



Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series

VOLUME 29

# Creation Care in Christian Mission



**Edited By**  
**Kapya J Kaoma**

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 29

# Creation Care in Christian Mission

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## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

The centenary of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, held in Edinburgh, was a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several different constituencies within world Christianity held significant events around 2010. From 2005, an international group worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, known as Edinburgh 2010, based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brought together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions, and many different strands of mission and church life, to mark the centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or ‘commissions’. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission – but now focused on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study process was polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today’s church. It was overseen by the Study Process Monitoring Group: Miss Maria Aranzazu Aguado (Spain, The Vatican), Dr Daryl Balia (South Africa, Edinburgh 2010), Mrs Rosemary Dowsett (UK, World Evangelical Alliance), Dr Knud Jørgensen (Norway, Areopagos), Rev John Kafwanka (Zambia, Anglican Communion), Rev Dr Jooseop Keum (Korea, World Council of Churches), Dr Wonsuk Ma (Korea, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Rev Dr Kenneth R. Ross (UK, Church of Scotland), Dr Petros Vassiliadis (Greece, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), and co-ordinated by Dr Kirsteen Kim (UK, Edinburgh 2010).

These publications reflect the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and will make a significant contribution to ongoing studies in mission. It should be clear that material published in this series will inevitably reflect a diverse range of views and positions. These will not necessarily represent those of the series’ editors or of the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, but in publishing them the leadership of Edinburgh 2010 hopes to encourage conversation between Christians and collaboration in mission. All the series’ volumes are commended for study and reflection in both church and academy.

### Series Editors

Knud Jørgensen	Former Chair of Edinburgh 2010 Study Process Monitoring Group, MF Norwegian School of Theology
Kirsteen Kim	Leeds Trinity University and former Edinburgh 2010 Research Co-ordinator, UK
Wonsuk Ma	Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK
Tony Gray	Words by Design, Bicester, UK

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Volume 29

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Edited by  
Kapyra J Kaoma

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## PREFACE

The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call emerged from the Edinburgh 2010 study process and conference marking the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. The Common Call, cited below, was affirmed in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on 6 June 2010, by representatives of world Christianity, including Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and other major Protestant churches.

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

*1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.*

*2. Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.*

*3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.*

*4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.*

*5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for*

*mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.*

*6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century, we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another's unique charisms, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.*

*7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.*

*8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.*

*9. Remembering Jesus' way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ's coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.*

### **Themes Explored**

The 2010 conference was shaped around the following nine study themes:

1. Foundations for mission
2. Christian mission among other faiths
3. Mission and post-modernities
4. Mission and power
5. Forms of missionary engagement
6. Theological education and formation
7. Christian communities in contemporary contexts
8. Mission and unity – ecclesiology and mission
9. Mission spirituality and authentic discipleship

### **The Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series to Date**

Against this background a series of books was commissioned, with the intention of making a significant contribution to ongoing studies of mission. This series currently includes:<sup>1</sup>

*Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now*, David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (eds).

*Edinburgh 2010 Volume II: Witnessing to Christ Today*, Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim (eds).

*Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Claudia Wahrisch-Oblau and Fidon Mwombeki (eds).

*Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma (eds).

*Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds).

*The Church Going Local: Mission and Globalization*, Tormod Engelsviken, Erling Lundebj and Dagfinn Solheim (eds).

*Evangelical and Frontier Mission: Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel*, A. Scott Moreau and Beth Snodderly (eds).

*Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*, Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (ed).

*Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*, Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

*Mission and Post Modernities*, Rolv Olsen (ed).

*A Learning Missional Church: Reflections from Young Missiologists*, Beate Fagerli, Knud Jørgensen, Rolv Olsen, Kari Storstein Haug and Knut Tveitereid (eds).

*Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives*, Cathy Ross (ed).

*Foundations for Mission*, Emma Wild-Wood and Peniel Rajkumar (eds).

*Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*, Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross (eds).

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*Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, Wonsuk Ma, Veli-Matti Karkkainen and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (eds).

*Engaging the World: Christian Communities in Contemporary Global Society*, Afe Adogame, Janice McLean and Anderson Jeremiah (eds).

*Mission At and From the Margins: Patterns, Protagonists and Perspectives*, Peniel Rajkumar, Joseph Dayam, I.P. Asheervadham (eds).

*The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*, Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

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<sup>1</sup> For an up-to-date list and full publication details, see [www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/](http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/)

*Global Diasporas and Mission*, Chandler H Im & Amos Yong (eds).

*Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives*, B Prevett, K White, CR Velloso Ewell & DJ Konz (eds).

*Called to Unity for the Sake of Mission*, John Gibaut and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

*Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission*, Hans Aage Gravaas, Christof Sauer, Tormod Engelsviken, Maqsood Kamil and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

*Reflecting on and Equipping*, for Christian Mission, Stephen Bevans, Teresa Chai, J. Nelson Jennings, Knud Jørgensen and Dietrich Werner

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## FOREWORD

It is not that long ago that the vast majority of Christians, if asked what the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 had to do with caring for our environment, would have been hard pressed to come up with an answer. There are still today probably many who struggle to relate the two. But in the last few decades, environmental concerns have become thoroughly integrated into our Christian lives and theology, and they have everything to do with mission.

I have said that, for Christians, mission is ‘nothing else but a state of being, a state of living responsibly to all that we have received from God; a state of allowing his love to pour through us; of letting ourselves become the people God calls us to be...’<sup>1</sup> For the Anglican Communion, Edinburgh was a critical element in helping us to define who we are as a church: it helped us to recognise that our interdependence as Christians is key to our identity, especially viewed against the Church’s tendency in past millennia to depend on centralised authority as opposed to being rooted in God’s mission. Our 2008 Lambeth Conference exemplified how we have sought to be faithful to a call to be a mission-shaped Communion.

Beginning at the Lambeth Conference of 1968, the process of defining who we are has led to a recognition that living responsibly to all that God has given us includes caring for the physical world around us, and that this should become embodied in our core vision and mission statements. In the Anglican Communion as a whole, we have included an environmental strand as one of our ‘Five Marks of Mission’: the fifth Mark is ‘To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’ A whole section of the 2008 Lambeth Conference was devoted to the environment. In my own church in Southern Africa, our Vision and Mission Statement says that we seek to be ‘Anchored in the love of Christ, Committed to God’s mission, and Transformed by the Holy Spirit.’ Moreover, concern for the environment is one of eight priorities we have identified within that vision.

Edinburgh 1910 highlighted the growth of Christianity as a global religion whose centre of gravity was shifting to the South and to Africa in particular. But as the 20th century unfolded, the joy of seeing this growth was dampened by the continued existence of a global divide between North and South in material (if not in spiritual) terms. Alongside this, we began from the 1960s to recognise that there was a mounting ecological crisis. Despite the lack of global political agreement on how to arrest and reverse

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<sup>1</sup> “Anglicans in Mission — Here am I, Lord, Send me!”

<http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2011/11/anglicans-in-mission-here-am-i-lord.html>. Accessed July 1, 2015.

the deterioration of our environment, the ‘increasingly strong and more frequent extreme weather events; changes in seasonal weather patterns; rising levels of seawater; acidification of seawater and depleted fishing grounds; the devastating impacts of pollution; deforestation, and destructive mining and energy extraction and transportation practices’<sup>2</sup> are scientific realities that the world can hardly ignore.

The ecological crisis is not only a scientific, socio-economic and political issue. As an international group of concerned Anglican bishops said on Good Friday 2015, it is a spiritual issue ‘because the roadblock to effective action relates to basic existential issues of how human life is framed and valued: including the competing moral claims of present and future generations, human versus non-human interests, and how the lifestyle of wealthy countries is to be balanced against the basic needs of the developing world. For this reason the Church must urgently find its collective moral voice.’<sup>3</sup>

This volume is an attempt to reflect a ‘collective moral voice’ on climate change in global Christianity. The essays which follow are from across the globe and from various branches of Christianity: from African-initiated churches, from the Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, Lutheran and Evangelical churches among others. The World Council of Churches, the Lausanne Movement, Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew have all joined individual churches and communions of churches in calling on humanity to relate to the Creation with respect and love.

The ramifications of our ecological crisis make it, in the view of the bishops I have quoted, ‘the most urgent moral issue of our day’ and time is of the essence in addressing it. Our Creator expects us to respect and care for God’s earth and creation. We cannot claim to love God and Jesus while watching the earth be destroyed. Nevertheless, if through the Holy Spirit Christians heed the call to serve creation as the Creator intended, and we change our attitudes towards the natural world, we can do our part in turning the situation around.

The loving God who created humanity is also the same God who created the natural world. The English translation of the creation narratives in the book of Genesis presents Adam independent and disconnected from the earth. However, the name Adam is derived from the Hebrew *adamah*, which translates as earth – suggesting human relationship with the natural world. Moreover, we need to respect the holiness and sacredness of creation as the avenue through which we experience the Creator. We are commanded by the Creator to serve (*ebed*) and protect (*shamar*) the Creation (Genesis 2:15). In short, the God who endowed humanity with

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<sup>2</sup> The Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Environmental Network, *The World is our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice*, Cape Town, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

natural rights is the same God who reveals the Godself in the creation. Our failure to serve and protect the earth is not only immoral but also sinful.

God entrusted the earth to our care but we humans are complicit in its destruction. Our failure to defend the environment represents a crisis of faith, and Christian mission as the *missio Dei* invites us to repent for our involvement in the destruction of God's earth as well as in the exploitation of the poor. In our era, Christian mission involves confronting the sinful structures and acts that work against God's purposes on earth. As participants in God's mission, we are invited to serve God's creation after the pattern of Christ – who came not to be served but to serve.

In doing so, we will also be addressing a critical social justice issue for billions of God's people. The most vulnerable in our communities bear a disproportionate burden of the environmental degradation we suffer. The poor and the powerless watch helplessly as powerful political and capitalistic interests rob them of their dignity and ancestral lands. Women watch their children die from climate-related illnesses. Women and children have to walk long distances to fetch water. In parts of the world, those who resist the forces of greed and material accumulation become victims of assassination – there are growing numbers of violent murders of environmental activists and defenders of the earth.

All creation is a family of ecologically interconnected beings. Yet, as in apartheid South Africa and colonial Africa, a very small group controls our economies across the globe while many languish in abject poverty. The world is blessed with abundant natural resources, yet more than one billion people live on less than a dollar a day. About 2.7 billion live on less than \$2 a day. Christian mission should propel us into fighting the unjust economic and political systems which contribute to such poverty and to our environmental crisis. Just as Christians united in the past to fight against colonialism and apartheid, so today we must fight against the ecological crisis, which has the potential to end all life as we know it.

The ecological crisis presents a Kairos moment for Christianity. Planted in varied Christian traditions, this volume alerts us to the reality that our future and the future of our descendants depends on how we act today. Including valuable global lessons and insights for the Church and the world, it invites us to rethink our socioeconomic and political assumptions as well as our theologies in human/earth relationships. Most importantly it shows that ecologically-developed Christian theologies can inform our ecological responsibilities and actions.

Amidst the displacement of the poor, disappearing rain forests and the increase in climate-related extreme weather phenomena, our efforts may seem helpless. As Christians, however, we follow the Lord who conquered death through selfless love. His victory over death and his Great Commission to the Church to participate in the mission of God assure us that our earth-caring mission can succeed and that, with God on our side,

we will defeat and overcome this crisis and secure the future for generations to come.

The Most Revd Thabo Makgoba  
Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan  
of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

### CREATION CARE AS CHRISTIAN MISSION

As the Edinburgh 2010 ‘centennial celebration program came to a close, the words “see you in 2110” flashed on the screen’. In the midst of worsening ‘global economic inequalities and threatening ecological crises,’ one wonders how Christianity and ‘the Earth would look in the next century’.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, the Edinburgh 2010 centennial came at the time when climate change, climate-related disasters – heat waves, storms, floods, and droughts, species extinction, deforestation, rising sea levels, air and water pollution – are increasingly destroying planetary ecosystems, and threatening communities from Africa to Asia to North and South America. But Edinburgh 2010 also heard that Creation or Earth care<sup>2</sup> is critical to the mission of the Creator God.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the scale of the impending ecological disaster is monstrous, changing our attitudes towards the Creation can mitigate its impact and secure the future of upcoming generations of life.

The unstated existential crisis is that the fate of life on Earth and Christianity as a whole – in the next century and beyond – is in this generation’s hands. Across academic disciplines and religions, we are slowly realising that the human-driven and induced ecological crisis, visibly manifested in global warming, ‘is a scientific reality, and its decisive mitigation is a moral and religious imperative for humanity’.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding, global Christianity has slowly awakened to this gloomy existential reality. In ecumenical circles, the World Council of

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<sup>1</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, ‘Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission: Joys, Issues and Challenges,’ in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (November 2014), 112-28, 112.

<sup>2</sup> Due to various Christian traditions represented in this volume, the words ‘Creation care’ and ‘Earth care’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, I argue that the *missio Dei* seems to emphasise humans (*imago Dei*), thereby sidelining non-human beings in the conception of Christian mission. For this reason, I prefer *missio Creatoris Dei* – the mission of the Creator God which includes all Creation. See Kapya John Kaoma, ‘Missio Dei or Missio Creatoris Dei: Witnessing to Christ in the Face of the Occurring Ecological Crisis,’ in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds), *Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 296-303.

<sup>4</sup> The Vatican, ‘Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity. The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Humanity: Declaration of Religious Leaders, Political Leaders, Business Leaders, Scientists and Development Practitioners,’ 28th April, 2015; posted 3rd May 2015: <http://jeffsachs.org/2015/05/protect-the-earth-dignify-humanity-the-moral-dimensions-of-climate-change-and-sustainable-humanity-declaration-of-religious-leaders-political-leaders-business-leaders-scientists-and-development> (accessed 19th May 2015).

Churches (WCC) has linked the integrity of Creation with peace and justice since the late 1980s. Edinburgh 2010 conference also addressed Creation care as a transversal theme – that is, a theme that ran through all nine study areas.<sup>5</sup> The WCC's call to safeguard the natural world was further highlighted in the 2014 *Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*. Despite human advancement in knowledge, literacy, commerce and technology, the *Invitation to the Pilgrimage* regretted that 'the planet sits at the brink of disaster and life itself is imperilled'.<sup>6</sup>

This consciousness is equally reflected in various Christian traditions. As early as 1984, the Anglican Communion adopted Creation care as the fifth mark of mission: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'<sup>7</sup> Besides, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and his successor Justin Welby have independently highlighted Earth care as critical to Christian mission. Apart from blaming climate change on destructive western lifestyles in 2014, in 2009 Archbishop Williams led religious leaders of various faiths in signing the *Lambeth Statement* that called for addressing climate change as 'a moral imperative,' ahead of the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen.<sup>8</sup> Pointing to the catastrophic effects of global warming on the Earth community, Williams called on developed nations not only to take 'responsibility' for causing climate change, but also for resolving it.<sup>9</sup>

Archbishop Welby reaffirmed Archbishop Williams's statement in the *Lambeth Declaration on Climate Change* in June 2015. In addition to reiterating the negative effects of climate change on the poor and on future generations, the *Lambeth Declaration* invited all nations to 'urgently redouble' efforts to limit global warming to less than 2°C.<sup>10</sup> In addition, both the 1998 and 2008 Lambeth Conferences (the global gathering of

<sup>5</sup> See Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011); Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> WCC, 'Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace': [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace) (accessed 30th April 2015).

<sup>7</sup> In Bartholomew and Justin Welby, 'Climate Change and Moral Responsibility,' *The New York Times*, 19th June 2015: [www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/opinion/climate-change-and-moral-responsibility.html?smid=tw-share&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/opinion/climate-change-and-moral-responsibility.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0) (accessed 19th June 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Faith and Climate Change,' 29th October 2009: <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/770/faith-and-climate-change#Statement> (accessed 19th May 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Williams, 'Faith and Climate Change'.

<sup>10</sup> Church of England, 'Archbishop of Canterbury joins faith leaders in call for urgent action to tackle climate change,' 16th June 2015: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/06/archbishop-of-canterbury-join-faith-leaders-in-call-for-urgent-action-to-tackle-climate-change.aspx> (accessed 17th June 2015).

Anglican bishops every ten years) highlighted Earth care as central to Christian spirituality and mission.

In Roman Catholic circles, Pope Paul VI argued in 1971 that, through the careless ‘exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation’.<sup>11</sup> In 1990, Pope John Paul II highlighted the moral aspect of the ecological crisis, having declared St Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology in the late 1970s.

In 1997, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of the Orthodox tradition, popularly known as the ‘Green Patriarch,’ declared environmental degradation a ‘crime against the natural world’ and ‘a sin’.<sup>12</sup> In 2002, the Patriarch and Pope John Paul II jointly warned of a stark ‘social and environmental crisis which the world is facing’.<sup>13</sup> In June 2015, the Patriarch and Archbishop Welby jointly wrote: ‘We have a mission to protect nature as well as human beings’; the Earth ‘is a gift to all living creatures and all living things. We must, therefore, ensure that the resources of our planet are – and continue to be – enough for all to live abundant lives’.<sup>14</sup>

The two global religious leaders’ statement was a follow-up to Pope Francis’s June 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’* (*Praise be to you*).<sup>15</sup> Using the teachings of St Francis of Assisi, his predecessors, Roman Catholic bishops, Patriarch Bartholomew I, and the scientific evidence on environmental degradation, Pope Francis comprehensively analyses the socio-political, economic, cultural and spiritual components of our eco-social crisis. Addressed to ‘every person living on this planet,’<sup>16</sup> the Pope acknowledged ‘the human origins of the ecological crisis’<sup>17</sup> as well as

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis On Care For Our Common Home*, Vatican Press (24th May 2015), 4: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf) (accessed 18th June 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Larry B. Stammer, ‘Harming the Environment Is Sinful, Prelate Says’ (sub-titled: ‘Theology: Declaration by Bartholomew I, Orthodox Christian leader, is believed to be a first by a major religious figure’): *LA Times*, 9th November 1997: <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/nov/09/news/mn-51974> (accessed 1st June 2015); Bartholomew and John Chrysavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Howden, ‘The Green Patriarch – Bartholomew I,’ BBC, 12th June 2002: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2040567.stm> (accessed 9th January 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Bartholomew and Welby, ‘Climate Change and Moral Responsibility’.

<sup>15</sup> The English translation is *Be Praised*, which is a reflection on St Francis of Assisi’s *Cantico di fratre Sole* – ‘Song of Brother Sun,’ which invites all creatures to praise their Creator.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’*, 75.

affirmed the intrinsic value of all biokind: 'Other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes.'<sup>18</sup>

The encyclical further addressed the established link between the plight of Earth and the plight of the poor: 'We cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.'<sup>19</sup> The poor, who make up the majority of the earth's population, he argues, are in fact 'the most vulnerable' to the ramifications of the mounting crisis.<sup>20</sup> While acknowledging the 'significant advances' made by the global environmental movement, the encyclical challenged sceptics to accept the scientific evidence on climate change.<sup>21</sup>

The Edinburgh 2010 conference addressed some of these socio-economic and ecological issues. For example, it addressed the negative effects of early missionary engagements and colonisation on indigenous peoples that led, and still lead, to cultural malfunctions and to the harming of Creation. In cognisance of such shortfalls, Edinburgh 2010 invited us, in Dieter T. Hessel's words, to 'contribute to achieving a sustainable human-earth relationship' coupled with the 'eco-justice sensibility'.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, the Edinburgh 2010 *Common Call* noted:

Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.

Many faith-related conferences have echoed the *Common Call*. On Good Friday 2015, Anglican bishops released their statement, *The World is Our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice*, in which they asserted that 'attending to the current and future life and health of our planet will require sacrifices now, both personal and collective, a deeper appreciation of the interdependence of all creation, and a genuine commitment to repentance, reconciliation and redemption'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the 2010 Lausanne Movement Cape Town Commitment maintained that we cannot love Jesus without loving Creation:

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Dieter T. Hessel, 'Christianity and Ecology: Wholeness, Respect, Justice, Sustainability Program on Ecology, Justice, and Faith': <http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity> (accessed 6th May 2015).

<sup>23</sup> The Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, 'The World is Our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice,' Good Friday 2015, 5: <http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/The-World-is-our-Host-FINAL-TEXT.pdf> (accessed 6th May 2015).

If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is... a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

The Cape Town Commitment did not only call for repentance for our roles 'in the destruction' of God's Earth, but also summoned us to rekindle our efforts 'to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility'.<sup>25</sup>

While these conferences and subsequent consultations reflect a growing ecological consciousness in global Christianity, the *Common Call*'s appeal for young people's active participation in mission needs emphasising. As Dana L. Robert rightly observes, student movements have played a critical role in Christian missions;<sup>26</sup> hence their involvement in Earth care is acute if we are to build a sustainable movement of ecologically conscious missionaries.

That said, growing ecological consciousness is one of the major shifts in Christian mission since Edinburgh 1910. While the number of non-western Christians who attended both Edinburgh 2010 and Cape Town 2010 reflects the shift in the Christian centre of gravity to the global South, this paradigm shift follows population explosion, poverty and environmental degradation. For instance, the global population is projected to be about ten billion by 2050<sup>27</sup> – with poverty-stricken Africa (the majority living on less than a dollar a day) claiming 40% of this growth.<sup>28</sup> Thus, as human population explodes, environmental degradation worsens, capitalism takes root across the globe, and the poor majority whose livelihoods mostly depend on the land suffer the most.<sup>29</sup>

Capitalism has brought many economic benefits to a small population of the globe – chiefly in the West. However, for the majority of the world's

<sup>24</sup> The Lausanne Movement, 'The Cape Town Commitment': [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment) (accessed 30th April 2015).

<sup>25</sup> The Lausanne Movement, 'The Cape Town Commitment'.

<sup>26</sup> Dana L. Robert, 'Boston students, and Missions 1810-2010,' in Todd M. Johnson et al (eds), *2010Boston: The Changing Contours of World Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 13-17.

<sup>27</sup> FAO, 'How to Feed the World in 2050': [www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert\\_paper/How\\_to\\_Feed\\_the\\_World\\_in\\_2050.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert_paper/How_to_Feed_the_World_in_2050.pdf), 6 (accessed 1st October 2013).

<sup>28</sup> US Census Bureau noted that 'the world population increased from 3 billion in 1959 to 6 billion by 1999, a doubling that occurred over 40 years. The Census Bureau's latest projections imply that population growth will continue into the twenty-first century, although more slowly. The world population is projected to grow from 6 billion in 1999 to 9 billion by 2044, an increase of 50% that is expected to require 45 years': [www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldpopgraph.php](http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldpopgraph.php), June 2011 (accessed 15th May 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2013), 128.

population, it has also ‘ensured poverty and mass starvation on a scale unknown before,’ so Ngugi Wa Thiong’o rightly argues.<sup>30</sup> Wa Thiong’o’s observation is illustrated by global economic inequalities – less than 20% of global North residents gluttonously consume 80% of the Earth’s natural goods. Moreover, every 3.6 seconds, someone dies from hunger – the majority being ‘children under five years’<sup>31</sup> – a salient injustice which ought to awaken in each of us a sense of the betrayal of justice. The *Invitation to the Pilgrimage* speaks to this injustice:

A stumbling global economy leaves millions of people idle and exacerbates inequality and poverty in both [the global] North and South. Churches around the world struggle to deal with the consequences. People in Africa and other continents watch their rich natural reserves being exported, while their own lives remain mired in poverty.<sup>32</sup>

The above observation is supported by Nobel Prize-winning economists Paul Krugman and Joseph E. Stiglitz who independently point to the insurmountable and impossible task of ensuring economic sustainability amidst large-scale global poverty.<sup>33</sup> Hence, amidst growing ecological crises and the growing gap between a rich minority and the poor majority, Christian mission can hardly remain neutral but denounce the effects of economic exploitation on the Earth and the poor.

