ecological worldview relate to the cultural assumptions of contemporary social

²¹ Rockefeller (1998:24f) notes that the Earth Charter is not organised around human rights as a dominant theme. It is concerned with the moral significance of the whole community of life and all its members, human and non-human. It calls for respect of all individual living beings. Although the issues addressed by the Earth Charter are closely related to human rights law, it does not use human rights language. It also does not adopt rights language with reference to non-human species (the rights of animals or the rights of nature). Rockefeller (2001:119) also notes that the concept of the rights of nature has not won broad international acceptance. Instead, the Earth Charter recognises the moral thrust of the idea of the rights of nature in that it holds that human relations with non-human species and individual living beings involve moral responsibilities.

²² See Rockefeller (2001:233, note 4) The Earth Charter has been drafted in coordination with a hard law treaty designed to provide an integrated legal framework. This draft International Covenant on Environment and Development is being prepared by the Commission on Environmental Law at the World Conservation Union (IUCN). On the relationship between the Earth Charter and human rights environmental law, see especially Casey and Morgante (1998).

paradigms such as globalisation, postmodernism or to what is referred to as the “New Age”?

2) As a result of these multi-faith initiatives, the environment has become a new focus on the agenda of inter-religious dialogue.²³ Paul Knitter suggests, for example, that there is a need for a “deep ecumenicity”, that is, the need for religious traditions to find common ground on a common earth. Such a “deep ecumenicity” implies that “the more the religions of the world can ground themselves in this earth and the more deeply they can connect with the nature and the needs of this planet, the more they will find themselves interconnected.”²⁴ Knitter suggests that such a common ground between religious traditions will probably be primarily of an ethical nature. The ecological problems that the world is faced with are indeed common problems. We can therefore speak of the need for and possibility of a universal environmental ethic. In terms of Hans Küng’s motto “No world peace without peace between the religions,” Knitter adds that there is “No peace with the earth without peace between the religions.”²⁵

For Christians, the sensitive listening to people of other faiths (but not an unsophisticated religious syncretism) is particularly important due to the sustained environmental critique of Christianity.²⁶ As a result, several Christian theologians have participated in conversations on ecological themes with thinkers from other religious traditions, including Buddhism,²⁷ Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and primal religions²⁸ and have drawn from the ecological wisdom of such religious traditions.

Where these dialogues will lead us, is not quite clear yet. Whether the history of the earth (as described by modern science) would provide a context for religious *unity* (as Thomas Berry suggests²⁹) remains doubtful. The notion of inter-religious dialogue will remain both crucial and controversial in the decades ahead.

The urgency of such dialogue between religious traditions regarding environmental concerns cannot mask some serious differences within Christian theological discourse on the very nature of such dialogue.³⁰ Some regard Christian earthkeeping, at best, as one

²³ See especially the contributions of Knitter 1995, 2000.

²⁴ Knitter 2000:365.

²⁵ Knitter 2000:372.

²⁶ Field 1996:285.

²⁷ See the contributions of McDaniel 1989:92f, 1995:150-170.

²⁸ See the work by Daneel (1998) on African traditional religion and by McDaniel (1995:192-214) on Native American traditions. Daneel’s work offers an amazing account of the possibility of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Instead of withdrawing from traditionalist practitioners of ancestor veneration to demonstrate its rejection of “heathenism”, the member churches of the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches have been able to work together in solidarity with their traditionalist counterparts in the green struggle. This shows that while religious traditions may differ on what is of “ultimate concern” it is possible to cooperate with one another on what is of “penultimate concern”. The realisation that the whole earth community shares a common home and that environmental destruction is a common threat that requires a common will, united action and a steadfastness that transcends group fragmentation, gives particular urgency to such cooperation. In this way joint earthkeeping projects do not imply religious relativism or a syncretistic compromise at the expense of Christian witness. The cooperation between AZTREC and the AAEC is all the more remarkable because the predominantly Zionist or Apostolic members churches of AAEC have fairly rigid views on traditional beliefs and rituals (e.g. branding ancestors as demons and forbidding any form of participation in traditional rituals – 1999:281).

²⁹ Berry in Lonergan & Richards 1987:27-39.