It is tempting to view Creation care as only about climate change – it is not. Across the globe, Earth care is proving to be a risky mission. According to the April 2015 Global Witness Report, *How Many More*, the killing of environmental defenders is surging across the globe – among them are indigenous land-dwellers.<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, defending the poor people’s rights to their land is an act of Christian solidarity and social witness. In other words, ‘Christian social witness must advocate policies that carry God’s concern for the natural world and the poor. Here, the church faces a moral choice: to ignore the “tears of the oppressed and

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<sup>30</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey / Heinemann, 1981), 66. See also Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, 161.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, ‘Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty’: [www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/UNMP-FastFacts-E.pdf](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/UNMP-FastFacts-E.pdf) (accessed 10th January 2015).

<sup>32</sup> WCC, ‘Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace’.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today’s Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2012); Paul R. Krugman, *The Great Unraveling: Losing Our Way in the New Century* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Global Witness, ‘How Many More? 2014’s deadly environment: the killing and intimidation of environmental and land activists, with a spotlight on Honduras’, in *Global Witness*, report, 20th April 2015: <https://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/environmental-activists/how-many-more>. Accessed 20th May 2015).

Earth” inflicted by capitalist economic [interests of the rich and powerful], or act to reform them through prophetic witness’.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, scientific studies suggest a direct link between climate change and human health. As The Lancet (a reputable British medical journal) Commissions’ Report noted, climate change is threatening global health:

The implications of climate change for a global population of nine billion people threatens to undermine the last half century of gains in development and global health. The direct effects of climate change include increased heat stress, floods, drought, and increased frequency of intense storms, with the indirect threatening population health through adverse changes in air pollution, the spread of disease vectors, food insecurity and under-nutrition, displacement, and mental ill health.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, the poor (mostly the elderly, women and children) ‘with little or no access to healthcare... are more vulnerable’ to these predicaments.<sup>37</sup>

Amidst such injustices, Christian prophetic witness involves taking specific actions – hence prophetic responses to climate change ought to shift from verbal advocacy to demanding specific socio-economic reforms, and ecologically sensitive policies. On 28th April 2015, for example, the Vatican hosted the historic United Nations Summit on climate change – billed ‘Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity,’ with the goal of elevating ‘the importance of the moral dimensions of protecting the environment’ as well as ‘to build a global movement to deal with climate change and sustainable development throughout 2015 and beyond’.<sup>38</sup> Attended by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Summit called for immediate global political will to limit carbon emissions, to secure the rights of the poor, and to safeguard the Earth – attracting criticism from climate change sceptics.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Kopya John Kaoma, *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams: Democracy, the Oppressed, and the Church in Africa (The Case of Zambia)* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), 104.

<sup>36</sup> The Lancet Commissions, *Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health* (23rd June 2015), 1: <http://press.thelancet.com/Climate2Commission.pdf> (accessed 19th June 2015). See also Paul R. Epstein and Dan Ferber, *Changing Planet, Changing Health: How Climate Crisis Threatens our Health and What We Can Do About It* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Bartholomew and Welby, ‘Climate Change and Moral Responsibility’.

<sup>38</sup> Organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, SDSN and Religions for Peace, the Summit sought to ‘strengthen the global consensus on the importance of climate change in the context of sustainable development’. The Vatican, ‘Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity’.

<sup>39</sup> John L. Allen, Jr, ‘Francis Taking Heat for Eco-encyclical,’ *All things Catholic, Boston Sunday Globe*, 3rd May 2015, A6. For US Conservative Evangelical responses to Pope Francis, see Cornwall Alliance, ‘An Open Letter to Pope Francis



Furthermore, in order to force reductions of carbon emissions, and to encourage investments in clean energy, today, Christian prophetic witness involves taking specific moral positions individually as well as institutionally. In April 2015, for instance, the Church of England announced its position to divest from companies that trade in coal and tar-sand oils.<sup>40</sup> The growing influence of the divest movement is already forcing global financial institutions to reconsider the future profitability of fossil fuel investments. According to Ambrose Evans-Pritchard of the *Daily Telegraph*, global financial institutions are worried that ‘two thirds of all assets booked by coal, oil and gas companies may be worthless under the “two degree” climate deal’; that is, the global commitment to limit climate change to less than 2°. <sup>41</sup>

In addition, growing ecological consciousness in global Christianity is reflected in the application and expression of Christian spirituality and faith. While some critics blame Christianity for the mounting ecological crisis, the Christian faith possesses invaluable lessons and insights for Creation care. Of course, the theme of Earth care was not a major issue to those who gathered at the Edinburgh 1910 conference. Today, however, Christian mission cannot remain faithful to God while ignoring the worsening depletion of life-supporting planetary ecosystems.

Further, the realisation that God cares for, and loves, every creature, and that the Creation was declared ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31) by the Creator invites Christian involvement in Earth-healing and Earth-defending initiatives. Tree-planting, clearing of dump sites or protesting against water and air pollution, land grabs and the destruction of the rain forests are spiritual, theological and moral issues that deserve missiological reflection and action. In socio-ecological justice terms, we are not only our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, but also nature’s keepers. This all-inclusive application of Christian spirituality and mission envisions an interdependent

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on Climate Change,’ 27th April 2015: [www.cornwallalliance.org/2015/04/27/an-open-letter-to-pope-francis-on-climate-change](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/2015/04/27/an-open-letter-to-pope-francis-on-climate-change) (accessed 18th May 2015); William M. Briggs, ‘Why is the Church entering the fray on “climate change”? And with such overblown rhetoric?’: <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/why-is-the-church-entering-the-fray-on-climate-change-and-with-such-overblo> (accessed 18th May 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Brian Roewe, ‘Church of England Divests from Fossil Fuels,’ 1st May 2015: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/church-england-divests-fossil-fuels> (accessed 2nd May 2015).

<sup>41</sup> According to Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, G20 nations ‘have launched a joint probe into global financial risks posed by fossil fuel companies investing in costly ventures that clash with international climate goals and may never be viable’. As the divesting movement grows, investments into oil, gas and coal will be ‘stranded assets’ since they will not be ‘burned under CO2 emission limits’. ‘G20: fossil fuel fears could hammer global financial system’: [www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/11563768/G20-to-probe-carbon-bubble-risk-to-global-financial-system.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/11563768/G20-to-probe-carbon-bubble-risk-to-global-financial-system.html) (accessed 2nd May 2015).



community of all creatures intricately and inextricably connected to a single sacred web of life in Christ.

Nonetheless, there is a danger in over-simplifying the mounting ecological crisis – it is a complex issue that demands inter-disciplinary responses, responsibilities and action. Creation care involves asking and answering hard questions – wrestling with issues of development, eco-economic sustainability, capitalism, income inequalities, gender justice, land rights, neo-colonialism, poverty, racism and ecological integrity, among many others. Contributors to this volume seek to address some of these issues by providing a diverse range of views on Creation care from various Christian traditions, academic disciplines, and socio-geographical contexts. But they also suggest a paradigm shift in our responses to the ecological crisis. Rather than debating Christian ecological consciousness, they challenge us to take actual steps in Creation care.

Essays in this volume build on each other – suggesting missiological and theological unity and agreement on Creation care in global Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Despite this unity, the volume is divided into three sections for easy accessibility. Section I deals with case studies of glimpses of hope in Creation care from Zimbabwe, Brazil, the US and Norway. Section II explores diverse denominational ecological reflections on Earth care, while Section III deals with various missiological reflections on the same.

The volume opens with Marthinus L. Daneel's case study of the African Initiated Churches' and African Traditionalists' earthkeeping ministry in rural Zimbabwe. Using the interfaith and ecumenical tree-planting ministries as a case in point, Daneel invites Christians to relate, love, care and value the Earth. In Chapter 2, the Right Rev. Bud Cederholm examines his eco-spiritual transformation that inspired him to lead the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts in the US to direct and influence public advocacy on climate change, and to 'greening' local congregations. While accepting the urgency of resolving the ecological crisis, Cederholm warns against emphasising 'fear and guilt' over hope, which he argues is counter-productive.

Another grassroots initiative is from the evangelical initiative of 'A Rocha in Brazil and Elsewhere' discussed in Chapter 3. Andrea Ramos Santos, PhD, Raquel Gonçalves Arouca, PhD, Gínia Cesar Bontempo, Carina Oliveira Abreu and Dave Bookless document how local Christian communities are mobilising to care for the Earth. The section ends with Per Ivar Våje's chapter, which explores Christian Earth care initiatives in Norway. These four case studies are from different Christian traditions and parts of the globe; together, however, they illustrate the growing ecological awareness and Creation care initiatives in global Christianity.

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<sup>42</sup> While the linkage of chapters is obvious throughout this volume, in line with some authors' requests, not all essays are linked with each other.

Section II opens with Dana L. Robert's important chapter on historical trends in Earth care – showing that Creation care has strong historical roots in Christian mission. Robert writes: 'The history of missions and contemporary concern for the environment show that a beneficial relationship with nature is intrinsic to mission "best practice" – whether framed as human survival or taken up for the sake of God's creation itself.'

In Chapter 6, John Hart examines the eco-social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Reflecting on various encyclicals and statements from the Vatican, bishops and scholars, Hart contends that planet Earth is common 'garden' intended to provide sustenance for all biokind – thus, how natural goods are shared is an eco-social and economic justice issue. Hart writes,

A sacramental commons is creation as a moment and locus of human participation in the interactive presence and caring compassion of the Spirit who is immanent and participates in the complex dance of energies, elements, entities, and events. It is a place in which people in historical time integrate the spiritual meaning of sacramental with the social meaning of commons, and consequently is characterized by a sacramental community consciousness that stimulates involvement in concrete efforts to restore and conserve ecosystems.<sup>43</sup>

The sacramental aspect of Creation is further explored in Chapter 7 by Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos of the Orthodox tradition. Unlike Hart, however, Metropolitan Coorilos plants Earth care in the Trinity – advancing the argument that the harmonious relationship in the Trinity should characterise human relationships with God, Creation and one another. While he argues that humans are priests of Creation, he also posits that the natural world has missiological agency – Creation is God's 'mission team' and the channel 'of divine healing and blessings'.

In Chapter 8, Dave Bookless documents the Evangelical Christian involvement in Creation care. Accepting the divide in global Evangelicalism on Creation care (with some Evangelicals such as the US-based Cornwall Alliance denying climate change), Bookless argues that caring for Creation is part of the Evangelical faith. In Chapter 9, Amos Yong explores a Pentecostal missiology of Creation care. He argues that understanding Christian mission as the *missio Spiritus* (the mission of the Spirit) has implications for caring for Creation. Yong observes that the Spirit-empowered Christian mission is 'cognisant of the environmental or ecological horizon within which Christian mission unfolds'. Christian mission, he insists, carries 'an environmental and ecological frame of reference'.

In Chapter 10, however, Norman Faramelli explores the complex issue of eco-justice from a Protestant tradition. He warns against the oversimplification of the ecological crisis, while suggesting that ecology, the

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<sup>43</sup> John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), xviii.

economy and equity must be held in balance when making eco-justice moral decisions. But he also invites us to think ‘outside’ the box in the application of eco-justice in human/Earth relationships. The section closes with Tallessyn Zawn Grenfell-Lee’s exploration of ‘empathy’ from a Wesleyan eco-feminist position. Presenting Creation empathy as an alternative to exploitative relationships responsible for the growing ecological crisis, Grenfell-Lee argues that empathy allows us to value and respect that which we love. Without empathy, she warns, the ecological crisis is set to worsen.

Christopher J.H. Wright opens Section III with a critical essay on Creation care. He bemoans the ‘defective theology of creation’ among some Christians, which ignores the biblical testimony on Creation care. He nevertheless warns against pantheism in Christian mission since ‘God’s glory *transcends* creation’. In Chapter 13, Mary Elizabeth Moore suggests ‘a multi-faceted response’ to the ecological crisis as opposed to the ‘proclamations of doom,’ which like Cederholm, she argues, ‘is often short-lived and ineffective’. To engage the complexity of the ecological crisis, Moore proposes a ‘daring vision, robust interpretation of global realities, and the ability to live with ambiguity’ in doing the mission of Earth care.

In her exploration of sustainability in Chapter 14, Kwok Pui-lan argues that a sustainable future will demand a change of ‘hearts and minds.’ She invites western Christianity to learn ecological consciousness from indigenous cultures across the globe. In Chapter 15, Rodney Petersen explores the relationship between science and Christian ecological responsibility – arguing that science and mission theology need each other in the *missio Dei*. He writes: ‘The wall of separation that once stood between the world of facts (science) and that of values (religion) is being chipped away.’

Because the Bible is foundational to Christian mission, in Chapter 16, Hermann Mvula employs the biblical concept of the *imago Dei* (the image of God) to argue for the poor people’s duty to care for the Earth. Although he accepts the challenges of economic deprivation and involuntary poverty on Earth care, he nevertheless maintains that the invitation to participate in the mission of God is to all believers – rich and poor alike. Mvula, however, warns against policies that seek to protect the environment without providing alternatives for the poor. In Chapter 17, Tim Carriker develops a Biblical mission theology of Creation care. He maintains that God’s concern for the natural world is highlighted in the grand biblical narrative of salvation. Discounting the argument for the destruction of the Earth during the end-times, Carriker argues that the Bible ‘reveals God’s unwavering love for the Earth as well as an optimistic end for the same’.

Another biblically based essay is from Lubunga W’Ehusha, who in Chapter 18 employs 2 Kings 17:24-29 to propose a concept of ‘priestly mediation’ in human relationship with Creation. W’Ehusha argues that

Creation care goes beyond prophetic pronouncements – it involves a priestly role of teaching people to change their attitudes towards the natural world. The concluding chapter explores the ecological and missiological implications of the Incarnation and suggests a Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestor to all biokind. It ends with some practical suggestions on how Christians can participate in the mission of Earth care.

This book would not have been possible without financial help from the the Drummond Trust, the Lutheran World Federation, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and the support of John Hart, Dave Bookless and Knud Jørgensen who guided and suggested some contributors. To all the contributors, I say thank you, *natasha, asante, tatenda, zikomo, takk, obrigado, 谢谢*. It is a long journey: we have travelled well together!

Kapya J. Kaoma, Boston, June 2015.

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# SECTION ONE

## GLIMPSES OF HOPE

The ecological crisis mounts  
And so are glimpses of hope.  
Christian mission is like a mustard seed,  
Planted by the Triune God,  
In the field of the human heart,  
Though the smallest of all seeds  
And mostly invisible, yet grows,  
Into the largest of garden plants,  
And the largest tree it becomes,  
And in its branches the birds perch!

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— adapted from Matthew 13:31-32

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# **CHRISTIAN MISSION AND EARTH CARE: AN AFRICAN CASE STUDY<sup>1</sup>**

Marthinus L. Daneel

The Edinburgh 2010 resolve to publish a volume dedicated to Earth-keeping mission is another sign in world Christianity of a growing awareness of the global environmental crisis. Yet, despite the well-intended calls of western church leaders for their people to respect the integrity of creation, one cannot say that the restoration of an abused planet Earth has been identified by them as a frontier to be crossed by way of a comprehensively mobilised missionary outreach of the church. In this chapter I wish to draw attention to a case study of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe that, over a fifteen-year period (1988–2003), developed a remarkable ministry of Earth-keeping. Their effort poses an arresting challenge to the world church.

## **Zimbabwe's 'War of the Trees'**

The resolve in rural Zimbabwe to 'declare war' on deforestation, soil erosion, and related forms of environmental destruction grew in the context of a research project conducted during the mid-1980s. I was probing the crucial role of religion in the mobilisation of the liberation struggle (*chimurenga*) before Independence. During extensive discussions with traditionalists and AIC leaders, most of them key role players during the war, we agreed that the 'lost lands' that had been recaptured politically were still being lost ecologically at an accelerated and alarming rate. Something massive and revolutionary was required to arrest the slide towards environmental bankruptcy and the mood of helplessness in rural society. We therefore decided to launch a new movement of 'green fighters' as an extension of the pre-Independence liberation struggle, one shifted in this instance into the field of ecology. In the subsequent drafting of organisational plans and mobilising of a force of Earth-keepers, we

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on and reproduces part of a presentation I made on the same subject during the International Association for Mission Studies meeting in Buenos Aires in 1996. See M.L. Daneel, *Earthkeeping in Missiological Perspective: An African Challenge* (Discussion Papers in the African Humanities 31; Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University, 2000). With minor variations, this chapter is reproduced with permission from *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35: 3 (July 2011), 130-36.

declared *hondo yemiti*, the ‘War of the Trees’. Whereas the major concern to start with was nursery development and tree-planting, the new struggle, according to our organisational charter, had three aims: afforestation, the protection of water resources, and wildlife conservation.

At headquarters, the organisational and financially empowering agency was the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCON), the institutionalised and extended version of my research team. Founded in 1984, this body took responsibility for the initiation and development of two affiliated organisations: the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), which comprised the majority of chiefs, headmen, spirit mediums, former combatants, and a large group of commoners in Masvingo Province; and the Association of African Earth-keeping Churches (AAEC), which at its peak counted some 180 AICs, mainly prophetic Zionist and Apostolic churches, then representing an estimated two million adherents.

During the 1990s the entire movement of African Earthkeepers represented the largest non-governmental organisation for environmental reform at the rural grassroots, not only in Zimbabwe but in all of Southern Africa. According to internationally recognised ecological luminaries, such as Larry Rasmussen, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who visited us in Zimbabwe, ZIRRCON’s inculturated and ritualised practices of Earth care was as innovative as any indigenous green movement they had observed elsewhere in the Two-Thirds World.

The accomplishments of the movement during the first fifteen years of its existence – the period during which I acted as ZIRRCON’s director – are briefly the following: fifteen to eighteen *mother nurseries*, some of which cultivated more than 100,000 seedlings in a given year, and a host of small-scale *satellite nurseries* run by women and schools were established. An estimated 12-15 million trees were planted during that period, in several thousand woodlots, by AZTREC and AAEC peasant communities, and also by women and school children in the central and south-eastern communal lands of Zimbabwe. The variety of trees planted included:

- fruit trees in orchards for personal and commercial use;
- exotics such as eucalyptus for building operations;
- indigenous trees for firewood and the restoration of denuded land;
- leucaena for cattle fodder, firewood, and nitrate-fixing in arable lands; and
- indigenous hardwood, such as kiazia and pod mahogany, as a long-term investment for future generations.

ZIRRCON’s Earthkeepers became known for cultivating more indigenous fruit tree seedlings, thorn trees, mountain acacias, and ancestor-related trees than any other institution had ever done in the country. Government officials, including President Mugabe, attended and participated in our annual tree-planting ceremonies.



The Women's Desk, with several departments, ably supervised the income-generating projects of eighty women's clubs, which included cloth manufacturing, bakeries, soap production, the pressing and refining of sunflower oil, and vegetable and fruit production. These clubs also facilitated the struggle against soil erosion by filling erosion gullies with stones and planting vetiver grass in the affected areas. The spirit mediums and male tribal elders in turn assisted the chiefs by restoring the customary laws on the protection of trees and wildlife in the ancestral sanctuaries of holy groves. Offenders were apprehended and brought to chiefs' courts, where they were heavily fined and required to plant trees in denuded areas. Likewise, offenders who engaged in riverbank cultivation and spoiling the veld's grass cover through the use of sleighs (hollowed out tree trunks, heavily loaded and pulled by donkeys or oxen) were served with heavy fines by the 'green chiefs'.

Up to thirty youth clubs were developed at rural schools. The pupils concerned were taken on trips to identify birds and trees. In addition, members of Parks and Wildlife accompanied them to some of the larger game parks to teach them about big game and the species of game no longer found in the communal lands. They were also familiarised with issues of modern wildlife conservation. I personally introduced proposals for two major game conservancies: one in the communal lands, mainly for the protection of the endangered klipspringer antelope, and the other for a joint project of collective, interracial game farming, incorporating some fifty farms to the east of Masvingo town. These plans, already approved by ZIRRCON, had to be abandoned because of the farm invasions allowed by Mugabe in the year 2000. A few years later, an estimated 85% of the entire game population on Zimbabwe's farms had been destroyed. So much for game conservation and protection of the country's natural resources!

### **A Ritualised Mission**

All tree-planting ceremonies were ritualised in either traditionalist or Christian fashion. The ritual component shaped the green struggle as a holy war, directed by the Creator-God and forces from the spirit world. The rituals drew large contingents of rural participants, highlighted publicly the resolve and commitment of the green fighters, and united people in a common cause, regardless of diverse religious persuasions and lingering conflicts of the past.

#### *AZTREC's Traditionalist Rituals*

The ceremonies of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists resembled to a large extent the old rain-requesting rituals of the past, called *mukwerere*. Sacrificial finger-milled beer would be brewed for the senior clan-ancestors, the *varidzi venyika* (guardians of the land), whose graves

are in sacred groves on holy mountains, at times encompassing large mountain ranges. Sacrificial addresses to these ancestors, on the basis of traditional cosmology, entrusted the seedlings to the protective care of these guardian ancestors and brought to the fore the neglected ecological obligations of old, with appeals for their revival and implementation.<sup>2</sup> As is typical for all rain ceremonies, the clan ancestors were also requested to appeal to the African high god, Mwari, for ample rain, in this instance to sustain the newly planted woodlots of trees.

Towards the end of the rainy season (i.e. AZTREC's tree-planting season), a delegation of traditionalist tree-planters would be sent to the high-god shrines, 300 kilometres to the west, to report to the oracle on the progress of the green struggle. This visit took place because of the belief that Mwari and the senior clan ancestors control all struggles in the country – be they for political or for environmental liberation – from within a spirit war-council.

In both the traditional tree-planting and the oracle-reporting ceremonies, Christian Earthkeepers were also in attendance. In order to demonstrate the retention of their Christian identity, they would refrain from drinking sacrificial beer, but they assisted their non-Christian counterparts once the actual tree-planting took place. Likewise, they refrained from full communion with the oracular deity, even as they engaged in close association and dialogue with cult officials at the shrines. Thus, in an open-ended inter-religious movement, the bitter strife between Zionist prophets and Mwari cultists of the past gave way to positive attitudes of understanding and tolerance in pursuit of a common cause.

### *The AAEC's Tree-Planting Eucharist*

The use by the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches of a tree-planting Eucharist integrated an Earth-keeping ministry with the sacrament of Holy Communion. This development<sup>3</sup> was of pivotal importance, for it brought environmental stewardship right into the heartbeat of church life and biblically based spirituality. In African agrarian society this was a powerful way of witnessing to 'a change of heart' within the church, an illustration of re-envisioning the church at its core, allowing it to become a better vehicle for the missionary good news it wants to convey. Moreover, this ceremony highlighted the characteristic trends of an emergent *AIC theology of the environment*, one not written in books but symbolised in budding trees sustaining a ravished countryside.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of AZTREC's traditionalist tree-planting rituals and related ecological activities, see M.L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care* (Vol. I; Pretoria, RSA: UNISA Press, 1998), chaps 4–6.

<sup>3</sup> A full account of the AAEC's green rituals and liturgies appears in M.L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Vol. II; Pretoria, RSA: UNISA Press, 1999), chap. 2.

Key activities of the outdoor tree-planting sacrament included the following:

- *Preparations of the woodlot* included digging of holes for the seedlings, fencing, and naming the woodlot 'Lord's Acre,' which was the Christian equivalent of the traditional sacred grove, or *marambatemwa* (lit. 'refusal to have the trees felled').
- *Dancing and singing* around the stacked seedlings to praise God, the great Earthkeeper, and inspire Mwari's Earthkeepers to engage in action.
- Several *sermons* by AIC bishops of different churches and ZIRRCO staff, followed by speeches of representatives of the Forestry Commission, Parks and Wildlife, government officials, and so forth, whereby the Eucharist evolved into an inclusive public, rather than an exclusive in-group, event.
- The sacrament itself was preceded by all Christian participants *confessing publicly their ecological sins*, such as tree-felling without planting any in return, promoting soil erosion through bad land-husbandry activities, river-bank cultivating, and spoiling wildlife by poaching game animals.
- After confession, *each communicant picked up a seedling* and moved with it towards the table where the bread and wine were administered. Thereby nature was symbolically drawn into the inner circle of communion with Christ the Redeemer, head of the church and of all creation. In such action, the salvation of all creation and the emergence of a new heaven and earth are anticipated and proclaimed.
- After the use of bread and wine, the Christian communicants *were joined by their traditionalist counterparts*, who up to this point had merely been observers of the proceedings. Then the green army moved in unison to the 'Lord's Acre' to commit the seedlings to the soil.
- The *seedlings were addressed as 'relatives'* by the planters as they placed them in the soil:

You, tree, my brother... my sister.

Today I plant you in this soil.

I shall protect you

And give water for your growth.

Have good roots to keep the soil from eroding.

Have many leaves and branches.

Then we can breathe fresh air, sit in your shade, and find firewood  
(when some of your branches dry).

- At the conclusion, many of the tree-planters would kneel in queues in front of the prophetic healers for *laying-on of hands and prayer*. Thus, the healing of the barren earth and of human beings blended

into a single event that witnessed to Christ, the crucified and resurrected Saviour of all the earth.

### Ecumenical Sacrament and Mission Command

In the tradition of the Zimbabwean AICs, there are two mission-activating Eucharists. First, in Bishop Mutendi's Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the celebration of the Eucharist during the Easter festivities became the springboard for an annual reconsideration and deliberate implementation of the classic mission command as found in Matthew 28:19.<sup>4</sup> The sacramental good news of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, blended with his call for mission after his resurrection, provided the challenge for the mobilisation of the entire church to engage in countrywide campaigns culminating in mass conversions and baptisms. Such outreach was always planned during the paschal celebrations and followed immediately after the climactic Eucharist administered by Mutendi, the ZCC 'man of God'.

Second, the practice was extended and given new content in the context of the first ecumenical movement of substance among the Zimbabwean AICs, founded in 1972 and popularly called *Fambidzano* (lit. 'co-operative of churches').<sup>5</sup> To the member-churches, the cornerstone text of their movement, John 17:21-23, called for church unity as a condition for effective missionary witness. Their joint paschal celebrations provided a broader base to the Eucharists they formerly conducted exclusively in each church. These Eucharists did not trigger united missionary action of the same magnitude as that of the ZCC. Yet they remained the vehicles of missionary outreach and, as such, reflected genuine ecumenical impulses.

The AAEC capitalised on this twofold Eucharistic tradition by building on both its ecumenical and its missionary dimensions in the new tree-planting ceremony. In this instance, the driving force for ecumenical interaction was the divine injunction for Earth-keeping. Here, sacramentally inspired unity somehow seemed to reach deeper than the faith-based fellowship of humans. Against the backdrop of an African holistic cosmology, it encompassed the bonding of the entire God-created family: woman/man, beast, bird, vegetation – all of creation. Intuitively sensed, *the harmony of the entire universe was at stake!*<sup>6</sup> The AAEC's tree-planting Eucharist thus assumed cosmic unity and enacted it more explicitly than the ecumenical communion of *Fambidzano*, where it had remained dormant.

Unlike the ZCC Eucharist, which became the flash-point for missionary outreach, *the AAEC tree-planting Eucharist in itself became the witnessing*

<sup>4</sup> M.L. Daneel, 'Missionary Outreach in African Independent Churches,' in *Missionalia* 8: 3 (1980), 105-20.

<sup>5</sup> M.L. Daneel, *Fambidzano: Ecumenical Movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Daneel, *Fambidzano*, 222.

*event*, the proclamation of good news unto all creation. It was enacted in nature and in the presence of an invariably large group of non-Christian fellow-fighters of the War of the Trees, many of whom had little contact with church life other than that encountered in the ZIRRCO context. These traditionalist Earthkeepers did not partake of the bread and wine, but they assimilated the Gospel, observed the sacrament, and assisted with tree-planting.

In these circumstances, the classic mission commission of Matthew 28:19 was assumed rather than featured as a central theme of proclamation. Not that ecological endeavour in any way superseded the call for repentance, conversion, human salvation, and church formation, which was the essential missionary dynamic of all prophetic AICs. But the mission mandate here was derived from the healing ministry of Christ, related to the believer's stewardship in service to all creation as required by God in the creation story of Genesis, and highlighted repeatedly with reference to Colossians 1:17 – in Christ all things hold together. Christ emerged in these sermons as the healer of all creation, and his disciples as fellow earth-healers. Hence the popular designation of these Eucharistic events as *maporesanyika* (healing the earth) ceremonies – the Christian counterpart of AZTREC's ancestral tree-planting rituals, called *mafukidzanyika* (clothing the earth).

That the tree-planting Eucharist is mission, that it constitutes and empowers earth-healing mission, was reflected in a sermon of Bishop Wapendama, leader of the Signs of the Apostles Church. During an AAEC afforestation ceremony at his headquarters, he roused his multi-church audience of tree-planters as follows:

Mwari [God] saw the devastation of the land. So he called his envoys [ZIRRCO/AAEC leaders] to shoulder the task of delivering the earth... Together with you, we the Apostles are now the deliverers of the stricken land... We the deliverers were sent by Mwari on a divine mission... Deliverance, Mwari says, lies in the trees. Jesus said: 'I leave you, my followers, to complete my work!' And that task is the one of healing! *We, the followers of Jesus have to continue with his healing ministry...* So let us all fight, clothing, healing the earth with trees! ... It is our task to strengthen this mission with our numbers of people. If all of us work with enthusiasm, we shall clothe and heal the entire land with trees and drive off affliction [the evil of destruction]. I believe we can change it!

Although Wapendama did not specifically mention the Eucharist, his message in the context of Holy Communion implied that, at the point where the union between Christ and his disciples (cutting across denominational boundaries) is sacramentally confirmed, the mission of earth-healing integral to it is visibly acknowledged and revitalised. God certainly takes the initiative to deliver and restore the ravaged earth, but responsibility to deliver the stricken earth from its malady here and now lies with the Christian body of believers, that is, the church. Implicit in Wapendama's words was the emerging AAEC image of Christ's church as

keeper of creation. Focal in it was the healing ministry of Christ extended through grace to the entire cosmos.

Wapendama's insights did not represent a fully developed theology of the interaction of Eucharist and mission. Yet it signalled one of the ways in which AICs tended to update their sacramental-cum-missiological tradition in the face of ecological needs.<sup>7</sup> It also hinted at Africa's understanding of the church's comprehensive missionary task in this world, not as a privileged community of mere soul-savers, but in terms of the vision of Bishop Anastasios of Androussa that 'the whole world, not only humankind but the entire universe, has been called to share in the restoration that was accomplished by the redeeming work of Christ'.<sup>8</sup>

### Features of 'Green Mission Churches'

The AAEC's engagement in the War of the Trees has clearly led to a breakthrough in AIC notions of the church as hospital. As propounded by Bishop Wapendama, and as is generally true for most prophetic churches, the healing ministry of Christ has been focal in the church's mission. Healing of human affliction in the widest possible sense remained among the most important goals and results of the AIC's prophetic ministry, but now it included, more deliberately than before, the holistic deliverance and salvation of Mwari's stricken earth.

This extended perception of salvation became practical to the extent that the church realised its role as keeper of creation, in a mission mobilising its entire membership as active agents rather than a select group of office-holders. It was as if Bishop Wapendama anticipated in such healing of creation a new dimension of liberation in the church itself – liberation from an overriding preoccupation with the human condition. In healing the earth, by reaching out beyond the physical and mental ailments of human beings, by setting internal leadership and inter-church conflicts aside for a higher God-given purpose, the Earth-keeping church, the Earthkeeper himself or herself, was healed. In such liberation unto earth-service, the apostolate of the church obtained prominence and meaning.

Endless variation in the AAEC's tree-planting sermons bore out the strong theological undercurrent of the understanding of Earth care as *missio Dei* and therefore as the mission of God's church. Davison Tawoneichi of the Evangelical Ministry of Christ Church, for instance, preached at a tree-planting ceremony: 'Earth-keeping is part of the body of Christ. It is so because we as humans are part of His body and the trees are part of us; they are essential for us to breathe, to live. So trees, too, are part of Christ's

<sup>7</sup> John Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Donald E. Messer, *A Conspiracy of Goodness: Contemporary Images of Christian Mission* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 69-70.

body. Our destruction of nature is an offence against the body of Christ... it hurts Christ's body. Therefore the church should heal the wounded body of Christ.'

This view complemented the above-mentioned assertion of Bishop Wapendama about mission as an extension of Christ's healing ministry, only in this instance Christ's body was understood as being itself afflicted by the abuse of nature.<sup>9</sup> This statement underscored the growing tendency in AAEC tree-planting Eucharists to view Christ's body in both its ecclesiastical and its cosmic connotations: through partaking in the elements of the sacrament, the Earthkeepers' witness to their unity in Christ's body, the church, deriving from it strength, compassion and commitment for the environmental struggle. Subsequently, they set out on their healing mission of afforestation to restore the cosmically wounded body of Christ. How, then, did the green mission affect the life and shape of the Earth-keeping church? Here are a few major ecclesiological shifts.

### *Expanded Healing Ministry*

An expanded healing ministry became noticeable at prophetic church headquarters. The black 'Jerusalems' were still healing colonies where the afflicted, the marginalised and the poor could feel at home. But the concept *hospitara* visibly changed as dedicated Earth-keeping prophets expanded their colonies into 'environmental hospitals' to accommodate the wounded earth. The 'patient' in this instance was the denuded land. The 'dispensary' (i.e. the faith-healing arsenal of holy cords, holy water, staffs, paper and related symbols of divine healing power to serve people) became the nursery of seedlings, where the correct 'medicine' for the patient, in terms of a wide assortment of indigenous, exotic, and fruit trees, was cultivated.

The entire church community – both at headquarters and at outlying congregations, both church residents and visiting patients – now became the healing agent under the guidance of the church's principal earth-healer and the 'high-command' of the War of the Trees at the ZIRRCO-AAEC operational headquarters in Masvingo town. Consistent after-care in new woodlots provided proof of the church's commitment in mission; the woodlot itself became the focus of witnessing sermons and the source of inspiration for an expanding ministry, just as the testimonies of healed human patients in the past had contributed both to a reaffirmation of belief in God's healing powers and to the church's recruitment of new members. Far from interfering with the church's worship and pastoral work, the earth-healing ministry – as observed in the churches of leading AAEC leaders

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<sup>9</sup> See also attempts of eco-theologians to describe the world as God's (or Christ's) body: for example, Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 69-78, and Messer, *Conspiracy of Goodness*, 67-71.



like Bishops Wapendama, Marinda, Machokoto, Chimhangwa and others – appeared to provide new impetus and direction to church life, as well as numerical church growth.

### *A New Generation of Church Leaders*

The AAEC also witnessed the emergence of a new generation of iconic church leaders: environmental missionaries whose evangelical drive included good news for all creation. They replaced the prominent first-generation AIC icons like Bishop Mutendi (ZCC), Johane Maranke (African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange), and Johane Masowe (Apostolic Church of Johane Masowe), who functioned as so-called black Messiahs to their followers, illuminating the mediation and saviourhood of Christ in an existentially understandable idiom.<sup>10</sup> Now, instead of a single leader giving substance to the presence of the biblical Messiah in African rural society through the mediation of rain and good crops for peasants, through faith-healing, education, and socio-political involvement revolving around a single ‘holy city,’ the mode of operation was shifted to an entire group of ‘Jeruselems’ to help establish the grace and salvation implicit in Christ’s presence in the Creator’s neglected and abused garden. Thereby the entire *oikos* was declared God’s ‘holy city’. In these iconic missionaries, Christ revealed a disturbing truth in the African context, namely, that *all* agro-economic development and progress will be meaningless unless it includes environmental sanctification, nature’s restoration, an ecological economy that, under the reign of Christ, consciously strikes a balance between exploitive agricultural progress and altruistic earth-restoration. This is the true purpose of an expanded missionary mandate and message proclaimed by the AAEC’s iconic missionaries. Jürgen Moltmann described such a calling for all humanity as follows:

In the messianic light of the gospel, the appointment [of humans] to rule over animals and the earth also appears as the ‘ruling with Christ’ of believers. For it is to Christ, the true and visible image of the invisible God on earth, that ‘all authority is given in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28:18). His liberating and healing rule also embraces the fulfilment of the *dominium terrae* – the promise given to human beings at creation. Under the conditions of history and in the circumstances of sin and death, the sovereignty of the crucified and

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<sup>10</sup> Despite the tendency in some AICs to develop a leadership with messianic traits, the theological assessment of this phenomenon tended to be more radical and condemnatory than the empirical evidence warranted. Invariably, the so-called black Messiah positively mirrored the presence of the Christ-figure in African society rather than replacing or obscuring Christ’s saviourhood. It is preferable therefore to speak of ‘iconic leadership’ instead. For a discussion of ‘black Messianism,’ see M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of Independent Churches* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), 180-94.



risen Messiah Jesus is the only true *dominium terrae*... It would be wrong to seek for the *dominium terrae*, not in the lordship of Christ, but in other principalities and powers – in the power of the state or the power of science and technology.<sup>11</sup>

The AAEC missionaries gave expression in the African context to the messianic *dominium terrae*, not so much in conference debates, not through repetitious reference in sermons to Christ's lordship in creation, but by mediating the power of Christ mentioned in Matthew 28:18 through persistent presence in village life, where commoners, the masses of people, all who wanted to participate, were empowered to share a new dominion of service. The 'mediation' thus facilitated by the Earth-keeping icons through tree-planting was not obscuring Christ's lordship or saviourhood – as some evangelicals may be inclined to think – but was unveiling and illuminating dimensions of the mystery of divine presence in nature that may have gone unnoticed by many believers and non-believers alike.

The iconic missionaries all had their roots in peasant society. Whether they were salaried staff members at AAEC headquarters, full-time nursery or woodlot keepers, bishops and prophets with 'environmental hospitals,' or women developing ministries of compassion, they all relied on the land for sustenance and were therefore well placed to demonstrate their churches' solidarity with nature. Their identification with Christ's lordship in all creation reminds one of the Old Testament prophets who related Israel's salvation to the history of their holy land, as Lubunga W'Ehusha argues in this volume. As Amos prophesied the fall of the kingdom of Judah because of Israel's overexploitation of the land and disregard of the poor, the Shona iconic prophets were attributing wanton destruction of the earth and related droughts, floods and famines to human hubris and defiance of the universal reign of Christ.

### *New Ethical Codes*

The AAEC's afforestation programmes stimulated a need for new ethical codes. Leading Earthkeepers felt strongly that clear environmental laws should be drafted on an ecumenical platform and that strict church discipline should be implemented in the 'green church' against all trespassers of such laws. Bishop Farawo, who was managing a large nursery as a veritable 'Zion City of Trees,' initiated court trials for tree-fellers at the level of the church council and the punishment of wanton offenders through extra duties of tree-planting and after-care in new woodlots to compensate for the damage done. Bishop Chimhangwa urged campaigns of conscientisation to reinforce the Gospel message of the earth's salvation. He considered general ignorance of the 'gospel of the

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<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 227-28.

trees' to be the cause for 'the threat of the destructive axe'. The bishop's wife felt so strongly about the unchecked use of the 'destructive axe' that she urged the church to have trespassers imprisoned until the urgency of environmental protection was fully understood.

The more radical exponents of the green struggle, who identified the church's mission with environmental legislation and control, insisted that the prophetically exposed 'wizards of the earth' be debarred from Holy Communion or even be excommunicated if they persisted in their evil ways. Evangelist Samuel Nhongo of the Zion Christian Church (an offshoot of the original ZCC of Bishop Mutendi), for instance, expressed such views as follows:

Simon Peter was told by Jesus that on him, Peter the Rock, the church will be built. Jesus said: 'I give you the keys to lock and unlock!' It is in this light that I see the earth-destroyers whom we expel from the church. We cannot keep undisciplined tree-fellers, for they are the *varoyi* [wizards] who should be locked out of the church... The churches, the chiefs [AZTREC], and the government should sit down together and plan properly for this war. The church's new environmental laws should be universally known and respected! Otherwise, we will be merely chasing the wind. In the Bible it says you have to leave the weeds to grow with the corn. This means the church cannot judge finally in this world. But cleansing of the church must proceed lest the [green] struggle stagnates.

Seen as an institution with legislative and disciplinary powers, the church – in the Earthkeepers' view – also becomes the vehicle of uncompromising struggle as it discerns and opposes evil forces that feed on mindless exploitation of the limited natural goods of the earth. In this mission, the church is at risk, willing to be controversial, to suffer and sacrifice whatever discipleship in this realm requires.

### *New Sense of Common Cause*

Finally, the emergence of the 'green church' meant the closing of ranks between Christian and traditionalist Earthkeepers in a common cause. The implied commitment of the church to a form of open ecumenism set the stage for regular and continuous interfaith dialogue in joint action, a situation that fostered and complemented the development of an already existent AIC theology of religions. In the healing colonies of Zionist and Apostolic AICs, dialogue between prophets and patients has all along been focal to the healers' attempt to identify the causes of affliction in terms of traditional world-views and to achieve religious ascendancy over, rather than appeasement with, the old spirit forces. Confrontation and transformation of the old beliefs were implicit in the 'fulfilment theology' undergirding prophetic faith-healing praxis.

There was a great difference, however, between prophets developing policies of antithesis to traditional religion from within the relative privacy or protected confines of their healing colonies and the more open situation

where Earth-keeping required the conduct of joint religious ceremonies in the presence of the large numbers of out-groups who in the past were the still-to-be-converted 'heathen,' or at least the 'religious opposition'. Much greater caution was required in the evaluation of another's religion when the 'other' was always present in what had in effect become religiously pluriform brotherhoods and sisterhoods bonded together in a common cause! The Earth-keeping brothers and sisters were no longer 'opponents' but fellow pilgrims in the quest for eco-justice. The green dialogue marked by inter-religious tolerance and friendship by no means meant religious relativism. The AAEC tree-planting Eucharist, as opposed to an ancestral beer libation, for example, highlighted the stark difference in religious approaches. Yet it was as if the ecological struggle through the newly planted trees breathed the message: 'You cannot afford the luxury of religious conflict if it causes the wounded earth to suffocate!'

I mention but one example of theological development in the ritualised interface between Christians and traditionalists. The preoccupation of the chiefs and spirit mediums with their guardian ancestors (*varidzi venyika*) whenever trees were planted caused their AIC counterparts to relate the role of the Holy Spirit to the world of the senior ancestors more positively than Zionists and apostles generally allow for. Instead of the ancestral guardians being branded as 'demons,' fit only to be exorcised or disassociated from by Christian prophets, a certain reverence for them was observed by the Christian tree-planters. Their protection of nature became more readily identified with the biblical code of Christian stewardship, and the question was at least considered whether these ancestors do not represent a theologically acceptable form of African *praeparatio evangelica*.

Could the church not at this point recognise a foreknowledge about and responsibility for nature, inspired by the universal God of all creation and developed by the pre-Christian sages of Africa? Whatever the answer to this question, and however genuine the respect shown the chiefs by the prophetic Earthkeepers, this preoccupation with the ancestors was also used by the *maporesanyika* (land-healing) preachers as a point of contact to introduce and explain Christ as the fulfilment of all ancestorhood, as the true *muridzi venyika*, guardian of the land, the 'Ancestor' of all the universe, commissioned and empowered by the Godhead to introduce new life to all creation. In this vision of Christ's fulfilment of traditional spirit guardianship, the attitude towards the old order – as reflected in the respect shown the participant chiefs – was less one of judgment than of encouraging the traditionalist elders to develop fully in the present Earth-keeping dispensation the ecological instincts that have always permeated African holism.

The message thus proclaimed and enacted, for all its conciliatory insight and tolerance, seriously questioned the popular myth held in many traditionalist circles that Jesus Christ is merely the white man's *mhondoro* (tribal ancestor), who holds no more authority or power than the Shona

hero-ancestors Chaminuka, Kaguwi and Nehanda. In AAEC theology, Christ's 'ancestorhood' and his communication with the guardian ancestors in no way detracts from acceptance of his lordship in the biblical sense over all creation. Whatever the demands of human partnership in the struggle, and however strong the drive for dialogue without bias, this cornerstone of Christian earth-stewardship remained. The entire tree-planting Eucharist testified to Christ's lordship in heaven and on earth.

### **Concluding Observations**

The War of the Trees poses a significant challenge for the church worldwide, one that hinges on a number of factors.

First, the point of gravity in global Christianity in terms of growth rates and numerical strength has shifted from North to South, from the so-called First World to the Two-Thirds World. Thus the churches of the South deserve our attention. In Africa, the AICs, particularly in Southern Africa, form an important component of a rapidly expanding African Christianity (representing in some areas up to 40% of the overall Christian membership). Despite some obvious limitations in theological education, these churches excel in developing original, inculturated theologies at the grassroots of African society. Their relevance to the communities they serve warrants a closer look at their Earth-keeping contribution.

Second, the AICs concerned have had little, or no exposure to eco-theological literature and can therefore be said to have developed Earth care concerns as an indigenous response to nature-related biblical injunctions, relatively free from western influence.<sup>12</sup>

Third, the engagement of peasant families who were directly affected by environmental deterioration contributed to the development of a spontaneous grassroots theology, born of existential need rather than based on abstract reflection. As Hermann Mvula argues in this volume, the poor have a role in earth-healing activities and mission.

Fourth, ecological insights derived from praxis are at times overridden by theoretical, academic considerations. We therefore need to trace more deliberately the movement of God's Earth-keeping Spirit as it is already manifest in Christian communities if we are to re-envision and understand the church's mission on this beleaguered planet. The environmental ministry of the AICs in Zimbabwe provides an opportunity to this end.

Fifth, despite the tendency of observers to characterise the AICs as protest movements rather than as missionary institutions in their own

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<sup>12</sup> As founder of the movement, I have admittedly influenced the movement's religio-ecological programme. Yet my contribution at the outset was more that of stimulating motivation and mobilisation for environmental reform and providing financial empowerment through fund-raising than to provide a theological blueprint for all activities. Instead, I encouraged local initiative and creative inculturation by the African earthkeepers themselves.

right,<sup>13</sup> the AICs do have a rich tradition of missionising activity in Africa,<sup>14</sup> a factor that contributes to their identifying their Earth-keeping ministry with what they understand as mission.

The main aim of this article has not been to present an in-depth consideration of biblical foundations for Earth care, but to give a brief account of an African Earth-keeping mission from the underside, where an imaginative attempt was made to liberate and heal an abused and over-exploited earth.<sup>15</sup> A few of the main tenets of tree-planting rituals have been highlighted. It has not been possible to include discussion of the underlying Trinitarian theology here, aspects of which could well be integrated into a broader missio-ecological theology for Africa, if not for the church universal. Coming from Zimbabwe, the testimony of the War of the Trees is, from a western perspective, very much a voice from the margins. But spoken as it is from sub-Saharan Africa, it comes as a valuable word from the new heartland of Christianity.

## Resources

Catherine Tucker, ed. *Nature, Science, and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment* (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2012).

Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 83 (see also 66-75, 83-89), attributed the emergence and growth of the AICs to a 'reaction to Christian missions' – a theory that was underscored and given prominence by theologians such as Adrian Hastings, G.C. Oosthuizen and David J. Bosch (see Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 71-79).

<sup>14</sup> I have repeatedly argued that characterisation of the AICs as predominantly 'protest movements' is flawed. AIC missionaries on the whole, it appears, are inspired in their evangelistic outreach by Christ's mission command and the Gospel to a greater extent than by a negative reaction to missions. Hence, the central hypothesis in all my work on AIC growth is that church expansion took place largely as a result of Africanised missionary strategies and praxis. See M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques* (Vol. II; The Hague: Mouton, 1974), chaps 2 and 5; 'Missionary Outreach in African Independent Churches,' *Missionalia* 8: 3 (1980); and Marthinus L. Daneel (ed), *African Christian Outreach: African Initiated Churches* (Vol. I; Pretoria, RSA: Southern African Missiological Society, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> After fifteen years and the planting of millions of trees, the grassroots environmental movement described in this article was gradually destroyed in the context of corruption and the decline of the rule of law in Zimbabwe over the past decade. For the story of the destruction of the movement, see M.L. Daneel, 'Zimbabwe's Earthkeepers: When Green Warriors Enter the Valley of Shadow,' in Catherine Tucker (ed), *Nature, Science, and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment* (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2012), 191-212.