³⁰ See Tucker 1996, also King 2005.

particular manifestation of an environmental movement that may offer a contribution, alongside other religious traditions, worldviews and philosophies, to a more general attempt to retrieve the kind of ecological wisdom that is required to address environmental devastation in the decades ahead. They may argue that the various religious tradition form part of the larger earth community and should contribute to a global ethos. In other words, religion is an aspect of culture and culture should make a contribution to the ethos and well-being of nations.

Others regard a Christian earthkeeping ethos, praxis, spirituality and theology as one way of witnessing to the truth claims of the Christian tradition in its ongoing dialogue with other living faiths and worldviews. They argue that the earth community, all its creatures, including humans, their cultures, languages and religions were created by God. The origin, life and destiny of the whole earth community are in God hands. The reason why Christian should engage in earthkeeping should be based on faith in the Creator God. This begs numerous further questions about the true identity of God. The conflicting witnesses to the identity of God from within different religious traditions have often incited inter-religious conflict.

This problem cannot be evaded easily. If Christians are urged to engage in earthkeeping in order to make a contribution to a collective effort to retrieve a generalised form of ecological wisdom from the world's religious traditions, it will only be supported by the few who are already convinced of the need for earthkeeping on other grounds.

The emerging ecological consciousness has, at the very least, lead to a new awareness of the one earth community to which all species, cultures, nations and religions belong. In fact, the picture emerging from the sciences and environmental movements alike is that everything in the cosmos is interrelated, that everything is radically kin. Everything, including human beings, are genetically related. We are all made from the ashes of dead stars.³¹ As Brian Swimme puts it: "No tribal myth, no matter how wild, ever imagined a more profound relationship connecting all things in an internal way right from the beginning of time. All thinking must begin with this cosmic genetic relatedness."³² This sense of relatedness and community may still have a profound effect on inter-faith dialogue and the self-understanding of particular religious traditions. This is well captured in the title of Knitter's book *One earth, many religions*.³³ Sean McDonagh expresses the same sentiment:

There are no Catholic lakes, Protestant rivers or Muslim forests. We all share a common earth and in the face of a threat to the survival of the planet we should unite our efforts and forget which institutions should have precedence, and other ecclesial niceties.³⁴

Remarkably, this sense of relatedness and community does not imply a levelling of differences and particularity or a lack of individuation. The history of the cosmos has been yielding an incredibly complex, highly individuated variety of things. No two specimens from the same species are, or have ever been, exactly the same.³⁵ In fact,

³¹ See McFague 1993:44.

³² Quoted in McFague 1993:106.

³³ Knitter 1995.

³⁴ McDonagh 1990:192-193.

³⁵ McFague 1993:105.

“nature depends on diversity, thrives on differences, and perishes in the imbalance of uniformity. Healthy systems are highly varied and specific to time and place. Nature is not mass-produced.”³⁶

Perhaps this comment also indicates a way forward. The common earth, which all human beings and all other forms of life share with one another, is something which transcends all our particularities. It is something which is bigger than ourselves. A concern for the environment is also a place where, in a still divided country, all true South Africans (i.e. those who love the land, the soil, the air, the waters, the plants, the animals, the people) can meet one another and commit themselves to something which is bigger than ourselves: the well-being of the land itself. In this way it can become a point of convergence for all other social agendas – the numerous struggles for political peace, economic justice, gender equality and civil society.

The earth that we share as our common home is indeed something that transcends ourselves, but only in a penultimate way. Religious traditions have tried to express that which transcends the cosmos itself. The claim of the Christian tradition is that the best clue to the ultimate meaning of the world (*and* whatever may transcend the world) may be found in the story of Jesus Christ. This claim should be the focus of a Christian contribution to a dialogue with people of other living faiths on an appropriate ethos for an “earth community”.³⁷

³⁶ Quoted in Rasmussen 1996:114.

³⁷ For the notion of “earth community”, see Rasmussen 1996.

**Christianity and
ecological theology:
An indexed bibliography**

Introduction to the indexed bibliography

The aims of this bibliography

The aim of this indexed bibliography is to facilitate research in the field of Christian ecological theology. Such an indexed bibliography provides for different reasons little more than a point of departure for research. The sheer bulk of literature may perhaps even discourage prospective researchers to commence with a literature survey. Nevertheless, the following concerns have prompted the publication of this bibliography:

- * The availability of such a bibliography can stimulate further (postgraduate) research in the field of Christian ecological theology, also within the South African context,
- * There is a need to avoid the mere repetition of previous research and the continuous reiteration that “something needs to be done about the environmental crisis.” This bibliography therefore provides an index for directed research.