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# **GREENING OUR CHURCH AND OUR WORLD: A BISHOP'S JOURNEY TO HEAL THE EARTH**

Bud Cederholm

## **Introduction**

The mission of God is for all God's people. In fact, the church exists to participate in God's mission of love, justice, peace and reconciliation. Across the world, Christians of all denominations are slowly coming to terms with the effects of climate change and other ecological challenges that confront people of faith and the world as a whole. While the problem may seem insurmountable and can easily lead to resignation, as this volume has shown, we have glimpses of hope from across the globe – people trying to heal the Earth. The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, for instance, has embarked on this journey by mobilising and working with Christians, policy-makers and people of other faiths to address the challenges of the mounting ecological crisis. While this is one effort within one denomination in a small part of the globe, hopefully, it will offer some cues for others in other places, necessarily linked with national and international efforts addressed throughout this volume.

## **Green Bishop – Converting to Christian Mission of Earth Care**

Many people in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts address me as the Green Bishop. Most of them wonder how and when I converted to the Christian mission of Earth care. I wish I could say my passion for eco-justice and a sustainable environment happened long before I became a bishop in 2001. Well, it didn't – but there had been sowers of seeds of love for Creation and the biblical mandate to be stewards and care-givers of all creation planted in me.

Those seeds finally fell on good soil during the 2003 Province I Bishops' retreat led by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt Jonas, a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. She opened our eyes, ears, minds and hearts to a much greater task of Earth care, and her passionate words still echo in me today: 'We share in Christ's crucifixion, mourning and feeling the wounds of Creation, the suffering of the poor, and that of the most vulnerable due to the degradation of planet Earth. We share in Christ's resurrection with a sense of hope and empowerment to roll away the stone in order to proclaim life, not death.' She invited us to take seriously the mission of Earth care – which is also the fifth of the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of

Mission – ‘To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth’.

At that retreat, as God’s missionaries, we read Scripture and prayed with Earth in mind. We reflected on our baptismal promises from the perspective of Christ, who is the source of all Creation. A pastoral letter to the seven New England dioceses – *To Serve Christ in all Creation* – was born.<sup>1</sup> In the letter, the bishops called on all Christians to acknowledge our neglect, complicity and ignorance with regard to the fifth Mark of Mission, and to pledge our prayers, leadership and energies to serve Creation. The letter remains the source of hope, strength and positive promise to the church and to the integrity of all Creation. Since then, I deeply fell in love with God’s Creation. I became spiritually emboldened to care for the Earth in the spirit of St Francis of Assisi, strongly advocating for eco-justice with colleagues near and far.

### **Anglican Marks of Mission, MDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

In 2006, the Episcopal Church voted to make the United Nations Millennium Development Goals<sup>2</sup> a mission priority. Apart from allocating about 0.7% of its budget to these goals, the church asked dioceses and congregations to form ministries based on these goals. None was more critical to the future of life on Earth than the seventh goal – to ‘Ensure Environmental Sustainability’. Unfortunately, 2015 has come and passed, but the future of life remains uncertain.

Taking seriously God’s invitation to participate in the mission of safeguarding creation and the sustainability of the environment, the church needs to develop and equip all God’s people for mission and the exercise of their vows to sustain and renew the life of the Earth. The 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed two strong environmental justice resolutions calling on Episcopalians to advocate for restrictions on carbon emissions, incentives for renewable energy and support for those who are most vulnerable to climate change, the poor, as well as fossil fuel company workers and their families.<sup>3</sup>

The World Council of Churches issued a Call to Climate Action in 2009, as the Copenhagen Negotiations convened.<sup>4</sup> Congregations and individuals

<sup>1</sup> [eeonline.org/download/p1-ltr-030227.htm](http://eeonline.org/download/p1-ltr-030227.htm) (accessed 13th March 2014).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability*: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml) (accessed 13th March 2014).

<sup>3</sup> [www.generalconvention.org/gc/resolutions?by=topic&cid=10](http://www.generalconvention.org/gc/resolutions?by=topic&cid=10) (accessed 13th March 2014).

<sup>4</sup> WCC, ‘Religious Traditions Call To Climate Action,’ 21 September 2009. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/religious-traditions-call-to-climate-action> (Accessed 13th March, 2014).



in Massachusetts joined thousands around the world in ringing bells 350 times as a wake-up call; 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is the upper limit for a sustainable and healthy planet. Yet, by 2013, it had reached 400 ppm. As a result, oceans are warming and acidifying, polar ice is melting, the oceans are rising, and the average rise in temperature has reached 1°C. Scientists predict dire consequences in the decades ahead if we surpass the tipping point of 2°C. At the rate we currently burn fossil fuels, we will reach 2°C in fifteen years – threatening island and coastal peoples, creating disasters and droughts, climate refugees in the millions and the extinction of millions of non-human species. Nobel Peace Prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, highlights the urgency of these times when he says, ‘We can no longer continue feeding our addiction to fossil fuel as if there is no tomorrow. For there will be no tomorrow.’<sup>5</sup>

In 2013 there was increasing prophetic advocacy calling on Episcopal entities in Massachusetts to divest from financial institutions that destroy the Earth and to reinvest in fossil-free and clean renewable energy companies. From churches to college campuses, in cities and towns, and in the State legislature, bills to divest pension funds and other investment funds from fossil fuel companies were being considered at the time this book went to press.

Many in the diocese now believe it is, in the words of Bill McKibben, time ‘to green our portfolios’. In September 2013, a group of Episcopal activists, in conversation with the Socially Responsible Investment sub-committee of the diocesan Trustees of Donations, crafted a divestment/reinvestment resolution for the 2013 Diocesan Convention. Before the convention, the Trustees of Donations and Episcopal City Mission co-sponsored a Creation Cafe and the Church Conference, with well-known speakers and workshop leaders presenting information on shareholder and proxy actions and divestment/reinvestment strategies. Managers of alternative energy investments showed the growth and feasibility of investments in clean renewable energy. The day brought together people with different ideas about whether it is best to stay invested in fossil fuels so investors can exercise their proxy votes and engage in shareholder actions, or divest and reinvest so that the public and fossil fuel companies are challenged to change their business plan.

Proxy votes and shareholder actions have not deterred the US and multinational fossil fuel companies from their plan to use all fossil fuel reserves in the ground in the world. Sadly, scientists warn that burning more than 20% of all global fossil fuel reserves in the ground would raise

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<sup>5</sup> Valerie Volcovici, and edited by Michael Perry and Bill Trott, ‘RPT-REFILE-Philanthropies, including Rockefellers, and investors pledge \$50bln fossil fuel divestment’: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/09/22/un-climatechange-rockefellers-idUKL2N0RN05J20140922> (accessed 13th November 2014).

the average temperature in the world more than 2°C with irreparable damage to life and ecosystems on earth.

The divestment/reinvestment movement is about keeping 80% of all fossil fuel reserves in the ground! As our 2013 Diocesan Convention concluded, ‘it is morally wrong to hold stock in companies and benefit from corporations who are making climate change worse’.<sup>6</sup> The divestment resolution passed almost unanimously – making the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts the first Episcopal diocese in the US to pass a resolution calling for a freeze on any new investments in fossil fuel companies; the creation of an alternative investment vehicle free from fossil fuel companies; and no investments in any fossil fuel company not deemed best in class by 2018. (‘Best in class’ is an oxymoron – at the moment, there is no best in class fossil fuel company.)

Fossil fuel companies won’t go away without a fight. According to Bill McKibben, ‘the oil industry alone spends \$440,000 a day lobbying [the US] Congress’ to continue exploiting fossil fuel reserves.<sup>7</sup> ‘The fossil fuel industry,’ he argues, ‘has become a rogue industry, reckless like no other force on earth.’<sup>8</sup> Regardless, an increasing number of voices and faith communities are speaking ‘truth to power,’ demanding that companies radically adjust their long-term business plan to extract all the fossil fuel reserves in the ground and become part of the climate change solution by ‘investing’ and diverting their business plan into clean, safe and renewable energy. In doing so, they would become ‘best in class’ companies.

In the long run, investment in fossil fuel companies will not give the investors high yields as a growing number of states in the US, and national governments, put limits and caps on the amount of fossil fuel that can be extracted and burned to protect the health of persons and the planet. It is projected that about 80% of fossil fuel reserves will become stranded assets as a result. Hopefully, fiduciaries would be forced to begin divesting and reinvesting in clean energy as the value of their holdings decreases, while those in clean renewable energy increase. Such reinvestments will also be of value to the Earth.

The Diocese of Massachusetts passed another Resolution at its 2014 convention asking the 78th General Convention of the national Episcopal Church (25th June-3rd July 2015 in Salt Lake City, Utah) – to call on the Episcopal Church Pension Fund and the Episcopal Church Foundation Fund to divest from fossil fuel companies over the next five years. The 2015 Episcopal General Convention used our resolution as a basis for

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<sup>6</sup> Bill McKibben, ‘Playing offense: It’s time to divest from the oil industry,’ in *The Christian Century*, 2nd January 2013: [www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-12/playing-offense](http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-12/playing-offense) (accessed 13th March 2014).

<sup>7</sup> McKibben, ‘Playing offense’.

<sup>8</sup> Bill McKibben, ‘Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,’ in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 19th July 2012: [www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719) (accessed 13th March 2014).

conversation--the resolution passed overwhelmingly making the Episcopal Church the second big denomination to pass a divestment resolution. (The United Church of Christ being the first).

### David vs. Goliath – We Know How the Story Comes Out

‘Sometimes the fight [for the earth] seems hopelessly lopsided,’ McKibben once said. When he told a reporter about plans to tame the Exxons (fossil fuel companies) of the world, the reporter responded, ‘This just seems impossible. It’s a David and Goliath story.’ Bill nodded his head and was feeling glum, and then blurted, ‘Wait a minute! I know how that story comes out.’<sup>9</sup> And so it is that the ‘Davids’ who fought ‘Goliaths’ in the Civil Rights movements in the US and all over the world in the past, knew how the story comes out; and the ‘Davids’ who fight the ‘Goliaths’ (the climate change deniers in the fossil fuel industry and government) through advocacy, divestment and reinvestment in renewable energy and through eco-justice movements large and small in Massachusetts and all over the world ‘know how the story comes out’ – they have hope for the future.

Due to this hope, movements for Creation care are calling people of all faiths to answer God’s urgent call. For Christians, it means being faithful and fierce in living out our baptismal promises, loving our neighbours, human and non-human kin, and striving for justice and peace for all Creation. I believe that, in time and with respect for the Earth’s sacredness as God’s house, these movements with people of faith, little faith, and no faith, will reconcile, restore and renew creation, this fragile earth, our island home, with God’s help!

These actions should be planted on the understanding that we are interconnected to the world of nature. Among the saints, St Francis of Assisi inspired people to understand our interrelatedness and interconnectedness with creation. We are kin and kith to all living beings and life; grounded in God, our Creator, and kin to all Creation; reconciled in Jesus, our Redeemer; sustained in the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier, who makes all life on earth a sanctuary for God.

This Franciscan understanding is equally shared by the African ethics of *ubuntu*. The church’s growing appreciation of and commitment to *ubuntu*, however, needs to be extended to how we relate to Earth. As Tutu argues, our ecological interdependence is called *ubuntu*, which ‘is difficult to translate into English. It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am because I belong. It speaks about wholeness: it speaks about compassion’.<sup>10</sup> In other words, *ubuntu* is eco-justice – ‘I am because you are, how I behave

<sup>9</sup> McKibben, ‘Playing Offense’.

<sup>10</sup> Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 26.

impacts not only on me, but also on others around me because we all belong together... and (we) need to sustain this otherness in creation... You can't exist in isolation, (we are made) for interconnectedness and interdependence.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Kaoma contends that the scientific, traditional and biblical world-views are agreed on the interconnectedness of Creation. 'God's Earth is God's family of interconnected sacred beings with a common ancestor or origin,'<sup>12</sup> Jesus Christ through whom and for whom everything was created. Just as God covenanted with Creation, we exist in covenantal relationship with Earth. How we relate to this Earth is a faith issue – we exist in the covenantal relationship with the Triune God and planet Earth.<sup>13</sup>

### Living our Baptismal Covenant

Existing in covenantal relationship with God, one another and God's Earth implies interconnectedness. It means understanding the plight of the disadvantaged, the poor and the earth. In the case of climate change and its consequences, the least of our brothers and sisters are the most vulnerable. In this regard, the mission of Earth care has eco-social implications.

Over the years, I have grown to realise that climate disasters inform and reform our attitudes towards the natural world and the poor. While the bishops' retreat was my conversion to love and care for the Earth, the 2005 horrific destruction in the US Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina brought the effects of climate change to the fore of my spirituality. The Diocese of Massachusetts was one of the first northern dioceses on the scene to help in the recovery process – rebuilding homes, churches, schools and communities. The diocese and many congregations focused their efforts in Biloxi, partnering with the Diocese of Mississippi, and committed to a three-year funding of a Priest Assistant for the Church of the Redeemer, Biloxi. We also partnered with the Diocese of Louisiana and some of its congregations. Some of our congregations continue to make mission trips to New Orleans to this day. Apart from making dozens of trips and donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to relief efforts, many Christians received from the storm what I term another baptism by 'water' – redirecting us to face and address the tragic effects of climate change. Katrina relief efforts and partnerships strengthened my commitment to Creation care and eco-justice. It also strengthened the commitment of hundreds of others in Massachusetts. As missionaries, partners and friends with those we helped, we received more in our hearts and souls than what we gave in time and resources.

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<sup>11</sup> tutufoundationuk.org

<sup>12</sup> Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth*, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Carol E. Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

After Katrina, the diocese embarked on disaster relief preparedness and training as an expression of our Christian witness. The August 2011 hurricane Irene in the US East Coast and the November 2012 hurricane Sandy, which brought New York and surrounding cities to a complete standstill, confirmed predictions from scientists and meteorologists of increasing weather-related disasters to vulnerable coastal towns and cities. In anticipation of similar climate change extremes, our diocese is now equipped with trained people who train others, and identify resources for disaster preparation and relief efforts locally, nationally and globally.

These experiences gave me a deeper sense of mission and commitment to my baptismal vows. I felt a renewed calling to continue in the apostles' teaching; to repent of the sins that cause harm to Creation; to proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ for all Creation; to seek and serve Christ in all persons and in all living creatures, loving our neighbours, human and non-human kin, as ourselves; and striving for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being, every creature and all living beings in creation.<sup>14</sup> I recall these vows regularly in my own life, and in my teaching, preaching, workshops and retreats.<sup>15</sup> Openly, and in my heart, I whisper, 'with God's help'.

### Conversion as a Continuing Journey

As Norman Faramelli argues in Chapter 10, eco-justice demands *both local and global* action and responses – think globally and act locally. I personally vowed to dedicate at least 25% of my time as bishop to the mission of Earth care for the sake of all life, my grandchildren and future generations. As the Rev. Dr Jim Antal, Conference Minister of the United Church of Christ (UCC) in Massachusetts, reminds us, 'We are the first generation to foresee, and the final generation with an opportunity to forestall, the most devastating effects of climate change.' Since the 2003 retreat discussed above, I have grown to believe climate change is a global justice issue – it is *the* civil rights issue of this millennium. In short, climate change is THE MOST critical moral and justice issue the church and world face today. Thus, the church in the mission of God cannot ignore this gospel issue.

Christian mission is God's mission – we are only invited to participate in it; hence, God doesn't always take us where we want to go but where we *need* to go for God's sake. My journey of ongoing ecological conversion has many highlights and some lowlights. At one time, my own guilt about climate change and my fear for the future of the planet dominated my teaching on Earth care. In line with Mary Elizabeth Moore's observation in

<sup>14</sup> The Episcopal Church, *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), 304-305.

<sup>15</sup> Adapted to fit Creation care.

Chapter 12, one Sunday, a parishioner stopped me and politely yet firmly told me, 'Bishop, you are not going to win many lasting converts and sustain an eco-justice movement preaching guilt and fear.' His mild rebuke brought me back to the bishops' retreat in 2003. It is holy habits rooted in love for God's creation, spending meditative prayer time with nature, study, and trusting in God's leading that form the foundation for the mission of Earth care and sustain it. Hildegard of Bingen's powerful teaching from the 11th century speaks for itself: 'We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously towards justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.'<sup>16</sup>

In 2013 my wife, Ruth Ann, and I journeyed to South Africa to visit with friends and spend time with all creatures great and small. I did not expect another conversion regarding climate change on this journey, but God had another plan. Like many American and world travellers before me, I felt the godly spirit of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Movement – which reminded me to accept the truth of our sins against Creation. However, there is also an urgent need for the ministry of reconciliation with Creation, entrusted to us through Christ's life, death and resurrection. The violence and injustice done to God's Creation can only be reconciled when we speak truth to power (including fossil fuel companies and their lobbyists), and when we sacrifice our own agendas and needs to reduce our carbon footprints. The injustice against the poor who suffer disproportionately must and will be reconciled when we act with compassion and love towards our neighbours near and far, human and non-human alike.

### **Local Earth Care Initiatives – Genesis Covenant, Green Grants, Creation Care Season**

Compassion and love for creation demand practical action. Our Church has responded to the mounting ecological crisis with specific steps and actions.

In 2009, President Obama and Congress marked September 11th as a National Day of Service, honouring victims and responders of the tragic terrorist attack on 9/11/2001. They also invited all Americans to do the same. One of the projects Episcopalians in Boston chose involved replacing hundreds of light bulbs in churches and public housing neighbourhoods with energy-efficient bulbs. One man single-handedly replaced nearly all the light bulbs in our cathedral, resulting in thousands of green dollars saved in energy costs, along with a huge amount of carbon saved.

In addition, the Diocese of Massachusetts passed a resolution affirming the Genesis Covenant at its 2010 Convention. It urged congregations, individuals and diocesan entities to explore the Genesis Covenant and

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<sup>16</sup> See Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life* (London: Routledge, 1989).

commit to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions from every facility they maintained by 50% by 2020. Originally initiated by Bishop Steven Charleston – former Dean and President of Episcopal Divinity School, in Cambridge, Massachusetts – the Genesis Covenant invites people, congregations and the leadership of all faith traditions to address climate change boldly and be reconciled with Creation through this covenant with God. Studies have shown that religious buildings are the most inefficient and wasteful structures of energy per capita in the US – partially due to their age.

The Genesis Covenant became the impetus for a Green Grants Initiative in the diocese to assist congregations in reducing their carbon footprint while saving green dollars for other mission and ministry initiatives. Thanks to generous donors, fund-raisers and a matching grant from the Diocesan Annual Fund, we raised \$150,000 in 2010, a testimony to the growing commitment to care for Creation and the conviction that churches need to be moral and justice leaders. In 2011, the Green Grants Initiative received a grant of \$2 million over five years from the diocese's Together Now fund-raising campaign. As of June 2014, Green Grants for energy-saving projects, community gardens and eco-justice education have totalled nearly \$750,000, awarded to over 80 congregations out of 180 in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

Amidst the overwhelming challenges and the urgency of the ecological crisis, we have realised that caring for God's Earth demands working across religious traditions. Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light is a key partner in the Green Grant Initiative. Its expertise in energy-efficient buildings and advocacy for eco-justice are invaluable to us. Every congregation receiving a grant is required to attend a Sustainable House of Worship workshop where participants learn how to effectively and systemically make their churches energy-efficient as well as how to take advantage of rebates and other grants. Not only do these workshops help congregations make wise decisions, but they also inspire and give ideas for parishioners' homes, lifestyle changes and renewable energy possibilities.

The diocese also offers Green Loans up to \$100,000 with a one-point reduced rate of interest from our normal loans, and a yearly payback equal to the estimated and actual dollars saved by energy-saving renovations. Grants, loans and workshops have helped over 80 congregations save up to 50% in electricity and heating costs with efficient gas boilers, LED lighting, insulation, windows and other energy-saving modifications to their buildings.

Grants and loans help congregations install solar panels saving them over 50% of electric energy costs and carbon emissions. One church with a large array is selling its excess electricity to other houses of worship in the community. I have had the honour and joy of blessing several solar panel installations. Rising up to the roof in a bucket truck, singing 'We are Saving Noah's Cargo' to the tune of 'We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder,'



and splashing holy water on the panels has been one of the highlights of my episcopacy. Some now call me ‘The Green Bucket Bishop’!

When congregations partner with a solar panel provider, members of the congregation who want panels on their home receive a free analysis of their home’s suitability, a reduced cost estimate, and information on rebates and grants. The *missio Dei* is for all God’s people – we are challenging the diocese, with the wisdom and help of ‘experts’ from existing solarised congregations, to increase the number of congregations using solar power each year with the goal of ‘solarising’ half our 180 churches in the next 3-5 years. It is taking a lot of advocacy work, but we are blessed with grant and loan funds and a volunteer team of solarised congregational advisors. They have the passion, knowledge and commitment to help their neighbouring congregations through the challenging technological and business plan processes. These solar champions have taken on the challenge to encourage all houses of worship in their community to consider solar energy as well. They, and we, ‘believe in the Sun even when it isn’t shining,’ as well as the Son of God whose incarnation shows us how much God loves the physical, created world.

Knowing the energy that caring for Creation takes, one is exhausted just thinking about all the *doing*. If people of faith and movements are going to be sustained for the *doing*, we must take significant time for *being*. In other words, if we are going to prepare and care for God’s sanctuary on Earth, we must be prepared by God’s care to be the human part of God’s sanctuary in Creation through holy habits of prayer, worship, study, silence, meditating, and listening and looking for the sacred in Creation. A diocesan Creation Care Task Force was formed in the diocese to help congregations, deaneries, conferences and conventions with programmes and workshops that teach and form us spiritually for environmental ministries and movements. In my spirituality, I have found *Care for Creation, A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*<sup>17</sup> by Delio, Warner and Wood a helpful resource with several meditations, reflections and practices that prepare us to be a sanctuary for God.

At the 2010 Diocesan Convention, a resolution was passed calling on congregations to designate a Creation Care Season from late Pentecost and the Feast of St Francis on 4th October to Advent I. The Creation Care season has a page on the diocesan website ([www.diomass.org](http://www.diomass.org)) with news, resources and opportunities for learning, worship, study and advocacy. The spirit and activities throughout the diocese during Creation Care Season have grown over the years, changing and converting many of our members to be lovers, care-givers and eco-justice advocates for Creation. What if these late Pentecost weeks became a celebrated season throughout the

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<sup>17</sup> Ilia Delio OSF, Keith Douglass Warner OFM, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2008).



Anglican Communion? Late Pentecost is, after all, a 'green' season. Imagine the impact on climate change if all Christians in developed and developing nations established a season of awe, wonder, care and advocacy. Creation care is not for a season only, it is critically important in all seasons! What if people of faith all over the world, in *all* seasons, answered God's urgent call to be reconcilers with and restorers of Creation as well as recyclers, re-users and reducers?

### **Inter-Faith/Ecumenical Earth Care – New England and Beyond**

It is important to realise that the mission of God exists to transform the world. The mission of Earth care for example, must move beyond local churches and transform policy-makers and international stakeholders. This is more important in the globalised world. As noted in this volume, the ecological crisis has both local and global connections which God's missionaries should take seriously. Our mission should aim at leaving no one behind – local people, national leaders and of course global multinational organisations and companies.

Vigils, protests and demonstrations held in 2011-2012 in Massachusetts during the US presidential election campaign were directed at both the Democratic and Republican parties, neither of which put Earth care as a priority. Three years hence, the voices of protest and advocacy have gotten increasingly more passionate, frequent, louder and more numerous in our state and nation. These voices continue to point to the arc of justice for all humans and our non-human kin who suffer from climate change catastrophes. While we still have deniers and the power of the fossil fuel industry and their lobbyists working against this cause, faith, hope and love whisper in our ears: carry on, carry on, and carry on – until there is justice for all life on earth.

And carry on many from Massachusetts did in February 2013 in Washington DC with busloads from our state joining the largest climate rally in US history. Over 50,000 from all over the country and Canada rallied and marched to the White House to protest against the Keystone Pipeline from Canada to Texas. The pipeline is a significant threat to the environment as a high-risk polluter of earth and ground water, and it is also a very poor long-range business plan. Due to sustained advocacy, President Obama rejected the Keystone XL pipeline on 6th November 2015 – citing its negative impact on the environment.

Then, in September 2014, over 350,000 demonstrators attended a climate march organised by 350.org in New York City ahead of a world leaders' meeting at the United Nations. Hundreds of thousands all over the world held marches and events, adding their voice and witness to those in New York. Hundreds of youth and adults of faith from Massachusetts, including scores of Episcopalians, were among the 350,000 who marched, sang, prayed and demanded that all countries meeting on climate change in

2015, especially the US and China, come to an agreement on significant goals and reductions in carbon emissions over the next five years. As people of faith in the past have done, we must carry on until there is justice for all humanity and all Creation.

In 2012, Episcopalians in New England joined the New England Regional Environmental Ministers (NEREM), which now includes several other denominational leaders and activists. Through our work, we have realised that no one denomination can sustain the urgent work that must be done over the next few decades without the faith, prayers, wisdom and learning from other denominations. The Rev. Jim Antal, Conference Minister for the Massachusetts United Church of Christ Conference, passionately shares his vision of a 'post-denominational' church, united in an eco-justice movement, caring for Creation in prayerful, pastoral and prophetic ways without the walls of tradition and polity keeping us separate, if not divided. The eco-justice movement for a sustainable planet and the practices that sustain us as an ecumenical movement give evidence that God's dream in Christ 'that we all may be one' is taking root.

NEREM planned and celebrated a Climate Revival – an Ecumenical Festival to Embolden the Renewal of Creation in Boston in April 2013. Hundreds of lay persons and clergy from several denominations in New England gathered in two historic churches in Copley Square Boston, Old South Church (UCC) and Trinity (Episcopal) for spirited worship, reflective of our different traditions. Prayers, meditations, music and conversations filled the day and our hearts, minds and souls. Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and the Rev. Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, preached with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Bill McKibben joining us via video.

During the Revival, twenty-two Protestant and Orthodox leaders from New England signed a letter to their churches – *Lazarus Come Out: A Shared Statement of Hope In The Face of Climate Change*.<sup>18</sup> The letter states that climate change is a moral-justice issue which demands action for the sake of our children, our children's children and God's creation. Climate change is driven by our own lifestyle choices as well as the power of economic institutions. It calls for repentance from our greed and lack of concern for our most vulnerable sisters and brothers who suffer most from the effects of climate change. The letter also calls for conversion leading to advocacy for eco-friendly local, national and international policies and regulations that limit carbon emissions, and encourages renewable, clean energy and just economic systems.

The Climate Revival was more than symbolic – it alerted us to the necessity of grounding ecological activism, responsibilities and actions in holy habits in order to sustain a movement. It fed and continues to feed

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<sup>18</sup> <http://macucc.org/pages/detail/255/climaterevival2013> (accessed 13th March 2014).

leaders and participants with a deeper sense of the holy and renewal found in community and in Creation. I still draw and build on that day in my prayer life and through the relationships with leaders in the church committed to justice and care for Creation.

In 2015, NEREM planned a significant season of witness from October that year till Epiphany 2016 – before, during and after the December international climate talks in Paris (COP21). This witness was not just for New England churches, but for the wider church in the US, and worldwide as well ([www.climatewitness.org](http://www.climatewitness.org)). It is called ‘A NEW AWAKENING: Proclaiming a Season of Prophetic Climate Witness through Preaching, Prayer and Practice’.

### **Final Reflections**

As Kaoma argues in Chapter 19, if Christian mission is God’s mission, then it knows no boundaries. While the initiatives discussed in this chapter are primarily those of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, they can be adapted to meet local challenges elsewhere in addressing the crisis that confronts our world today. Regardless of our social, religious and geographical location, we are all participants in God’s mission. In line with the Great Commission, while the mission of Earth care begins at home, it aims at reaching the whole world – North and South America, Europe, the Pacific nations, Africa and Asia.

The church must lead and be a moral voice for justice by virtue of Scripture, Tradition (including our baptismal promises and the traditions and faith of the saints and other heroes of the faith) and Reason (including science and observing well what is happening to Creation). But eco-social justice movements have also been opportunities for people of faith to learn from and partner with those of other faith traditions.

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, and indeed dioceses all across the US, have found partners and allies with advocates for the Earth and organisations such as Bill McKibben, 350.org, 350Ma.org, Better Futures Project, Appalachian Mountain Club, various divestment organisations, GreenFaith and the aforementioned Mass. Interfaith Power and Light, to name a few. These partners and allies share a love of Creation and God with a deep sense of calling to reconcile, restore and renew the Earth. They also manifest gifts and skill sets not all people of faith possess. We rely on these gifts to help us train and equip leaders and sustain a robust Creation care movement.

The church is called to steer resources, time and funding towards the support of congregations and groups seeking to reduce their energy consumption and raise up Creation care missionaries. The church must also work and support youth, young adults and college students in their Earth care, because they often see the church as irrelevant and powerless to make change happen, and it is they who will inherit what we have done and left

undone. There is a need for seminaries to continue to re-imagine and make necessary changes in how the church prepares lay persons and ordination candidates to be ‘ministry developers’ of all the baptised for Earth care and not just ‘ministry deliverers’ to humanity. All these efforts and actions need to be sustained by a deep faith and spirituality led by our bishops, priests, pastors, deacons and lay people – all the baptised!

Many years ago, I found a Franciscan Blessing Prayer (author unknown), and adapted it for these times of climate crisis and God’s call to care for Creation:

May God bless us with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that we may seek and speak truth boldly and love deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of God’s Creation, so that we may work tirelessly for justice, freedom, and peace in Creation, among all people, and for all life on Earth.

May God bless us with the gift of tears to shed with our human and non-human kin who suffer from pain, loss, rejection, starvation, environmental degradation and disaster, so that we may reach out our hands and hearts to comfort them, renew and restore their lives.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can really make a difference in this world and for Creation, so that we are able, with God’s grace, to do what others deny and claim cannot be done – Amen!

## Resources

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## **CASE STUDIES OF HOPE – A ROCHA IN BRAZIL AND ELSEWHERE**

**Andrea Ramos Santos, Raquel Gonçalves Arouca,  
Gínia Cesar Bontempo, Carina Oliveira Abreu and  
Dave Bookless**

A Rocha ([www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org)) is perhaps the most globally representative example of a practical Christian response to Earth care. Beginning with a single conservation project established in Southern Portugal in 1983, A Rocha has grown into a diverse global movement operating in twenty countries across six continents, and with opportunities under consideration in many more. This chapter gives brief examples to illustrate the scope and diversity of A Rocha's work, before looking in more detail at one specific example: A Rocha Brazil's 'Transformation Network' (Rede de Transformação), working amongst churches in Northern Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

A Rocha focuses on protecting and restoring the natural environment through practical conservation projects, based on the biblical belief that God created the world, loves it, and entrusts it to the care of humankind. Each A Rocha national organisation is a self-governing, self-supporting entity, giving great cultural diversity, but linked through a set of shared core values and a small international organisation which provides coherence and training, shares best practices, and represents A Rocha globally. In several countries, A Rocha operates residential Field Studies Centres where scientific research, community conservation and environmental education take place within a context of intentional and inclusive Christian community. These centres have led to the study and often the subsequent protection of ecosystems as diverse as Mediterranean estuary, African coastal forest, Indian Ocean coral reef, Canadian Pacific river valley, and European urban parkland. As residential centres, these

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<sup>1</sup> The name 'A Rocha' is Portuguese for 'The Rock' and relates to A Rocha's twin foundations in sound science and solid biblical theology. A Rocha Brasil (ARB) is a Brazilian Christian environmental organisation committed to environmental education, community development and conservation. Organised in 2006, ARB is part of A Rocha International (present in 19 other countries) and maintains a primary focus on environmental education and social mobilisation in Protestant churches, equipping pastors, missionaries, educators and community leaders for practical involvement in local socio-environmental issues.

provide a fruitful meeting place for Christians and non-Christians, scientists and non-scientists, and people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Even where Field Studies Centres have not emerged, A Rocha projects retain a strong focus on practical conservation. Examples include substantial work on human-elephant conflict in India, protecting breeding seabirds through removing non-native pest species in New Zealand, addressing extreme poverty and human health, whilst also enhancing wildlife habitats in urban Uganda, and tackling desertification through planting native Huarango forests in Peru. In some countries, such as Ghana, multiple projects have emerged in locations all over the country, and A Rocha has become a major player in the conservation sector. Often A Rocha projects work in partnership with landowners (often but not always Christian organisations), with local churches (for instance, in tree-planting, conservation agriculture or environmental education), and with secular conservation bodies. In every case, A Rocha is clear about its biblical Christian basis and requires senior staff and trustees to sign a Basis of Faith, but in many examples volunteers and researchers may not share this Christian basis, and in some places, such as Ghana, India, Kenya, Lebanon and the UK, A Rocha has worked closely with individuals or groups from other faiths on specific conservation or advocacy projects.

As well as its conservation work, A Rocha, at both national and global levels, is deeply involved in providing written and multimedia resources for churches, engaging in advocacy for the biblical basis for Earth care and providing practical resources. These are multiple, varied and growing all the time, including the EcoCongregation scheme ([www.ecocongregation.org](http://www.ecocongregation.org)), books such as *Planetwise* (available in English, Dutch, French, German and, from 2015, Chinese), regular blogs ([www.blog.arochoa.org](http://www.blog.arochoa.org)), a travelling multimedia exhibition, 'Eklógia,' on the Bible and creation, and a free resources website ([www.atyourservice.arochoa.org](http://www.atyourservice.arochoa.org)). The rest of this chapter now turns to a specific case study, examining A Rocha's work in churches in the context of Brazil, where the combination of a significant Christian population and areas of global bio-diversity importance bring great strategic significance to this work.

According to the last Brazilian census,<sup>2</sup> in 2010 there were 42.3 million Protestants in Brazil, or 22.2% of the total population. This represents an increase of 61.45% in ten years. Historically however, Protestant Christians (particularly Evangelicals and Pentecostals who form the great majority in Brazil) have been slow to take action on social and environmental concerns. This is largely due to the priority Brazilian Protestants place on an understanding of the gospel as concerned with reconciliation between

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<sup>2</sup> IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), *Censo Demográfico 2010: Características Gerais da População, Religião e Pessoas com Deficiência* (Rio de Janeiro, 2010).

human beings and God, neglecting the restoration of humankind's relationship with the natural world.

This 'Platonic' vision of Christianity, based on the Greek philosophical distinction of spiritual and material reality, has led many Brazilian Protestants to be concerned only with saving human souls, ignoring social and environmental issues. However, James Jones (2008),<sup>3</sup> based on biblical passages such as Colossians 1:15-20 and Romans 8:19-22, affirms that redemption and reconciliation embrace not only human souls but all things in the heavens and the earth, and that the Earth will be saved because of the faithfulness of God expressed in creation, covenant and the cross. Jones further states that if we believe that the Earth will, in the end, be consumed by fire, then we will be inclined to exploit it while we can, but if we believe that the Earth is destined for renewal and that the material has a place alongside the spiritual in God's eternal purposes, then we will be persuaded to assume a more caring attitude.

In Brazil, A Rocha began the 'Transformation Network' project (Rede de Transformação – ReT) in January 2009, with financial support and assistance from Tearfund (www.tearfund.org), in order to address the theological issues which have inhibited the involvement of Christian communities in Creation care, and to provide appropriate models for practical engagement. This work has been accomplished through socio-environmental projects emerging from the context of local communities in eight cities in the north and northeast of Brazil.<sup>4</sup>

The Transformation Network was designed and implemented on the basis of 'transformational and liberating' environmental education principles, defined by Lima (2002)<sup>5</sup> as being established with a commitment to transform and renew society and its relation to the environment, and by Loureiro (2004)<sup>6</sup> as a means of realising the holistic transformation of persons and society. The Transformation Network has provided resources for teaching and involving local communities, with the objective of empowering those involved through providing them with the necessary tools for the planning, management and implementation of new socio-environmental action.

The goal of the Transformation Network has been to sensitise, enable and mobilise local churches, enabling their greater involvement in, and learning about, socio-environmental challenges, leading on to practical

<sup>3</sup> James Jones, *Jesus e a Terra – A ética Ambiental nos Evangelhos* (Viçosa, Brazil: Ultimato, 2008), 128.

<sup>4</sup> Manaus, Belém, Fortaleza, Ibiapina, Natal, São Luís, Duque Bacelar, Coelho Net.

<sup>5</sup> Lima, G.F.C., 'Crise Ambiental, Educação e Cidadania: os Desafios da Sustentabilidade Emancipatória,' in C.F.B. Loureiro, P.P. Layrargues and R.S. Castro (eds), *Educação Ambiental: Repensando o Espaço da Cidadania* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2002), 109-41.

<sup>6</sup> C.F.B. Loureiro, *Trajetória e Fundamentos da Educação Ambiental* (São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez, 2004), 150.

involvement through local environmental projects. Local churches have been at the heart of the project, from the planning stage, starting with the choice of implementing themes, through to the form and the physical location of practical projects. In this manner, local people have been involved in a process of environmental education developed 'with the people' rather than 'for the people'. Thus the Transformation Network project has been sympathetic to the ideas of Bracagioli (2007)<sup>7</sup> concerning participatory methodologies as a way to encourage the participation and emancipation of those involved.

The project has used lectures and workshops, conducted once or twice a year, to engage and involve local churches, with participants suggesting the implementing themes. Up to this point, the following themes have been discussed and implemented: climate change; the role of spirituality in the environmental crisis; environmental responsibility; community development; and the elaboration and execution of social and environmental projects. The project has also encouraged and facilitated participants in practical action in their own communities as well as through their political involvement as citizens. Workshops on 'participative diagnostics' have helped the local churches to identify the environmental challenges in their areas and seek possible collective solutions, besides encouraging them to consider global challenges as well.

Over the last five years, 986 Christians in the North and Northeast of Brazil have participated in the Transformation Network. They have included men and women, adolescents, youth, adults and the elderly; urban and rural (river and indigenous communities); persons from C, D, and E social classes (as defined by the Brazilian government's demographic research organisation, *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics*), and from various sectors: (students, homemakers, the unemployed, civil servants, employees of private companies, and staff from non-governmental and religious organisations).

Having described the methodology and work of the project, there now follow some personal stories from participants, illustrating how the project has been transformative and has contributed to equipping Christians to participate in environmental issues. The first is from a participant from Ibiapina, who has been active in the Transformation Network since 2009. In 2010, he became a member of the Municipal Council of Environmental Protection (COMDEMA) and currently is part of two other boards in his city: as Secretary of the Department of School Nutrition (CAE), and President of the City Board of Children's and Adolescents' Rights (CMDCA):

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<sup>7</sup> Bracagioli Alberto', *Metodologias Participativas: Encontros e Desencontros entre a Naturalização do ser Humano e a Humanização da Natureza*, in L.A. Ferraro Júnior (ed), *Encontros e Caminhos: Formação de Educadores Ambientais e Coletivos Educadores* (Vol. II; Brasília: MMA, 2007).



I confess that before the Transformation Network project I couldn't believe that I could do anything about environmental issues. But from the moment I began to be involved with the project, learning more about the issue and what I could do to help, my understanding of the environment totally changed. In the beginning, all I found was difficulties. People could not see the relation between the environment and the church, much less understand how each can do their part. This made me sad, but did not make me give up. However, as time passed and with much energy and dedication to the cause, today we are able to speak of the wonders God has done in this town through us. We are grateful first to God for opening the doors, and second to A Rocha, who enabled us to do this. We have many challenges before us, but we believe that all will happen in God's timing. May He give us wisdom to fulfil His plans here in this place.

This second personal account is from a delegate from Ananindeua who was part of the 2009 project, and in 2011 founded 'Trash Turns to Cash' to reach the school community (students and staff). Trash Turns to Cash mobilised the community to clean the area around the school and currently participates in big events in the city of Belem.

The partnership with the Transformation Network project gave me hope in the power to make a difference for the environment and I perceived that I was not alone. I have been transformed into a garbage collector! In 2009 I needed serious re-orientation to become committed to the truth and to nature. I did a global search for NGOs because I was indignant about the situation of my small home town (Benevides) and family farm where there is a small river (*igarapé*) threatened with city sewage. I did a campaign to save the river, denouncing abuse to the Public Municipal Ministry and, searching on the internet, I found A Rocha. I was encouraged and full of hope when I saw its vision and mission, realizing that the environmental cause was not merely my own and that mine was not a lost cause. I still haven't solved the problem of my small farm, but every year I am cleaning out the little river and promoting socio-environmental actions all over the place, sounding an alarm in our society that yes, we can take better care of the planet. Yes, we can better the quality of life! We do not have to wait for government action, but can do our part. We created a name for our own local programme: 'Trash Turns to Cash'. We have given seminars in our elementary school, we have gone to the streets collecting trash from participants in the 'March for Jesus' and other events. So I realized I was not alone and could make a difference where I lived. A Rocha has motivated me to persevere and insist on the environmental theme, because they really clarify how saving the planet begins with me.

The next personal story is from a participant from Manaus who has been involved in the project since its beginning, and in 2011 developed an environmental education project among the indigenous communities of the Black River. The school community became involved in planting native fruit trees along the margins of the river:

Previously the question of the care and preservation of the environment was only a theme for debates and projects. It was not connected to life. However, after I became a part of the Transformation Network project, practical care of

the environment became part of my Christian walk. The primary change was my realisation that, as a citizen and Christian, I have a responsibility to care for the environment in which I live, and also to sensitise other Christians to see the care of the environment as part of our holistic mission. The process of change was a challenge, because we have our own habits and lifestyle, and giving some things up is not easy. In the process of change, seeing Jesus, and his lifestyle as a simple Galilean, made a big difference and encouraged us to move forward seeing creation as an integral part of God's redemptive plan. Being part of A Rocha has been a constant challenge and a break with my previous paradigm and preconceived notions. I remember when I was a young Pentecostal child, a little song that I was taught that goes like this: 'This Earth will be set afire and where will you live? I will go to be with Jesus'. During that time I had no idea that the Earth will not be destroyed totally, but rather will be restored once again. I no longer see myself as a passive agent on an Earth that will be destroyed by fire, but rather as an active agent with a responsibility for caring and helping other Christians to not destroy what God has created. We have the responsibility to care and to manage in a sustainable manner the natural resources God has put at our disposal. We need to understand that we are active parts of the conservation of the environment by obedience to God and for the good of all humanity. Just as Christ sacrificed himself for our salvation, we too have the responsibility to sacrifice our consumerist and individualistic lifestyle for our own good and the good of all humanity.

The final account is by a participant from Duque Bacelar, involved since 2009, who in 2012 organised an entourage of fifty people from his state to participate in the Rio +20 global environmental conference. During the People's Summit, this group delivered lectures and led a march for Brazilian conservation and sustainability groups with the support of A Rocha.

I believe it was important for me to participate in the Rio +20 Conference because we are world citizens looking for local solutions. At Rio +20 we concluded that we were doing our part, and participation in a global event gave more motivation to better our work and action. A feeling of planetary unity at Rio +20 especially impressed me. Various languages and ethnic groups together, one diverse human race, living together in just one house called Earth, making up one big family. Among the experiences I brought back from Rio +20, I would highlight the understanding that we cannot live in isolation in our search for sustainability. We need to form partnerships with groups who have common interests in local, state, national and global contexts. We need to communicate more effectively through learning global languages like English [and other global languages, whilst continuing to nurture and value regional and indigenous languages]. Our varied ecosystems and natural and ethnic glories particularly complement each other and cause admiration among those who appreciate different cultures. For example, the bunch of Babaçu coconuts on display at the Maranhão state stand were familiar to those of us from Maranhão, but fascinating to those who had never seen them before.

The testimonials shared above show that A Rocha Brazil's Transformation Network project has contributed to the personal transformation of individuals who have then become environmental activists, contributing to the transformation of the world in which they live. These environmental agents are ordinary local church members, disciples of Jesus, who have reflected upon their lifestyles and have sought to care for God's creation as a form of obedience and love for the Creator.

This example from Brazil is but one example of the potential A Rocha is finding of engaging the global Christian community, both theologically and practically, in caring for God's creation. The approach needs to vary enormously according to cultural and ecclesiological contexts, and yet the example of A Rocha Brazil's Transformation Network also provides a carefully considered methodology, many aspects of which may be transferable. As the global church increasingly recovers Earth care as a central aspect of its faith and ministry, and is willing to partner with others, the consequences in ecological and spiritual terms can only be positive.

### Resources

- James Jones, *Jesus e a Terra – A ética Ambiental nos Evangelhos* (Viçosa, Brazil: Ultimato, 2008).
- James Jones, *Jesus and the Earth* (London, SPCK, 2003).
- C.F.B. Loureiro, *Trajetória e Fundamentos da Educação Ambiental* (São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez, 2004).
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- David Bookless, *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008).

# **CHRISTIAN MISSION AND EARTH CARE – A NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Per Ivar Våje

In Norway, the use of the country's natural resources is the main source of the nation's wealth and prosperity. At the same time, the exploitation of offshore oil and gas is the major contributor to climate change. What role have Christian movements in Norway played in this context? A new understanding of the role of Christians and churches in the current ecological crisis, and how to address it, is growing. This understanding invites a revitalised view of Christian mission, and the recognition of the earth's integrity as the foundation of mission. This chapter examines how the role of Christian witness and mission is understood and addressed within churches and organisations, as post-modern Norwegian society develops.

## **Christian Movements: Engines for Development, Democracy and Equality**

Norway is a small country with about five million inhabitants. In 2014, Norway celebrated the 200-year anniversary of its constitution; however, independence from Sweden was not gained until as late as 1905. By then, Christian lay movements and mission organisations contributed to the growth of civil society and the development of the democratic movement. For instance, the 'Haugians' – followers of the lay preacher and entrepreneur Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) revived society with their strong emphasis on work ethics and integrity. They also emphasised the authority of Scripture, creativity and innovation in the socio-economic life of society; leading to the formation of a number of small enterprises – many of which still exist as family businesses.

Haugians were highly concerned with world mission and evangelism. At a time when the church was viewed as the source of Christian mission, women in particular were the backbone of missions – they shared the word of God, prayed and collected money to send out missionaries. In 1842, the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) was founded as an independent organisation within the Church of Norway. It was the first democratically organised movement in Norway – setting an example for the formation of political parties in the country. As early as 1904, the NMS granted women the right to vote, nine years before they got their right to vote in political elections.

In 1845, it became legal in Norway to establish other churches apart from the official state church. While the Quakers had existed since 1814, many other churches were established: the Methodists (1856), the Baptists (1860), the Norwegian Lutheran Free Church (1877), the Mission Covenant Church of Norway (1884), the Salvation Army (1888), and the Pentecostal Church (1906). These new churches played a major role in empowering people from below. They showed Christian compassion and care, and also took part in establishing trade unions and political parties – thus building civil society and democracy in Norway.<sup>1</sup>

This background somehow explains the present context of Norway and, specifically, the Christian mission of Earth care. The belief in good stewardship, for example, was a core value of the Haugians. ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain’ (1 Tim. 6:6) was one of their key verses, while justice, equity and sharing with those in need formed their active community ethics. During that time, Norway was predominantly an agrarian society which depended on nature’s gifts and limitations. Nonetheless, the notion of human life being more valuable than the rest of Creation was slowly taking root. Due to poverty and suffering, however, Haugians stressed the equal value of all humans regardless of one’s socio-economic status. Still the ‘apartheid habit’ – the belief that humanity is separate or ‘apart’ from the natural world – is quite far from this tradition; it developed gradually as modernisation and industrialisation evolved.