Is another bibliography necessary?

A number of other bibliographies have already been published in the field of Christian theology and ecology. References to these bibliographies may be found in the index. I have also previously compiled two indexed bibliographies that were published in editions of the journal *Scriptura* in 1993 (47, 52-104) and in 1995 (52, 26-64). Two previous editions of this bibliography have been published in 1998 and 2001 at the University of the Western Cape in the series Study Guides in Religion and Theology 3. The following features may explain the need for a new edition of this bibliography:

- * This bibliography is perhaps more comprehensive than others which have been published thus far. However, it cannot make any claims to being fully comprehensive. My own continuous discovery of previously unlisted publications from all over the world has precluded any such claims to comprehensiveness.
- * This bibliography only contains publications in Afrikaans, Dutch, English, and German. It therefore unfortunately excludes some publications in, for example French, Greek, Italian, Portugese, Russian, Spanish and Scandinavian languages which may have proved helpful to some researchers (in South Africa).
- * The two bibliographies which were published in *Scriptura* are integrated in this third revised edition of the indexed bibliography, together with a large number of more recent publications as well as some earlier material.
- * The most important feature of this bibliography that may facilitate further research is its index. See the comments on the index below.
- * It has to be noted that this bibliography focuses on Christian theology only. There are a large number of publications on ecology in secular literature and from the perspective of other religious traditions. These are only included here if they are discussed in relation to Christianity or in the context of inter-faith dialogue (see the index for detail).

- * Since an ecological consciousness has emerged especially after 1970, most of the literature included in this bibliography derives from this period. No special attempt was made to compile references to works published before 1970.
- * Although several publications from the period 2005-2006 are included in the bibliography, the data on this period remains incomplete.
- * Book reviews and articles of only one or two pages in length are usually not included in the bibliography.
- * It was not always possible to include full bibliographic details due to the incompleteness of the bibliographic sources. Such entries are nevertheless included in the bibliography.

A “Research guide” as companion volume

The 2001 edition of the indexed bibliography was published together with a companion volume, namely *Ecological theology: A guide for further research* (Study Guides in Religion and Theology 5). These two publications are now integrated into a single volume. The aim the research guide remains to promote and direct postgraduate research in the area of ecological theology in the context of Christianity. It offers an orientation to the wealth of literature from all over the world without necessarily replacing an exposure to this literature.

Some comments on the index

The following considerations should be taken into account in using the index:

- * The index is based on key words and themes. Usually, these have been derived from the titles of the literature, even though the titles may possibly be misleading. A more systematic approach would, however, only be possible through a detailed reading of the literature. This is certainly beyond my capability!
- * The themes and key words are somewhat more specific than that of other major electronic indexes. This should enable researchers to concentrate on the literature within ecological theology with reference to a specific concept.
- * There are often good discussions of specific themes in major books in the field of ecological theology. Unfortunately these are difficult to derive from the titles and could therefore not be indexed. The literature included in the index therefore provides little more than a starting point. Many of the major books contain a detailed index which should prove valuable in this regard.
- * The bibliography and the index only include literature with a specific focus on Christian theology and ecology. There are many other secular publications that could also prove helpful for research on any specific theme.
- * There is often more than one contribution by a specific author on a particular topic in the same calendar year. Only one such reference is included in the index.
- * The index contains references to virtually all the publications cited in the bibliography.

An unfinished project

A bibliography of this nature can never be completed. This manuscript is therefore published with the hope that an updated version of the full bibliography can be published on a regular basis (more or less every four or five years). Any person who may wish to submit additional entries or corrections for such an envisaged updated version of the bibliography is warmly invited to forward that to me at <econradie@uwc.ac.za>.

Electronic publication

The vast number of publications included in this bibliography provides a sobering indication of the volume of paper which must have been required to publish a total of more than 5000 books, articles and essays in edited volumes. The publication of the bibliography through SUN Press has made it possible to produce an electronic version of the publication. This will also allow researchers to do their own electronic searches of key words.

A word of thanks

The publication was made possible through several research grants from the University of the Western Cape in 2001, 2005, and 2006. I would also like my deep gratitude to a number of postgraduate students who contributed to the painstaking task of gathering and editing bibliographic information. The contributions of Patrick Andries, Wyomia Lawrence, Charl Fredericks and Xolani Sakuba deserve special mentioning in this regard.