At that time, Norway was among the poorest countries in Europe. Between 1825 and 1925, about 900.000 Norwegians out of a population of about two million, for example, migrated to the USA and Canada in search of a better life.<sup>2</sup> During the last fifty years, however, Norway has emerged as (per capita) one of the wealthiest countries in the world, mainly due to the exploitation of offshore oil and gas. This wealth has also resulted in the world’s largest sovereign wealth fund, the Government Pension Fund Global (SPU), currently worth more than 6,900 billion NOK (about 850 billion USD in March 2015). In order to avoid overheating the national economy, less than 4% of the fund is invested in Norway; the rest is invested in about 8,000 companies worldwide.<sup>3</sup> The Norwegian model of

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<sup>1</sup> Ingunn Folkestad Breistein and Dag Nygård (eds), *Free Churches, Lay Movements, Labor Movements and the Modern Norway (1880-1920)* (Norwegian: Frikirkelighet, lavkirkelighet, arbeiderbevegelse og det moderne Norge (1880-1920), Norges: Frikirkeråd, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Yngve Nedrebø. University of Bergen: <http://digitalarkivet.uib.no/sab/Norskutvandringshistorie.htm> (accessed 20th May 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Norges Bank Investment Management: [www.nbim.no/en/the-fund](http://www.nbim.no/en/the-fund) (accessed 20th May 2014).

management of our oil and gas resources has become an export article for international development.<sup>4</sup>

How is it possible to develop this resource without the curse that has struck so many nations – the accumulation of wealth by a small minority, while the vast majority remains in poverty? Arguably, the answer lies in a strong civil society, which holds its leaders accountable, in the biblical work ethic, and in eco-social justice.

### **The Challenge and the Responsibility**

In Norway's national inventory for Greenhouse gases (GHG), the petroleum industry counts for about 27% of national emissions – a total carbon footprint of about 10.5 ton CO<sub>2</sub> – equivalents per person. In 1990, the official national emissions were about 50 million ton CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents. The national goal for 2020 is 47 million.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that the industrialised countries must reduce their own domestic emissions by 25-40% compared with 1990 levels. Yet, Norway's national emissions increased to 52.8 million ton CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents in 2013.<sup>6</sup> But the reality is even worse – the oil and gas exported are not part of the national carbon inventory. If included, the burning of exported oil and gas would increase Norwegian CO<sub>2</sub> emissions tenfold.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we calculate the exported oil and gas as Norwegian when considering income and national wealth, but their negative contributions to climate change are not accounted for.

The Government Pension Fund Global (SPU) is a huge asset for Norway. The system of management is quite transparent, but many people are not satisfied with the investment strategy of our common savings. The Norwegian government declared its intention of creating a new programme within the SPU aimed at investing in sustainable businesses and projects in poor countries as well as in emerging markets. The government is also

<sup>4</sup> The Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad) / Scanteam, *Facing the Resource Curse: Norway's Oil for Development Program* (Evalueringsrapporter 6/2012).

<sup>5</sup> Norwegian Environment Agency, *Scientific Base for further Developing the National and International Climate-Policy* (Norwegian: Faglig grunnlag for videreutvikling av den nasjonale og internasjonale klimapolitikken, M-133, Oslo, Norway, 2014), 63.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Norway, *Emissions of Greenhouse Gases, 2013, Preliminary Figures*, May 2014: <http://ssb.no/en/natur-og-miljo/statistikker/klimagassn/aar-forelopige> (accessed 1st December 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Norwegian Church Aid and The Future in Our Hands, *Norwegian Oil- and Gas Production: Effects on Global CO<sub>2</sub>-Emissions and the Energy Situation in Low-Income Countries* (Norwegian: Norsk Olje- og Gassproduksjon: Effekter på globale CO<sub>2</sub>-utslipp og energisituasjonen i lavinntektsland. Kirkens Nødhjelp og Fremtiden i Våre Hender, 2013).

considering establishing a similar programme for renewable energy.<sup>8</sup> These changes may force other investors to follow, thus creating a shift towards eco-justice in the world economy, and a sustainable future.

In 2012 the International Energy Agency stated that two thirds of the proven reserves of fossil fuels should remain in the ground if the world is to achieve the global warming goal of less than 2°C.<sup>9</sup> The last report from the IPCC suggests that all coal and half of the oil and gas reserves should remain in the ground to meet this goal – the same observation made by Christophe McGlade and Paul Ekins in their article in *Nature*. But they add that the exploitation ‘of resources in the Arctic [is] incommensurate with efforts to limit average global warming to 2°C’.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, many African countries are discovering large reserves of oil and gas, and they want their fair share of development and wealth from these reserves. With what right should Norway continue to exploit its reserves? In 2013, for example, the Regional Ecumenical Forum of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, meeting in Kampala, Uganda, explored this ethical point under the theme, ‘The Role of the Church in Natural Resource Management’.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Durban, 2011, Geoff Davies, retired bishop of the Anglican Church in South Africa, directly challenged Norway: ‘Norway must stop drilling for oil!’<sup>12</sup> In a letter to the Norwegian Prime Minister in 2013, Oilwatch Africa, representing thirteen African countries, makes the same point but less directly: ‘The [Norwegian] Prime Minister has personally pointed out that reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation is among the fastest ways of reducing global emissions, because keeping the forest standing requires no technology. We would like to remind you that keeping

<sup>8</sup> The Norwegian Government, *Political Platform for a Government Formed by The Conservative Party and The Progressive Party* (Sundvolden, 7th October 2013): [www.hoyre.no/filestore/Filer/Politikkdokumenter/Politisk\\_platform\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.hoyre.no/filestore/Filer/Politikkdokumenter/Politisk_platform_ENGLISH.pdf) (accessed 20th May 2014).

<sup>9</sup> International Energy Agency, IEA, ‘Executive Summary,’ in *World Energy Outlook 2012* (Paris): [www.worldenergyoutlook.org](http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org) (accessed 10th July 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Christophe McGlade and Paul Ekins, ‘The Geographical Distribution of Fossil Fuels Unused when Limiting Global Warming to 2°C,’ in *Nature* 517 (January 2015), 187-90.

<sup>11</sup> Per Ivar Våje, *Churches and Civil Society Perspective on the Norwegian Experience in Managing Oil and Gas Resources* (A presentation for the Regional Ecumenical Forum of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) (Kampala, Uganda, 23rd-24th October 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Susanne Lende, ‘The Fight for Climate Justice,’ in *Climate Justice: A Magazine for Faith, Theology and Climate* (Norwegian: Kampen for klimarettferdighet, in *Klimarettferdighet. Skaperverk og bærekraft*, 2013), 21-24, 32.

undiscovered oil and gas in the ground similarly requires no costly or technologically advanced measures.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to realise that poor countries and the poorest within our society will suffer the most from the negative effects of climate change. In addition to being prone to extreme weather disasters, an increasing population in most developing countries will suffer from hunger due to crop failure as well as the lack of clean drinking water. Rising water levels will affect millions living in low-lying areas, especially those who cannot afford to live elsewhere. Unfortunately, these are the least significant contributors to the emission of Greenhouse gases (GHG) responsible for climate change. In Norway, we are seeing the consequences of climate change – frequent extreme weather events, changes in average temperature, snow cover and precipitation. The ice cap at the North Pole is decreasing more rapidly than estimated a few years ago, while the average temperature in the Arctic has increased by more than the global average.

Worse still, up to 90% of the increased energy accumulated into the earth and in the atmosphere due to the increased concentration of GHG, is absorbed by the oceans.<sup>14</sup> The oceans take longer to heat than the land, but they also store energy for much longer. A warmer ocean will also accelerate the melting of sea ice from below. Besides, the snow-covered white surface of the earth reflects most of the radiation from the sun back into the atmosphere (the albedo effect). As the sea ice or snow-covered surface decreases, the much darker open sea will instead absorb the energy from the sun, thus further accelerating the heating up of the ocean.

Moreover, increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increase CO<sub>2</sub> in the oceans. While the oceans absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, CO<sub>2</sub> increases the acidic level of the oceans. The acidification of the ocean is already affecting calcareous shells in coral reefs and other marine species. If coral reefs or shells of other marine species start to disintegrate, then a tipping-point of deterioration of almost all eco-systems of the ocean may be reached. This will furthermore be disastrous to all fisheries.

Paradoxically, we are aware of the consequences of climate change in years to come, but most Norwegians still believe that we will adapt to its effects. For many others across the globe, however, this is not a question of adaptation, but of mere survival. This was despondently experienced on 8th November 2013, when the most powerful typhoon ever to hit land wiped out most of what got in its way, killing over 6,300 people and displacing

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<sup>13</sup> Oilwatch Africa, 'Norway Must Leave its Oil Under the Ground!', in a letter to the Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, and the Minister of Petroleum and Energy: [www.oilwatchafrica.org](http://www.oilwatchafrica.org) (accessed 20th May 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Stocker D. Qin et al (eds), *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis: Working Group I Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



millions in the Philippines alone. The January 2015 floods in Southern Africa are another example.

The global problem of climate change has given Norway and other nations a crucial responsibility to compensate for the effects of climate change. A recent report from Norwegian Church Aid – an ecumenical Christian organisation working in 32 countries – suggests that the fair share of an ambitious climate effort from Norway will be to reduce global GHG emissions by more than 320 million ton CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents by 2030.<sup>15</sup> Since this is impossible to do in Norway alone, the report suggests a domestic reduction of 50% and additional technical and financial support for mitigation efforts abroad to achieve roughly 270 million ton CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents by 2030.

But this is not just a political call to action. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) calls on its member churches to ‘engage in sustained climate justice advocacy with local and national governments as soon as possible and to promote and work with ecumenical and interfaith climate justice initiatives in the local, national and regional contexts’.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the European Christian Environment Network (ECEN) states that ‘as churches and faith communities, we are called upon to care for our neighbour, and our neighbour is every living creature in God’s Creation. We call upon the churches and church leaders across Europe to respond to the spiritual and practical crisis of climate change’.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Theological Justification for the Mission of Earth Care**

The basis for ‘Creation care’ is that God created everything, and declared that all Creation was very good (Gen. 1:31). Destroying this wonderful Creation – the bio-diversity and the intricate ecosystems, which show the glory of the Creator, is contrary to God’s original intention. When humanity was created in God’s image, that image was directly linked with the responsibility to care for all God’s Creation (Gen. 1:27-28). No other creature shares this responsibility. When sin entered the world, it was a direct violation of the mandate of stewardship of the Garden of Eden. The sin was not only that Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, but also that they went beyond the God-mandated limits for using creation. Thus, the over-exploitation of Creation to our own short-sighted benefit and mere human greed are at the heart of our global environmental problem and the suffering of all Creation (Rom. 8:22).

<sup>15</sup> Norwegian Church Aid and Stockholm Environment Institute, *Norway’s Fair Share of an Ambitious Climate Effort* (August 2014), 24.

<sup>16</sup> Lutheran World Federation, *Statement on Climate Justice* (16th June 2014).

<sup>17</sup> 10th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network, ‘The Churches and Faith Communities of Europe Have a Role and a Voice in Responding to Climate Change: Letter to Church Leaders and the Churches of Europe’ (27th September-1st October 2014).

When we alter the ecosystems of the world and species become extinct, this is not outside the interest of the Creator. God knows every sparrow that falls to the earth (Matt. 10:29). Sadly, the eradication or extinction of species is now more rapid than ever before, mostly due to habitat destruction and fragmentation. What if these species are some of ‘the least of these’ that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 25:40-45? Surely Jesus recognises their destruction, which is definitely contrary to the will of the Creator.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, through Jesus Christ, God himself became human in order to restore broken relationships; that is the relationship between God and humanity, between men and women of all tribes, colors and tongues (Gal. 3:28), and the relationship between humanity and the rest of Creation (Col. 1:20). Biblically, the Gospel of God’s Kingdom through Jesus Christ includes all Creation. As the Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment states, ‘If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says, “Jesus is Lord” is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ’s Lordship is over all Creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.’<sup>19</sup>

Although we need the natural world to survive, Jesus warns against the love of money: we cannot serve both God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). The love of money is destructive to our relationship with God, one another and the natural world. Again, the Cape Town Commitment asserts, ‘To live out the love for God’s Creation and for all human beings means that we repent from our part in the destruction and our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism, both as individuals and as a society. Instead we should commit ourselves to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility through advocacy and action.’ For Norway, this responsibility cannot be isolated from the source of our nation’s wealth – the exploitation of fossil fuel.

### **The Church of Norway**

Through the Reformation, the Church of Norway (CoN) became a Lutheran Church. In 1660, it constitutionally became a state church. In 2012, the CoN was granted increased autonomy by the Norwegian Parliament, and ties with the State were relaxed. In 2014, about 3.8 million Norwegians are baptised as members of the CoN – 74% of the population.<sup>20</sup>

For many years, the CoN has been a critical voice against unjust social structures. The church advocated sustainable lifestyles and care for

<sup>18</sup> Heidi Westborg Steel, *One of Those Small of Mine: About Mission, Climate and Nature* (Norwegian: En av disse mine minste. Om misjon, Klima og natur. Luthersk Kirketidende (3/2014), 56-60.

<sup>19</sup> ‘The Cape Town Commitment’.

<sup>20</sup> Church of Norway: [www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=11943](http://www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=11943) (accessed 10th February 2015).

Creation. As early as 1969 the bishops' conference formulated a message about environmental degradation. In 1992, they commissioned the report 'The Consumer Society as an Ethical Challenge'.<sup>21</sup> Since 1996, the General Synod (GS) of the CoN has addressed consumerism and issues of eco-justice. In addition to establishing the Fairtrade Foundation in 1997, the CoN developed the term 'Green Congregations' in 1999. Through a common commitment, the local congregation can serve as a motivating link between individual action and national policy. In many places, action by local congregations enhance co-operation with other 'activists,' thereby changing society from below. The CoN has also established groups of resource persons at diocesan level to highlight its work on consumption, environment, justice, sustainability and Creation (see also A Rocha, and the chapter by Cederholm in this volume). These resource groups arrange meetings, support green congregations and encourage other congregations to go green.

In 2003, the CoN organised a major ecumenical event that focused on the Ocean: 'The North Sea Sailing Seminar on Responsible Stewardship'. Politicians, church leaders, business owners and environmentalists around the North Sea were invited to a boat trip from Stavanger to the CEC (Conference of European Churches) Assembly in Trondheim. Participants discussed climate change-related issues such as the oil industry, fisheries and sea farming, from which emerged the 'Geiranger Declaration on Responsible Stewardship'.<sup>22</sup> In 2007, the GS recognised the need for a profound change in the basic values of individuals and society in order to address the threat posed by climate change. It stated that the church had a particular responsibility in this process of change and concluded that there was a need for new and profound reform in regard to the human understanding of nature within the church itself. The same year, the CoN adopted a new definition and plan for *diakonia*: 'Diakonia is the caring ministry of the church. It is the gospel in action, and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for Creation, and the struggle for justice.'<sup>23</sup>

Since then, GS decisions (2008, 2012 and 2013) have built on and also strengthened the 2007 statement. In 2009, all bishops and the leadership of the CoN participated in a sailing conference to COP 15 – meeting in Copenhagen, arranged by the Norwegian Church Aid, and The Future in Our Hands. The Bishops also challenged Norwegian authorities to withdraw from exploiting tar-sand in Canada by the Norwegian company

<sup>21</sup> Church of Norway Information Service, *The Consumer Society as an Ethical Challenge* (Report from the Norwegian Bishops' Conference 1992; 1995).

<sup>22</sup> 'The Geiranger Declaration on Responsible Stewardship': [www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=doLink&famId=3264](http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=doLink&famId=3264) (accessed 10th February 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia in the Church of Norway* (Norwegian: Plan for diakoni i Den norske kirke, 2008).

Statoil. To show the seriousness of the problem, the CoN sold all its shares in Statoil, a decision that attracted a lot of public attention.

In 2013, the GS released a public statement about the SPU, challenging the management of the fund to invest less in fossil fuels and more in renewable energy, as well as in poor countries, in ways that would benefit the poor.<sup>24</sup> The statement challenged the government to readjust the national policy for oil and energy to be in line with national commitments to reduce global GHG emissions. The government invited civil society to comment on investments in coal and petroleum companies, and in July 2014, the CoN responded to this challenge. It called on the government to strengthen ethical considerations regarding management of the fund – that is to invest less in fossil energy, more in renewable energy and in poor countries.<sup>25</sup>

### Ecumenical Work through Churches and Organisations

The ideals of Hans Nielsen Hauge are still valid. Many active members of churches and Christian organisations are not comfortable with the huge accumulation of wealth in Norway in contrast to poverty and suffering elsewhere. For this reason, Christians consider giving money, time and manpower to missionary work all over the world as an integral part of the mission of God. A newly published report from Digni (an umbrella organisation for the development work of nineteen churches and mission societies in Norway) and the Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelism (made up of 43 mission organisations and churches<sup>26</sup>) states that their member organisations represent a strong active force in society. From 250,000 to 300,000 active members, they collect about 1.3 billion NOK (215 million US\$) annually. This is equal to the financial support from the Norwegian government to the same organisations and churches, which also includes contributions to running costs for several institutions like schools and kindergartens.<sup>27</sup> The Pentecostal movement alone gathers 300 million NOK a year (50 million US\$).

For mission organisations and the free churches, active participation in society through charity or diaconal work in Norway and internationally is a

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<sup>24</sup> Church of Norway, *KM 12/13: Proper Ethical stewardship of Norwegian Petroleum Resources and Use of the Oil-Fund* (Norwegian: Forsvarlig etisk forvaltning av norske petroleumsressurser og bruk av oljefondet): [www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=343467](http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=343467) (accessed 10th January 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Church of Norway, 'Considerations regarding investments in coal and petroleum companies within the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global (GPF); a letter to the Ministry of Finance, 16th July 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Norme, Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelism, 'Members of Norme': <http://norme.no/om-norme/medlemmer> (accessed 10th January 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Frank-Ole Thoresen. *Membership Statistics for Digni and Norme, 2012* (Norwegian: Medlemsstatistikk for Digni og Norme, 2012).

natural consequence of the Christian faith. The Salvation Army, the Pentecostal Church and the Church City Mission in Norway (Kirkens Bymisjon) are highly appreciated in society for their social justice work among sex-workers and people with drug addictions, to mention but two. In addition, mission organisations have long experience in development projects related to environmental issues such as pure drinking water, energy-saving stoves, soil and water conservation, watershed management, organic farming, environmental education, protection of natural forests and afforestation programmes. The Co-operation for Congregation and Mission within the CoN (SMM) has identified several ‘green projects’ within their seven member organisations. Despite these positive developments, the underlying understanding of mission is still anthropocentric.

It is important to realise that Christian mission conceived as *missio Dei* (God’s mission) is rather new.<sup>28</sup> This concept widens the perspective of mission to embrace all Creation. Within the Environmental Competence Building Program (led by NMS, together with Digni and some other Digni member organisations and partners), these issues are under discussion. The programme seeks to link Creation care, theology and mission.

Digni focuses on long-term development, and manages and safeguards support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad) to projects of their member organisations in about forty countries. Whereas Digni identifies environmental degradation as one of the cross-cutting issues of all its projects, it also highlights global issues as well as the responsibility we share with other nations of causing climate change through our emissions and lifestyles.

Mission organisations and churches are equally highlighting environmental issues. The ‘Fretex’ company of the Salvation Army, which opened in 1905, is based not only on collecting and selling, but on redesigning and making new products out of used clothes and other secondhand products.<sup>29</sup> The concept of recycling and secondhand stores has grown immensely in the past two decades: NMS (45 shops), the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (27 shops), and Normisjon (six shops). Here several values and needs of the organisations are merged: generating income for the mission, creating a social meeting place for people, and care for the environment through recycling and reduced consumption. Furthermore, many churches and Christian organisations have adopted fairtrade policy, guaranteeing the producers a fair price.

The Norwegian Church Aid and their youth organisation, Changemaker, have for many years focused on advocacy along with long-term development aid and emergency preparedness and response. As part of their mission, they have focused on climate change, both through

<sup>28</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Fretex Norge AS, *Fretex Annual Report 2012* (Årsrapport 2012), 52: [www.fretex.no/om-fretex](http://www.fretex.no/om-fretex) (accessed 10th January 2015).

influencing decision-making processes, and through projects of climate change adaptation. Many reports on climate change are available in English at the NCA website.<sup>30</sup>

The work of the Christian Council of Norway (CCN) has also promoted care for Creation among its nineteen member churches and eight observers. Together with the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations of CoN, they have developed 'Creation Day' as an ecumenical concept. With inputs from different church traditions, they published a booklet *Faith and Creation*, as a theological foundation for engagement with creation. In addition, other denominations like the Lutheran Free Church, the Methodist Church and the Salvation Army play active roles in promoting these issues within their congregations. The Salvation Army, for example, has its own 'environmental plan for congregations,' while the Methodist Church has developed resource materials for green congregations. The Lutheran Free Church has a working group on global warming and has published a thematic booklet on the church and climate change.<sup>31</sup>

### Creation and Sustainability

In 2008, the project 'Creation and Sustainability' was launched as a joint project of the Christian Council of Norway, the CoN and the Norwegian Church Aid. The project had a ten-year horizon as a decade of change in church and society from 2008 to 2017.

The project aims to:

1. Be a driving force for and contribute to a sustainable society locally, nationally and globally.
2. Contribute to a just, binding and ambitious climate agreement, and mobilizing people in church and society to support this.
3. Demonstrate care for creation, the environment, and a consciousness for our consumption and global justice.
4. Create hope and confidence for the future through words and deeds.<sup>32</sup>

Through networking and ecumenical co-operation among churches, the project strives to create increased awareness of the threats of climate change and a common theological justification for Creation care. The project has finalised two foundational documents on the challenge of

<sup>30</sup> The Norwegian Church Aid, [www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/About-NCA/Publications/Reports](http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/About-NCA/Publications/Reports) (accessed 10th January 2015).

<sup>31</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, *The Church and the Challenge of Climate Change* (Norwegian: Kirken og klimautfordringene, Den Evangelisk Lutherske Frikirke, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Church of Norway, General Synod, *KM 5/08: Sustainability and Creation: Ecumenical Project for Changing Church and Society* (Norwegian: Bærekraft og skaperverk. Økumenisk prosjekt for endring av kirke og samfunn 2007-2017).

climate change.<sup>33</sup> These documents will be available in Norwegian and English. The website [www.gronnkirke.no](http://www.gronnkirke.no) serves as a common platform for the sharing of information and relevant resources for churches, congregations and individuals. Resource groups at the diocesan level of the CoN are included in the project, and all churches are invited to join. The concept 'Green congregation' is also included in the project and covers a growing number of churches from other denominations. By June 2015, there were about 300 Green congregations within the Church of Norway, and ten in other denominations.

The project also works with theological education institutions to promote the inclusion of Creation care within missiology, theology and *diakonia*. Newly developed documents on the background of climate change and theology will serve as resources and tools among pastors, priests and teachers at relevant educational institutions. The project also co-operates with educators among children and youth, and aims at promoting these ecological values in the education and presentation of the Christian faith.

But this engagement is not limited to churches. In 2013, the project was actively involved in the 'Klimavalg 2013' campaign, aimed at mobilising people to elevate the challenge of climate change on the political agenda for parliamentary elections. Out of 101 organisations, thirty were churches and Christian organisations; Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Quakers, the Salvation Army and several other Christian organisations joined forces with environmental organisations, trade unions and professionals, and agreed on a common statement of six political demands to politicians. These demands included reducing Norwegian CHG-emissions as per UN recommendations, 'giving specific content and meaning to the term Climate Justice,' creating 'green jobs to replace jobs in the oil and gas industry,' and taking 'seriously the solidarity between generations'. Through local action, politicians were challenged to address climate change in about twenty places throughout the country before the election. Through this initiative, the campaign lifted the issue of climate change from a minor to a major public attention-grabbing issue.

The mere existence of such a massive movement made it hard to be ignored by either the media or by politicians. A major contribution to this campaign from the 'Creation and Sustainability' project was the organising and motivating of churches and Christian organisations to join and actively take part in the campaign, and to publish the magazine 'Klimarettferdighet' (climate justice), which gives a scientific as well as a biblical justification for the engagement of churches in the fight against climate change. Apart

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<sup>33</sup> Foundation document for the project Creation and Sustainability: 1) Climate Change. 2) Theological justification. (Norwegian: Faglig grunnlag for Prosjekt Skaperverk og bærekraft, 2014: 1) Klimafaglig grunnlag. 2) Teologisk faglig grunnlag), 2014.



from being a positive surprise to many, the contribution from Christians opened up many new possibilities for co-operation. One example was the conference ‘The Bridge to the Future,’ held on 27th February 2014 and 13th March 2015, which focused on the transformation of Norwegian society to a zero-emission society and the move away from fossil fuel dependency.

### **The Interfaith Track**

Since the Uppsala Declaration from a conference convened by the Church of Sweden in 2008, interfaith collaboration has gained momentum in Norway.<sup>34</sup> In our context, NCA and CoN have supported such initiatives. Ecumenical co-operation within the project was further witnessed during the UN Conference of the Parties (COP 17) meeting in Durban in 2011. At COP 17, the campaign ‘We have faith – Act now for climate justice’ was launched, primarily as an African faith-based initiative. Norway sent a delegation of religious leaders to advocate for a more binding and just climate agreement. Different religions represented a common ethical ground for the protection of Creation, thus opposing over-exploitation from the rich and the suffering of the poor. The common voice of faith leaders from all over the world drew a lot of attention.

Such inter-religious campaigns were also witnessed during the COP 18 in Doha and COP 19 in Warsaw, where a delegation of a Muslim, a Jew, two Catholics and a pair from two different Lutheran churches organised inter-religious side-events. The group met with the official Norwegian delegation on several occasions. It was commended for raising awareness of the ethical aspects of climate justice from various religious traditions. Religions standing together in unity multiply the weight of their statements more than those given individually.

### **The Mission of God – in a Norwegian Context**

Mission organisations within the CoN have lived out the call to international missions. To some extent, the various mission organisations have defined their mission identity within or outside the CoN. Somehow, the calling of bringing the gospel to all nations has been considered relevant to those with a special interest and commitment within these organisations, rather than a call to the church as a whole. After being challenged by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2004, however, the Church of Norway defined itself during the 2005 GS as a missional church. The CoN clearly affirmed the importance of co-operation with the mission

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<sup>34</sup> ‘The Uppsala Interfaith Manifesto: Hope for the Future,’ 29th November 2008: [www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=664984](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=664984) (accessed 10th January 2015).



organisations, insisting that all congregations should be missional congregations.

Churches and mission organisations in Norway have in general agreed upon the inclusion of *diakonia* as a part of the mission of God. There are, however, different traditions as to what extent *diakonia* is seen as an equally valued part of the mission of God, or of secondary value compared with the proclamation and teaching of the gospel. In another document from the LWF (2009), the definition of *diakonia* was challenged. Today, the fight for justice and care for Creation are included in the definition of *diakonia*. This means that political campaigns and advocacy are missiological issues. The Cape Town Commitment and the Lausanne Global Consultation on ‘Creation Care and the Gospel’ underlined the same view.<sup>35</sup>

Although the World Council of Churches and the LWF have highlighted the social and political aspects of Christian mission, in the Lausanne movement the emphasis on Creation care is rather new (for the history of Evangelical perspectives, see Dave Bookless in this volume). This has also led to a gradual change in the spoken messages from several Norwegian mission organizations closely linked to the Lausanne movement as opposed to the WCC and LWF. On 3rd September 2012, the leaders of the three main Lutheran mission organisations of Norway – Normisjon, Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society – published an article in the leading Christian newspaper of Norway, *Vårt Land*.<sup>36</sup> Apart from calling for a new model of society no longer based upon limitless economic growth and consumption, on behalf of their three organisations, the three mission leaders invited Norway to repent from over-consumption, with its heavy burden on God’s creation, and making us idol-worshippers. But, as Bård Mæland writes, ‘These are stronger words than what are used in the official documents from bishops’ conferences and the General Synod of the CoN.’<sup>37</sup>

The echo from the Cape Town Commitment in this statement can be heard. The fact that these organisations care for Creation and justice is nothing new; they have long traditions for doing so. Their call for structural change, however, is rather remarkable and novel. At the same time, this

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<sup>35</sup> The Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, ‘Jamaica Creation Care Call to Action’ (St Ann, Jamaica, November 2012): <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/fore/files/2013/01/Jamaica-Creation-Care-Call-to-Action.pdf> (accessed 10th March 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey Huseby, Rolf Kjode and Øyvind Åsland, *Society has Gone Astray* (Vårt Land, 3rd September 2012). (Norwegian: Samfunnet har gått seg vill). Also published in Klimarettferdighet, 2013: Et magasin om tro, teologi og Klima. Skaperverk og bærekraft.

<sup>37</sup> Bård Mæland, *The Greening of Mission – Norwegian and Ecumenical Perspectives* (Norwegian: Misjonens forgrønning – Norske og økumeniske perspektiver), in *Luthersk Kirketidende* 3 (2014), 61-66.

change is completely in line with the traditional ideals of these organisations: austerity, charity, the work ethic and devotion. The problem of environmental degradation generally, and climate change specifically, is of such a magnitude and severity that it can no longer remain in the private sphere. The three mission leaders call upon a change of structure and society, which clearly involves engagement in advocacy and entering into the political sphere. There may still be a long way from a statement from mission leaders, one may safely argue, to the general acceptance of these ideas at the grassroots of mission organisations.

### **The Fight against Climate Change as a Concept of Christian Mission**

The threat of climate change is not solved by one single measure; it is so complex that all possible contributions towards the common goal are essential. One may have different reasons for trying to avoid the calamity, but that should not be an obstacle to co-operation. Even among scientists there is a growing understanding that religions and religious leaders are needed to raise awareness of ethical and moral imperatives to protect the planet. A 2014 article in the journal *Science* acknowledges that religious leaders can instigate the ‘massive mobilisation of public opinion’ needed to stem the destruction of ecosystems around the world in a way that governments and scientists cannot.<sup>38</sup> The chief editor of *Science*, Marcia McNutt, added her voice to the editorial,<sup>39</sup> while Naomi Oreskes, the Harvard-based historian of science and climate change issues, described the paper as ‘a watershed moment’.<sup>40</sup> In Creation care, we do not fight other religions or ‘non-believers;’ we fight destruction, indifference and carelessness towards God’s Creation. We must reorient our mind-set and comprehend that this is not *our* mission, but *God’s* mission.

Finally, Christian movements, churches and mission organisations have played a crucial role in shaping current Norwegian society. The Creator has blessed us with an abundance of natural wealth. Our stewardship of this wealth has been characterised by fairness and transparency, securing a fair distribution of welfare within Norwegian society. However, in a global context, our growing economic wealth is at the expense of billions who do not have the same access to such resources. Moreover, our consumption is far from sustainable. Knowing the loving heart of God towards all

<sup>38</sup> Partha Dasgupta and Veerabhadran Ramanathan, ‘Pursuit of the Common Good,’ in *Science* 345 (19th September 2014), 1457-58.

<sup>39</sup> Marcia McNutt, ‘The Pope Tackles Sustainability,’ *Science* 345 (19th September 2014), 1429.

<sup>40</sup> University of Cambridge, ‘Science Turns to Religion for ‘Mass Mobilization’ on Environmental Change’ (19th September 2014): [www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/science-turns-to-religion-for-mass-mobilisation-on-environmental-change#](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/science-turns-to-religion-for-mass-mobilisation-on-environmental-change#) (accessed 10th November 2014).

Creation, and God's mission of reconciliation with all creatures, Christian mission in Norway must include the call for changing our dependence on fossil fuels. It must find its way back to 'Haugian' roots where 'Godliness with contentment is great gain'.

### Resources

- Ingunn Folkestad Breistein and Dag Nygård (eds), *Free Churches, lay movements, labor movements and the modern Norway (1880-1920)*. (Norwegian: Frikirkelighet, lavkirkelighet, arbeiderbevegelse og det moderne Norge (1880-1920), Norges Frikirkeråd, 2002).
- Bård Mæland, 'The Greening of Mission – Norwegian and Ecumenical Perspectives' (Norwegian: Misjonens forgrønning – Norske og økumeniske perspektiver), in *Luthersk Kirketidende* (3/2014), 61-66.
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- The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (Geneva: LWF, 2009).

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# SECTION TWO

## EARTH CARE IN CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Loving nature is a sacred mission  
Silently articulated, and heard by all  
On all continents,  
Africa, Asia, Europe,  
South and North America,  
By all races, faiths, and religions,  
In churches, temples and mosques,  
In the beauty of nature,  
Our hearts and our minds mingle,  
With all Creatures in the heavens,  
In the Skies, the Seas and on Earth,  
In the harmony untold,  
All differences disappear,  
We become One, for the Earth and God is One.

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# HISTORICAL TRENDS IN MISSIONS AND EARTH CARE

Dana L Robert

Over the past thirty years, all major branches of Christianity have thought about what it means to extend the saving work of Christ beyond individual human redemption.<sup>1</sup> In 1979, Pope John Paul II declared the great missionary, St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, and called for the laity to draw upon the power of the resurrection 'to restore to creation all its original value'.<sup>2</sup> In 1989, mainline Protestants and Orthodox, through the World Council of Churches, embraced the ideas of 'justice, peace, and the integrity of creation' as intrinsic to the nature of Christian witness. In 2004 evangelical leaders met at Sandy Cove, in the town of North East, Maryland, and pledged to advance God's reign by making 'Creation care a permanent dimension of our Christian discipleship'.<sup>3</sup> Recent opinion polls of evangelical Protestants show that earth care is one of their top five priorities. Across many traditions, Christians in the twenty-first century believe that the wholeness and reconciliation desired by God include his creation. In 2010, both the Lausanne III and Edinburgh 2010 conference processes generated missiological reflection on Christian responsibility towards the earth.<sup>4</sup>

But what has been the historic role of missions in earth care? The history of Christian missions provides rich data showing a diversity of missionary attitudes towards traditional nature-based practices. The recurring themes that follow, by no means exhaustive or systematic, suggest the multiplicity of ways in which individual missionaries have understood their engagement with nature and with the existing nature practices they have encountered. History reminds us that missionary relationships with the natural world have never been static, and that each generation engages

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<sup>1</sup> This article is edited from an address at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, December 2009, given to a conference of mission leaders for the purpose of promoting missiological reflection. In accord with its intent to provide an impressionistic overview of the sweep of practices and issues, footnotes are kept to a minimum. Reprinted with slight variation from the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35: 3 (July 2011), 123-28.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Allan Effa, 'The Greening of Mission,' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32 (October 2008), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Effa, 'The Greening of Mission,' 173.

<sup>4</sup> Official statements from both conferences mentioned the need for Christians to care for God's creation. For 'The Common Call of Edinburgh 2010,' see: [www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org). For 'The Cape Town Commitment,' see IBMR 35 (April 2011), 59-80: [www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment).

nature in accordance with its own knowledge and values. The final section of the article, while holding past missionary experience in mind, considers how future mission practice might shape human relationships with God's creation.

### Competition and Suppression

Throughout the thousand-year span during which Europe was converted to Christianity, one prominent mission theme was that of competition between the 'civilised' religion of the sacred book and Roman laws, and the 'uncivilised' religion of orality and nature-based spirits. The sixth-century missionary Martin of Braga wrote of the challenges involved in converting the rural peasants, or 'rustics,' whose pagan practices he connected with the idolatry condemned in the Old Testament. He argued that demons expelled from heaven found their homes in streams and rivers, and even lent their names to the days of the week, and he condemned the practices of new converts as the religion of the devil.<sup>5</sup>

In the conversion of Europe, the Christian struggle against pagan nature religion was long and violent. In Trent in 397, missionaries who had tried to prevent their converts from participating in traditional agricultural and fertility festivals, were murdered. Destruction of sacred groves and woodland altars was a central feature of Christian 'power encounters' with indigenous religion. The Anglo-Saxon missionary Bishop Boniface was said to have felled the Sacred Oak of Thor in northern Hesse in 723. Drawing an analogy with Elijah and the priests of Baal, Boniface challenged the pagan gods to strike him down as he cut down the tree. According to Boniface's first biographer, a wind blew down the oak while he was chopping it. After Thor did not strike Boniface dead, the people began converting to Christianity. Boniface built a church with the wood of the oak – a symbolic beginning for the Christianisation of the German people.

In early Christianity, Mediterranean-based theologians had considered the rich farmlands, olives and grapes of their own region to be proof of the superiority of Christianity over the desolation of the 'pagan' and 'barbaric' northern wilderness. Continued efforts to eradicate paganism through controlling nature – through both power encounters and the expansion of agriculture – were a common feature of medieval monasticism. As monks moved into Europe, they tamed the landscape through the introduction of dikes, viniculture, cheese-making, and other forms of settled farming. The settlement of nomadic peoples around monastic centres was seen by the

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<sup>5</sup> Martin of Braga, 'On the Castigation of Rustics,' in J.N. Hilgarth (ed), *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 1969), 62.



church as a sign of the progress of Christianity over the power of pagan religion.

With the conquest of the Americas, the monastic model was extended to the reductions and missions staffed by Franciscans, Jesuits and other religious communities from the 1500s to the 1700s. Native Americans living on the missions farmed and grew cereal grains and other products that they sold to European settlers for their self-support. In colonial Philippines, the corruption of the religious orders meant that the church controlled most of the land, forcing the Filipinos to farm it, and forbade traditional practices of land use and fishing. The colonial 'mission station' was a double-edged sword from an environmental perspective: it simultaneously imposed itself on the terrain and stabilised food production that made possible concentrated settlements of people. In a spiritual sense, the routinisation of agriculture around the missions went hand-in-hand with the suppression of pagan religious practices.

### **Inculturation and Transformation**

The inculturation and transformation of many pre-Christian nature-based practices is another important motif in the history of Christian mission. In 601, Pope Gregory the Great wrote what has become a classic missiological text on cultural accommodation:

The heathen temples of these people need not be destroyed, only the idols which are to be found in them... If the temples are well built, it is a good idea to detach them from the service of the devil, and to adapt them for the worship of the true God... And since the people are accustomed, when they assemble for sacrifice, to kill many oxen in sacrifice to the devils, it seems reasonable to appoint a festival for the people by way of exchange. The people must learn to slay their cattle, not in honour of the devil, but in honour of God and for their own food; when they have eaten and are full, then they must render thanks to the giver of all good things. If we allow them these outward joys, they are more likely to find their way to the true inner joy.<sup>6</sup>

The dramatic power encounter represented by Boniface and the Oak of Thor was probably less common than the mundane transformations that have, in retrospect, been seen as either syncretism or indigenisation. That the desecrated wood of European druidic sacred groves was used to construct the first churches indicates the desire of Christian missionaries both to conquer nature and to provide controlled continuity with the people's sense of the sacred. St Francis of Assisi himself drew upon longstanding Christian traditions of natural religion and earth care in his appreciation of God's creation as friend rather than enemy.

Over the centuries of effort to convert Europe, many practices related to pagan nature religion were gradually transformed into Christian customs, or

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<sup>6</sup> Norman E. Thomas, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 22.

else survived underground as popular practices disconnected from the official Christian world-view. Most western Christians today enjoy Christmas trees covered with lights, for example, and no longer relate them to druidic sacrifices in Celtic or Germanic sacred groves. The lighting of an Advent wreath and the setting of Christmas to roughly coincide with the winter solstice are examples of the transformation of pre-Christian nature religion. At the same time, traditional tribal societies depended for survival on a right relationship with the cosmic forces, and the codification of traditional laws such as the Lex Salica was one of the great contributions of Christian missions to early European societies.

### Preservation

Along with inculturation of indigenous nature practices, Orthodox Christian mission contains notable examples of an essentially sacramental approach to conversion from paganism that focused on the preservation of the natural world. For example, the life and work of the hermit St Herman of Alaska (d. 1837) is known for its sympathetic engagement with Aleut religion through liturgical and sacramental practices, translations into local languages, and living in solidarity at the poverty level of the ordinary people. Herman became head of the Russian mission in 1799. Because he tried to protect the Aleuts against exploitation by Russian traders, he worked for the sustainability of wildlife. He objected to the slaughter of sea animals by western traders. His famous power encounters were on behalf of the people, such as when he protected them from fires and tidal waves through a combination of spiritual and practical measures. The Orthodox spirituality he employed saw nature as sacramental – as pointing towards the salvific process of *theosis*, by which humans become more godlike. This essentially positive view of the spiritual relationship of persons to nature, which springs from deep Orthodox roots, combined with the traditional Aleut sense of spiritual force and balance in nature, including respect for the spirit of the animals that sacrifice themselves for human consumption.

At the time of Alaska's sale to the US, the Orthodox mission had nine churches (including a cathedral), 35 outlying chapels, and 32 clergy, many of whom were native Aleuts. The success of the mission's holistic approach was affirmed by the faithfulness of the Aleuts to their Orthodox faith, despite the cruel pressure and acquisitive materialism of movements to forcibly Protestantise and Americanise them after the purchase of Alaska in 1867. In 1970, Herman was canonised as the first North American Orthodox saint.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbara Sweetland Smith, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1980), and Michael Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

### Engaging the Earth in Protestant Mission

Protestant missionary engagement with the earth has been diverse, wide-ranging, and closely attentive to the details of human interaction with the environments upon which humans depend for sustenance. Although the 'civilisation' model has probably prevailed throughout most of the history of Christianity, the popular assumption that missionaries have destroyed the land is a product more of contemporary environmental discourse than an historically informed opinion. Obviously, Christians have exploited and abused the land for centuries, and missionaries have benefited from their relationship with colonial economies. But mission history reveals a complex picture in which missionaries have also become guardians of natural resources and prophets of sustainability. The first Shona dictionary produced by missionaries in Rhodesia, for example, contained an appendix listing the names of all the indigenous trees and plants.

### *Civilising the Wilderness*

The dream of creating a new Garden of Eden inspired missionaries who experienced the mission field as a disorderly, spirit-ridden wilderness needing to be tamed. The vision of subduing nature and replacing the wilderness with the fields and farms of civilisation was a common trope among early European Protestant missionaries. Western missionaries often sought to replicate the rural villages from which they had come, and aspired to create a self-supporting 'yeoman class' as the basis for healthy churches in Africa and Asia. In North America, the tidy farms and orchards of Moravian Indians in Pennsylvania and Ohio were seen as a sign of their Christian character. Idealistic missionaries naïvely assumed that teaching indigenous converts to farm would ensure that their rights would be respected by white immigrants.

The 'pastoral ideal' in nineteenth-century Protestant missions has been extensively studied and critiqued, and the Protestant missionary's faith in the spiritual and moral power of modern farming has been a source of contemporary scholarly controversy. The poster child for this dispute is Robert Moffatt, of the London Missionary Society (LMS), often called 'God's Gardener' because he was literally a gardener before he went to southern Africa as a missionary in 1817, taking with him his gardener's tools and books on botany and agriculture. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have meticulously documented how Moffatt used modern methods for the production of crops as a means by which to attack traditional religion and authority structures. By introducing irrigation to water his gardens, for example, he both undercut the power of the chiefs, by rendering their rain-making unnecessary, and challenged the traditional

authority of women based on their control over agricultural production.<sup>8</sup> In his sermons on God's providence, Moffatt tried to drive a wedge between traditional religious authorities and control of the natural world. In the eyes of modern scholars such as the Comaroffs, the work of missionaries like Moffatt represents the worst of cultural imperialism. But for mission history, Moffatt remains a founding father of Tswana Christianity, whose methods – for better or worse – were consistent with those of missionaries both before and after him.

### Observing Creation

Modern science provided the framework for tremendous interest in the natural world as Protestant missionaries used their observations of nature as a way to attack the perceived superstitions of non-Christian religions and world-views, and to affirm God's creative and providential power. When William Carey travelled to India in 1793, he carried 108 botanical magazines in his luggage. Along with his work in Bible translation and education, he helped establish the famous botanical garden in Serampore, edited a guide to Indian plants found there and, in 1820, founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India to promote agricultural development.

The missionary contribution to the observation, classification and preservation of species is a huge untold story, of which a few brief examples must suffice. Many of the most astute missionary observers of the natural world were products of the Scottish Enlightenment. Perhaps the most famous exemplar of Protestant missionary natural science was explorer David Livingstone, whose *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) provided meticulous observations of nature and African people's relationship to it. The front page of the book, interestingly enough, shows an etching of the tsetse fly rather than a Christian symbol. Livingstone was only one of a multitude of nineteenth-century missionary observers with a special interest in God's creation. Missionary to Liberia William Savage discovered and named the gorilla and packed off bone specimens to Harvard scientists in the 1840s. For the sake of scientific research, he had to fight curiosity dealers for possession of the gorilla bones.<sup>9</sup> George Post, missionary in Syria and professor at the American University of Beirut, published in 1896 as his life work *The Flora of Syria, Palestine, and Sinai*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Vol. II, The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> [www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2008\\_09/gorillas.html](http://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2008_09/gorillas.html)

<sup>10</sup> <http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/saab/post-flora/index.html>. On missionary observations of the natural world in Hawaii, see E. Alison Kay, 'Missionary

### *Missionary Environmentalism*

In the 1800s, scientific observation could develop into full-blown missionary environmentalism, especially when natural and man-made disasters threatened human well-being. A turning point in missionary self-perceptions about their roles in natural disasters occurred with Timothy Richard. This great Welsh Baptist missionary to China devised an extensive famine relief system in response to the Great Famine of 1876-79. Richard saw that scientific studies could have helped to prevent the famine in the first place through greater knowledge of biology and agriculture, as well as through economic and political reform. He wrote, 'The highest truths, whether found out by discovery or revelation, are the wonderful laws of God in nature, in human life and in God's own perfect character, and the highest inspirations to service, peace and progress are derived from the knowledge of these divine laws in all departments (2 Peter 1:2-3).'<sup>11</sup>

Another Protestant missionary who embraced science as a means towards advancing human well-being in relationship to the land was John Croumbie Brown. An LMS missionary like Moffatt and Livingstone, Brown first noticed massive drought in southern Africa in a tour through the Karoo in 1847. He became aware that torrential rains carried topsoil to the sea, leaving a drought-stricken area with no water storage. Brown attributed destruction of the land to human sin, in violation of God's moral order. Through individual conversion, people would be restored to a right relationship with God, and through their changed lives they would work to restore God's intentions for his creation. In 1862 Brown became official botanist for the Cape Colony, in which capacity he analysed the rapid destruction caused by colonial policies and settlement, including deforestation, desertification and species extinction. As botanist and later as a father of modern forestry, he wrote fifteen books on hydrology and land management and especially on forestry in Africa and Europe. He also corresponded with a vast network of missionary informants who shared his passion for collecting plant specimens for the sake of scientific research and improved land management.

### *Living off the Land*

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The history of agricultural missions is one of the great unwritten chapters of mission studies, and the least documented of the three main foci of missionary development work – education, healthcare, and agriculture. At the height of European colonialism, the 'agricultural missionary' became a

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Contributions to Hawaiian Natural History: What Darwin Didn't Know,' in *Hawaiian Journal of History* 31 (1997), 27-52.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Richard, 'The Multiple Conversions of Timothy Richard: A Paradigm of Missionary Experience,' quoted in Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 252.

staple part of so-called ‘industrial’ missions. Often located in the context of colonial ‘land grant’ mission stations, the purpose of the agricultural missionary was to increase local capacity for food production, including the introduction of modern farming methods, drought-resistant seed varieties, and fruit trees such as mangoes, guavas and papayas.