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Wallis, J (ed) 1990.
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Wright, NG 1996.

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Diakonia / deacons

Bratton SP 2000.
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Domination

Bloomquist, KL 1989.
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Dominion

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Jobling, DK 1971.
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Betcher, SV 1994.
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Faith

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Webb, B 1998.

Gaia (use of term)

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 Lovelock, J 1982.
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 Rose, E 1993.
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Grace / Nature and grace

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 Stewart, CY 1983.
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 Muratore, S 1985.
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Human dignity

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Image of God

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 Loader, JA 1987.
 Scharbert, J 1987.
 Troster, L 1991.

Incarnation

Briere, E 1989.
 Burrell, DB 1996.
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 Phillips, JS 1995.
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Imagination

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Joy

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Justification

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Kenosis

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Rolston, H 2001.

Kingdom of God / Reign of God

Fullenbach, J 1993.
Hall, DJ 1985.
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Herman, WR 1994.
Kaylor, RD 1995.
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Law (and gospel)

Altner, G 1991.
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Liberation

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Landes, GM 1978.
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Sölle, D 1993.

Spencer, DT 1993.
Tinker, GE 1992.
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Willis, ED 1985.
Winter, G 1981.

Life, Respect for life (see also theology of life)

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Birch, C & Cobb, JB (jr) 1981.
Birch, C, Eakin, W & McDaniel, JB (eds) 1990.
Christ, CP 1987.
Cupitt, D 1990.
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Dowd, M 1990.
Ericson, EI 1975.
Gansterer, G 1997.
Gill, D 1983.
Granberg-Michaelson, W (ed) 1988.
Hedström, I 1990.
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Josuttis, M 1989.
Kapur, P 1993.
Loader, JA 1991.
Lönning, P 1987.
McDaniel, JB 1989.
McDonagh, S 2003.
McPherson, J 1986.
Nelson, JR 1991.
Ole, RT 1990.
Robra, M, Manchala, D & Anderson-Rajarigam, S 2001.
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Van Rossum, ML 1993.

Limits (notion of limits, see also "limits to growth)

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Barbour, IG (ed) 1976.
Blenkinsop, J 1997.
Cobb, JB (jr) 1970.
Cobb, JB (jr) 1979.
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Cobb, JB (jr) 1999.
Daly, HE 1980.
Drengson, AR 1984.
Durning, A 1999.
Ferrell, DR 1983.
Hardin, G 1993.
Lindqvist, M 1980.

Rasmussen, LL 1975.
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Root, M 1981.
Tucker, GM 1993.
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Love

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Alle, PG 1990.
Anderson, DR 1995.
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Bratton, SP 1992.
Christiansen, D 1994.
DeWitt, CB 1993.
Huber, W 1987.
Jacobson, CR 1994.
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Rigdon, VB 1983.
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Sölle, D & Cloyes, S 1984.
Thiele, J 1989.

Mysticism (also mystery)

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Fox, M 1994.
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Myth and ritual

Carmody, J 1991.
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Nature and history

Balzer, L 1992.
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 Obayashi, H 1973.
 Ponting, C 1992.
 Roberts, J 1993.
 Ruether, RR 1981.
 Spring, D & Spring, E 1974.
 Stevenson, WT 1976.
 Tucker, GM 1993.

“New creation” (use of term)

Amalados, M 1991.
 Anderson, BW 1994.
 Baldermann, I et al (eds) 1990.
 Bishop, S 1991.
 Burggraave, R 1991.
 Gadon, E 1992.
 Gnanakan, K 1994.
 Gottlieb, R (ed) 1990.
 Granberg-Michaelson, W 1981.
 Halkes, CJM 1989.
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 Houtepen, A 1995.
 Koyama, K 1993.
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 Langerak, A 1993.
 McDonagh, E 1986.
 Reumann, J 1973.
 Robb, C & Casebolt, C (eds) 1991.
 Sittler, JA 1972.
 Suhor, ML (ed) 1990.
 Theokritoff, E 2003.
 Timm, H 1993.
 Wilkinson, L 1987.

Place / Sense of place

Lilburne, GR 1989.
 Moltmann, J 2002.
 Tödt, HE 1979.
 Tolliday, PW 2001.
 Tuan, YF 1997.
 Victorin-Vangerud, NM 2001.

Priestly service / Priesthood

Getui, M 1996.
 Kehm, G 1992.
 Muratore, S 1985.
 Paternoster, M 1976.
 Theokritoff, E 2005.
 Williams, DT 1994.

Prophetic voice, protest

Fox, M 1987.
 Köhler, E 1980.
 Letcher, A 2002.
 Paarlberg, J 1992.
 Palmer, M 1995.
 Rock, M 1985.
 Rock, M 1985.
 Williams, DT 1994.

Reconciliation, peace, unity, harmony

Altner, G & Liedke, G 1984.
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 Berkhof, H 1970.
 Berry, T 1991.
 Birch, BC 1985.
 Borovoy, V 1984.
 Borovoy, V 1990.
 Burrel, D & Malits, E 1997.
 Cobb, JB (jr) 1984.
 Daly, G 1993.
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 Habel, NC 1996.
 Huber, W 1988.
 Inchody, O 1993.
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 Modler, P 1989.
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 Muratore, S 1985.
 Och, B 1988.
 Rau, G & Ritter, AM 1987.
 Raymond, L 1993.
 Rogers, P 1995.
 Roshchin, M 1996.
 Stamm, RA 1989.
 Stückelberger, C 1988.
 Webb, SH 1996.
 Williamson, R 1995.

Redemption and creation

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 Daly, G 1988.
 Fletcher, P 2004.
 Fox, M 1983.
 Gibbs, JC 1971.
 Gosling, D 1993.
 Gowan, DE 1985.
 Granberg-Michaelson, W 1984.
 Granberg-Michaelson, W 1992.
 Grey, M 1989.
 Hiebert, TG 1994.
 Hoezee, S 1998.
 Kehm, GH 1992.
 Kolden, M 1987.
 Lohfink, N 1978.
 McCarthy, J 1994.
 Moltmann, J 1976.
 Morton, J 1984.
 Nicholls, BJ 1993.
 Och, B 1995.
 Prenter, R 1991.
 Rolston, H (III) 1992.
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 Root, MJ 1979.
 Root, MJ 1981.
 Ruether, RR & Merton, T 1995.
 Scharper, SB 1996.
 Schillebeeckx, E 1981.
 Schmid, HH 1984.
 Smith, S 1992.
 Wilkinson, L 1991.
 Van Dyke, F et al 1996.

Renewal

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 Coyle, K 1993.
 Duraisingh, C (ed) 1990.
 Granberg-Michaelson, W 1990.
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 Halkes, CJM 1991.
 Kerr, DA 1991.
 Limouris, G (ed) 1990.
 Lutz, PE & Santmire, HP 1972.
 Murphy, CM 1992.
 Ormerod, N 1991.
 Ryan, T 1990.
 Santmire, HP 1984.
 Stendahl, K 1990.
 Tobia, B & Maksymowicz, V 1992.
 Wallace, MI 1996.

Repentance

Harris, P 2002.
 Ruether, RR 1991.

Resurrection (of the dead)

Conradie, EM 2002.
Cooley, PM 1992.

Sabbath, rest

Bacchiochi, S 1980.
Berry, W 1987.
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Reformation

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Augustine

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Bonaventura

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Calvin, John

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 Schreiner, SE 1983.
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 Zimmermann, G 1988.
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Eckhardt, Meister

Barciauskas, J 1994.
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Edwards, Jonathan

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Francis of Assisi

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 Brugge, T (ed) 1987.

Dubos, R 1974.
 Fong, F 2003.
 Green, J 1985.
 Hooper, P, & Palmer, M 1992.
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 Morton, DJP 1996.
 Robson, M 1997.
 Rohr, R 1994.
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 Sorrell, RD 1988.
 Stratman, TB 1982.
 Verheij, S 1987.
 Warner, K 1994.
 Weigand, P 1984.
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Gregory of Nazianz

Bergmann, S 1993.
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Heloise

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Hildegard of Bingen

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 Craine, R 1987.
 Feldman, C 1991.
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Ignatius

Schineller, P 1989.

John Chrysostom

Hall, CA 2002.

Luther, Martin

Churchill, SL 1999.
 Gregersen, NH 1995.
 Holze, H 1995.
 Ickert, SS 1998.
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