Agricultural missionaries introduced crop rotation, contour ridges, and reforestation projects, even as their efforts enabled missions to be self-sustaining in food production. They typically saw their work as integral to the missionary message of abundant life through conversion to Jesus Christ. Along with healing by medical doctors, their work to ensure food security was one of the most visible and obvious benefits of the missionary presence in colonial settings. Agricultural missionaries naturally shared attitudes towards land common to their own eras, but their professional training and empirical observation often allowed for accommodation to local conditions. Despite their mistakes and captivity to contemporary scientific farming and management techniques, agricultural missionaries filled one of the first formal conservationist roles in the non-western world. They also communicated valuable ecological information from the margins of empire back to its heartland.<sup>12</sup>

### **Land Rights – An Issue of Basic Human Rights**

During the 450 years of European colonialism, the relationship between human rights and protection of land resources for native peoples has been an important sub-theme in the history of missions. From Moravian David Zeisberger trying to protect the farmlands of his Indian converts from rapacious European colonists in Pennsylvania, to the Jesuit reductions among Guarani Indians in Paraguay in protest against Portuguese slavers, missionaries have known that land rights are essential for communal survival. By the mid-twentieth century, industrial and technological expansion, population increase, and the rapid loss of natural resources because of multiple forms of human abuse and exploitation, all combined to create a perfect storm of ecological degradation in ‘mission fields’ around the world. The missionary legacy of human rights protection for oppressed peoples began evolving into a nascent missionary environmental movement.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Grove argues that Brown was a forerunner of modern conservationism. See Grove, ‘Early Themes in African Conservation: The Cape in the Nineteenth Century,’ in David Anderson and Richard Grove (eds), *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies, and Practice* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 21-39. See also Richard S. Darr, ‘Protestant Missions and Earth-keeping in Southern Africa, 1817-2000’ (ThD dissertation, Boston University, 2005).

### *Who owns the Earth?*

Missionaries were pioneer defenders of indigenous land rights. As western colonists moved into the areas of the people among whom they worked, missionary defence of land rights became a prime realm of their advocacy for human rights. Two famous examples from mission history illustrate this trend. In the 1830s, US president Andrew Jackson decreed the removal of the Cherokee Indians from their homelands in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi. Under missionary tutelage, the Cherokees had become Christianised settled farmers. To no avail, Congregationalist missionaries protested against the Cherokee removal from their land. Missionary Samuel Worcester, who had translated the Bible into Cherokee and founded their first newspaper, was imprisoned because of his opposition to federal policies. Ultimately, Worcester travelled the 'trail of tears' with his people to their reservations in Oklahoma. Another example of missionary efforts to protect native land rights was that of LMS missionary John Philip, who went to Cape Colony in 1819 and became involved in supporting the land rights of the Cape Coloured, who faced massive displacement and virtual enslavement by white immigrants. Philip pushed the British Parliament to pass Ordinance 50, which gave some land rights and rights to their own labour to the KhoiKhoi in 1828. Missionary activism helped the Cape Coloured obtain the franchise – rights they kept until the apartheid government of 1948 stripped them away.

In addition to sheer greed, part of the problem of white colonialism was that European colonists introduced the idea of private land ownership wherever they went, and ignored communal land rights.<sup>13</sup> In response to colonial land seizures in the name of white ownership, missionaries sometimes supported private ownership by native peoples to help thwart European take-overs. In other cases, they worked to expand and improve communal areas. Ironically, often the colonial land grant mission station eventually became the centre of indigenous communities because the native people had been pushed off all the other land. Missionary defence of land rights thus involved varied compromises with the harsh imposition of western definitions of 'civilisation' and private ownership.

### *Protecting the Earth*

The rise of the ecological age in the mid to late twentieth century saw the merger of the missionary land rights/human rights tradition with environmentalism. After the end of European colonialism, local and

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<sup>13</sup> For a fascinating discussion among delegates to the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, 1910, on King Leopold's land policies in the Belgian Congo, see *Report of Commission VII: Missions and Governments* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier; New York: Revell, for the World Missionary Conference, 1910), 178.

regional rulers began exploiting the environment for their own personal benefit, including selling their country's resources to the highest bidder. Missionaries became eyewitnesses to increasing abuses of human rights through seizure of tribal lands in countries such as Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines and Malaysia. As natural resources were exploited by corrupt élites, often in alliance with multinational oil, timber or agricultural corporations, issues of human rights were increasingly defined as issues of land rights.

For example, in Ecuador in 1977, 'missionary kid' Randy Borman began to organise seven Cofán communities to protect their rain forests from exploitation by oil companies, cattle ranchers and plantation owners. By resurrecting native crafts and traditional forest lore, the Cofán launched the world's first 'community-based ecotourism project' to help them sustain their traditional habitat. In Zimbabwe in 1988, another son of missionaries, Inus Daneel, worked with traditional chiefs to launch a grassroots reforestation movement that focused on planting indigenous trees in communal lands. By modifying both traditional and Christian rituals into grassroots tree-planting ceremonies, rural villagers planted hundreds of thousands of trees a year for nearly fifteen years, worked on gully reclamation and water conservation, and started conservation clubs in local schools. Borman and Daneel are examples of how missionary identification with indigenous peoples built bridges with modernity for the preservation of indigenous lifeways.

Catholic sisters have also started missionary movements for ecological justice. With the recognition that resource degradation most dramatically affects the subsistence-level poor, sisters run income-generating projects and environmental training in poor communities in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Panama and other locations. For example, Maryknoll sisters from the Philippines, Latin America and the US together run a model farm and forest that helps Afro-Panamanian families cultivate native medicinal plants in a push for ecological sustainability. The vulnerability of God's creation, combined with the vulnerability of the world's poorest people, together create a strong motive for cross-cultural mission in the twenty-first century.

As with human rights advocacy, missionary support for ecological sustainability can be dangerous. On 12th February 2005, two hit men hired by cattle ranchers in Brazil shot Sister Dorothy Stang point blank as she stood in the rain, reading Bible verses to them about God's justice for the poor. A sister of Notre Dame de Namur, Stang had moved to Brazil from Ohio in the 1960s and began assisting landless peasants to seek better lives for themselves in the Amazon through ecologically sustainable practices. When killed, she was on her way to meet with a group of peasants whose



homes had been torched by loggers and ranchers who were illegally seizing their land.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to missionary activism, ordinary church people have responded to global poverty and ecological degradation through projects of their own. For example, the Fair Trade Movement was first organised by church people.<sup>15</sup> This movement supports ecological sustainability by pledging to purchase agricultural products produced with environmentally sound practices by small producers who receive a fair price for their work. Another example of contemporary church-based activism is the Network of Earthkeeping Christian Communities in South Africa (NECCSA), which 'seeks to encourage and engage local Christian communities in Earthkeeping ministries'.<sup>16</sup> It has a wide range of concerns, including developing liturgies and prayer resources for churches, fostering theological reflection on Christian stewardship, supporting action on climate change, rejecting genetically modified seeds, and other environmental issues of special importance to Christians at the African grassroots.

### **Future Missionary Earth Care**

As this article has tried to show, because the Gospel is news of abundant life (John 10:10), concern for God's creation is intrinsic to Christian mission. In an era of ecological degradation and concern for the future of the planet, Christians are busy reframing their relationship with nature. What are the implications of environmental consciousness for mission practice today? What is the Earthkeeping agenda for missionaries and mission agencies in the twenty-first century?

### ***Renewed Theological Reflection***

While this article has not discussed theology, it is obvious that increasing missionary involvement in environmental issues carries theological implications. Questions of soteriology (the salvation of all creation?), images such as the earth as 'God's body,' the meaning of Jesus Christ's redemption of the cosmos, the rejection of 'dominion theology,' a renewed emphasis on the creation rather than the fall, and the nature and purpose of holistic mission practice, are some of the theological issues that have emerged in relationship to environmental mission. An urgent issue for

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<sup>14</sup> The above examples are taken from Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 110-12.

<sup>15</sup> On Ten Thousand Villages: [www.tenthousandvillages.com/php/about.us/about.history.php](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/php/about.us/about.history.php)

<sup>16</sup> See NECCSA's website at: [www.neccsa.org.za](http://www.neccsa.org.za)

evangelical mission reflection is to consider the relationship between human salvation and the rest of God's creation.

### *Inter-religious Co-operation*

Because God created the world and declared it good, environmental activism requires co-operation across religious divisions. Scholars of religion Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim have for many years been gathering theologians and environmentalists to reflect on the religious roots and implications of their work. They held major scholarly conferences that resulted in ten collected volumes on multiple religious traditions and ecology. Now located at Yale, Tucker and Grim work with the Forum on Religion and Ecology.<sup>17</sup> In recognition of the need for religious and spiritual traditions to contribute to the movement to save the earth, the deeply inter-religious nature of theological reflection on ecology is one of the key features of this Yale forum. Mission leaders need to study and reflect upon the implications for mission practice of this wide-ranging inter-religious environmental dialogue.

### *Training and Professional Expertise*

Ecological mission is not a matter for amateurs. As with movements towards 'scientific farming' in the early twentieth century, many mistakes are being made. Just as with specialisation of medical care, missionaries need to be trained in earth care. Those undertaking serious environmental projects need both to have deep insight into local cultural systems and to have access to trained hydrologists, foresters and other experts. Changing people's relationship to the land is both a deeply spiritual and a practical form of intervention into traditional world-views. Mistakes are made from ignorance of traditional lifeways. The decreasing number of western missionaries who have grown up on farms makes ecological mission more of a stretch than it used to be.

One well-documented example of ignorance is noted in a scholarly study of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Niger. SIM became involved in 'modern' agriculture in the 1950s. At the mission farm school, missionaries introduced ploughs, chemical fertilisers and single-crop farming into land unsuitable for these practices. The result was desertification and loss of indigenous trees. Individual ownership was introduced through destruction of the native trees, as well as marginalisation of women by blocking them from farming. By the 1980s SIM missionaries had shifted from destructive modern farming to reforestation efforts, including the establishment of nurseries and the digging of wells. But in indigenous culture, tree-planting marked boundaries for the appropriation of land: 'Trees are the issue in

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<sup>17</sup> <http://fore.research.yale.edu>

debates over who cleared land first, who is intruding into someone else's fields, whether land is bush or fallow, and whether or not land is available for pasture.<sup>18</sup> Villagers thus surreptitiously uprooted trees for fear they would allow the government to claim their land. Just as SIM had destroyed the land through zealous propagation of what it took to be modern farming practices, so now SIM promoted tree-planting with little regard for the social context of land use.

The positive benefit of missionaries being involved in earth care is that career missionaries often have a deeper understanding of local cultures than do development professionals who fly in and out and who do not know the local language or culture. If missionaries have lived among a people for a long time, they can play a vital role in earth care. But this benefit presupposes that the missionaries have had some kind of training in cultural anthropology, are committed to indigenisation, and have access to the technical knowledge needed for truly beneficial earth care.

### *Rethinking Mission Practices*

While 'power encounter' has seen a resurgence within Christian practices over the past several decades, it needs to be interrogated closely from the perspective of environmental consciousness. Does the power encounter involve the defeat of demonic forces, or can it become an excuse for ignoring traditional conservation practices? Christian conversion, as defined by modernisation, often unleashes individualistic economic behaviours that encourage exploitation of natural resources if new Christians see themselves outside the realm of traditions or customary law.

A theology of prosperity and God's blessing can become an excuse for personal greed. Missionaries and church leaders need to distinguish religious competition from nature-based practices that help to preserve God's creation. The individualism of western-style conversion can wreak havoc with communal understandings of earth care, especially if urbanising Christian élites begin defining rural ways of life as demonic. To urge mission leaders to compile 'best practices' in relationship to earth care does not mean romanticising traditional cultures. Yet, from the perspective of Creation care, too long have Christian missions rightly been accused of throwing out the baby with the bath water in their competition with 'paganism'.

As mission practices evolve, so should missiological reflection on earth care. For example, one issue being raised about the proliferation of long-distance, short-term missions is the waste of fossil fuels they entail through frequent travel. Should the end of cheap oil and the reality of climate change influence mission practices? At what point does the globe-trotting

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<sup>18</sup> See Barbara M. Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 332-39.

of mission executives and volunteers become an ecologically unsustainable practice or sign of privilege? Should missions be rethinking a theology of place based on environmental considerations?

### *A Forum on Missionary Earth Care*

Both the history of missions and contemporary concern for the environment show that a beneficial relationship with nature is intrinsic to mission 'best practice' – whether framed as human survival or taken up for the sake of God's creation itself. The days are gone when an abundance of forest and wildlife could be seen as the 'howling wilderness' waiting to be subdued for Christian civilisation. In a context of over-population and environments on the edge of extinction, paradigms of stewardship need to replace those of dominion.

The question before us is how – not when, or even whether – evangelical missions will enter the realm of earth care, for 'eco' projects are springing up in missions like mushrooms after the rain. It is time that a mission forum or formal clearing-house be established to study, to collect examples of best practice, and to give solid practical and theological advice to missionaries who find themselves either by choice or by necessity entering the realm of earth care.

### **Resources**

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# **THE POOR AND THE SACRAMENTAL COMMONS: A ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE**

John Hart

The ecological crisis is simultaneously an economic crisis. Harm to Earth's air, land and water imperil the survival and well-being of humanity (individually and collectively) and of all members of the biotic community (the community of living beings), of which humans are but a small part. We are thinking stardust, the fruit of fourteen billion years of cosmic creation unfolding and of 3.5 billion years of life on Earth evolving.

While ecological destruction impacts all people on Earth (whether or not they recognise, acknowledge or address it in some way), the poor who are especially vulnerable and least responsible are particularly harmed – as noted by numerous representatives of world religions (including the World Council of Churches – popes and Vatican officials), scientists (including members of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize-recipient Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), and United Nations officials and member states.

Churches, popes and Christians around the globe have become increasingly concerned about harm done to God's creation by humankind, and have come to recognise that people have a responsibility to God to mitigate and eliminate exploitation of Earth, extinction of species, and harm to the 'least members' of humankind, those for whom Jesus had a particular concern (expressed especially in Matthew's Last Judgment story). The Edinburgh 2010 'Common Call' recognises this aspect of mission when it states that Christians 'are called to become communities of compassion and healing... where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation'.

The focus of the current chapter is on Catholic considerations of the integrated social and ecological impacts of humankind's harmful treatment of their home planet, and of the diverse parts of Earth's regions which, though distinct in numerous ways, comprise people's interrelated and interdependent common ground. Following brief comments on key biblical passages are summary statements of papal documents (John Paul II and Francis I); the national US Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on the environment; a regional bishops' international pastoral letter; and independent Catholic scholars' summary ideas on socio-ecological issues.

### Speaking in a New Tongue

Decades ago, feminists – initially solely women, but later including men – discerned that how we use language, and the far-reaching implications of some words in our language, have strong cultural bases and biases (and patriarchal origins). They questioned why, since more than half of the world's population is female, 'man' is used as a universal term for both men and women when humanity as a whole is meant. Then-current representative descriptions of human history declared that early 'man' had invented tools, 'man' had developed agriculture, 'man' had developed literature through millennia, 'man' advanced technologically, 'man' landed on the moon, and all 'men' are created equal and have certain 'inalienable rights'. Woman is subsumed into man; woman is subordinate to man. Similarly, references to God were masculine even though, in the belief of Christians and members of other faiths, God is an eternal Spirit who has no gender (except in God's Incarnation in Jesus): 'God created the world. *He* said...' 'God spoke to Isaiah. *He* told Isaiah...' Patriarchy was taught, emphasised, and culturally reinforced.

The subsequent linguistic transition from 'man' to 'humanity' or to 'women and men' had profound impacts. Women's cultural contributions, which had disappeared from or never been included in 'official' historical writings, were restored or included for the first time. Humanity was made whole. In religious traditions, the simple practice of repeating 'God' without using a pronoun, or rephrasing a sentence so as not to need a pronoun, stimulated people to recall their basic dogma that 'God' is a divine 'spirit'. This diminishes to some extent the existing heretical implication of male language for divine Being which indicates that God has a gender, specifically, a male gender. In churches' art depicting the Trinity, a very old, bearded man in a long robe is seated on a throne; a bearded younger man is close by; and a dove hovers above them. Over time, God (the 'Father') became understood as that old man. Word changes have enabled people to overcome biases in language use, biases which were continually culturally reinforced; new words led to consciousness changes.

A significant language change to describe accurately the impoverished members of our world would be to shift 'poor' to the social justice-promoting 'oppressed poor'. These members of society did not come to be impoverished by some objective 'survival of the fittest' social interaction, but by the deliberate actions of wealthy and politically powerful people. Economic and political structures have been developed that keep the poor, poor and the rich, rich. Capitalism especially promotes class and social disparity; it elevates greed to a virtue and subordinates communities to the inordinate desires of individuals or small groups. The Christian mission as *missio Dei* should not overlook this, or pretend that this social control does not exist when the powerful claim that their nation is a 'democracy'. Christians are not called solely to succour the economically deprived, but to support – in word and deed – their struggles for a just society.

### **Planet *Earth*, not *earth***

Similarly, people should consider changes in key words used for our planet and our planet's natural goods. The word 'earth' should be changed to 'Earth' when referring to our home planet. Capitalisation will raise Earth visually to a higher status when people see its new spelling: 'It's our home planet!' Capitalisation would distinguish between the planet and the soil, between Earth and Earth's earth. The elevated status of Earth in our consciousness should promote greater respect for our planet and prompt us to take better care of Earth. Earth must be conserved and restored, not only to benefit those of us who live today, but our descendants into the future. Word changes should stimulate respect for all living beings today and for generations to come – including the micro-organisms living in Earth's earth that are essential for the well-being of all biota (living beings). Today, most scientists, many theologians and social scientists, and major religious leaders are using *Earth*, not *earth*, which promotes an ecological ethics consciousness to stimulate ecologically responsible conduct.<sup>1</sup>

### **Natural *Goods*, not Natural *Resources***

A 'good' is something that can provide some benefit for flora, fauna, or abiotic nature, principally but not exclusively in the place in which it is situated. A 'resource' is an Earth natural good that is viewed as intended for or primarily available to humankind, exclusive of other biota, to use in place or to extract, alter and use elsewhere to provide energy, to meet other needs, or to satisfy wants. However, Earth is not intended by the Creator Spirit to satisfy the needs – much less the wants – of humanity alone.<sup>2</sup>

Humankind must recognise, to an increasing extent, that Earth has 'natural goods' to provide for all life, and for Earth's geodynamic and meteorological needs. Earth's inherent benefits would be promoted if 'resources' were replaced by 'natural goods'.

Minimal linguistic changes, then, constantly used, would help significantly to promote responsibility toward, on, and in, Earth.

The chapter will explore distinct but related influences on the development of socio-ecological responsibility in Catholic thought and tradition, including key biblical passages and their ongoing relevance. Teachings from these sources are many, but the pages available are few. Much can be presented only in minimal detail; the reader is encouraged to explore further cited books and documents and their insightful ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> A more complete elaboration of these ideas is presented in John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), and John Hart, *Cosmic Commons: Spirit, Science, and Space* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See Hart, *Cosmic Commons*, 99.

### **Biblical Bases for Catholic Teachings**

Biblical insights key for care for creation and ecological consciousness include the Genesis creation and flood stories, and Christian Scriptures' principles for social well-being.

#### **Creation and Re-Creation: New Wine in Matured and Seasoned Wineskins**

Jesus taught that new wine cannot be put into old wineskins. An iteration of this teaching would be that, in some cases, a new expression of older ideas is not a 'new wine' but an aged, mature wine whose quality can be appreciated today after it weathered millennia of shifting winds and trends, and emerges now from its casks to be put into a renewed church's wineskins.

The first two chapters in Genesis elaborate creation stories which, while distinct and diverse, share the same core ideas: a Creator Spirit brought all that exists into being; all being is 'very good'. The phrase 'image of God' in the first creation story, shortly before God calls all creation 'very good,' means that the Creator expects humankind to likewise regard all creatures, not just humans, as 'very good'. In the second story, people are instructed to 'conserve' and to 'serve' all creatures and their shared Earth home. (The Hebrew verb translated 'serve' is otherwise used in the Bible to command that people serve God. Thus: Serve creation as you serve its Creator.) The teaching that God regards all creatures as 'very good' is indicated anew in Genesis 6-9, the Flood Story. Noah is instructed to build an ark for *all* creatures, not solely for humans, and to put on the ark a reproducing pair of every creature so that all will be able to populate the post-Flood Earth. The story teaches, too, that after the Flood, when the ark has been opened and the biota released, God makes a covenant with Earth and all creatures – not just humankind (Gen. 9:9-17<sup>3</sup>).

#### *Concern for the Oppressed Poor*

Biblical insights that are foundational for Catholic socio-ecological teachings include the principles and proclamation of the Jubilee Year; compassion for the 'least ones' expressed in the Last Judgment story; the Great Commandment; the requirement to express faith in action by works of compassion (James 2), and love in action (1 John); and practices of a sharing Christian community (Acts 2 and 4).

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<sup>3</sup> Biblical quotations are from the New American Bible (NAB).



### *The Biblical Jubilee*

The principles and practices of a Jubilee Year are first presented as teachings from Moses in Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15 and Exodus 23. In the background story, the ancient Hebrews, newly escaped slaves from Egypt, are occupying their 'promised land'. The Jubilee sought to ensure a perennially dispersed ownership by which all members of every tribe would have their own farm (except the Levites, who would own land in urban areas). The Jubilee had four requirements. First, rest for the land, a one-year period in which people could neither plant nor harvest, nor chase birds or wild or domestic animals from their fields, orchards and vineyards: this would remind people of the creation stories' teaching that Earth is a common 'garden' intended to provide sustenance for all, not merely 'private property' to benefit whoever has civil title to it. Second, the release of slaves, so that those who had bound themselves and their families into servitude because of adverse ecological (extended drought) or economic (insurmountable debt brought on by the drought) reasons would have a chance to start anew. Third, the remission of debts, so that debt-burdened people would have economic relief. Fourth, the redistribution of lands, to prevent the consolidation of all land into the hands of a few; this would promote a country of small landholders who would make their livelihood from Earth's natural goods.<sup>4</sup>

In 2000, church leaders from diverse Christian traditions around the world called on US banks to use Jubilee principles to cancel Third World debt and give poorer nations an opportunity to have a stable economic system, unencumbered by excessive debt. Although the banks had more than recovered the principal they had lent, and substantial interest besides, they rejected Jubilee practices.

### *The Last Judgment*

In Matthew's Gospel (25:31-46) Jesus tells the story of a final judgment of people from all nations. The Son of Humanity (Son of 'Man') is the divine judge (see Daniel 7) before whom all are gathered. He invites those on his right hand to enter the divine dwelling because when he was hungry they fed him, when thirsty they gave him a drink, when a stranger they welcomed him, when naked they clothed him, when ill they cared for him, when in prison they visited him. The people ask him when they had helped him in these ways. He responds, 'Whenever you helped one of these least ones, you helped me'. (Note that works of compassion for the poor are the only stated criteria for entry into 'heaven': not faith, not worship, not rituals within dedicated places of worship.) Then the Judge tells the people on his left hand to depart into eternal fire because when he was hungry they did

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<sup>4</sup> The biblical Jubilee is discussed extensively in Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 184-98.

not give him food, when thirsty nothing to drink, when naked no clothing, when homeless no provision of shelter, when sick or in prison no comforting visit. Whenever they did not help out the 'least ones,' they did not help the Son of Humanity who was present among and suffering with them.

Here there is an evident relationship between ecology and justice, between the natural goods Earth produces and their distribution (or lack thereof) to the ones who need them most. In their time of dire need, the poor are deprived of the natural goods Earth produces, with or without human agriculture: food that grows in Earth's earth; water that flows in Earth's rivers; shelter constructed from trees that grow in earth, stones quarried from or found atop earth, and clay extracted from earth; clothing made from cotton that grows in earth, or from the wool of sheep who graze on earth and drink Earth's water; medicine derived from Earth's herbs; and relief from incarceration which likely had resulted from taking from another's abundance what was needed for one's basic subsistence, or from violating mandates of the Romans occupying the lands of Israel in Jesus' time.

Today, excessive private land holdings exist in capitalist or capitalism-controlled nations and regions. These have often been acquired by present or historic seizure of lands from the 'least of these' (including indigenous peoples around the world). Now they provide for the *wants* of the few rather than the *needs* of the many. Some lands are left idle or farmed with excessive chemicals rather than with natural fertilisers and pesticides. The privatisation of Earth's essential natural goods of land and water harms not only the 'least ones': all of us are affected when we commemorate the Last Supper. In communion, to what extent do the bread, and wine or grape juice, truly represent or are transformed into the body and blood of Christ if the wheat used for the bread is grown on chemically polluted fields, the grapes are grown in chemically polluted vineyards, or the water is not safe to drink? The 'fruit of the Earth and the work of human hands' might be unhealthy for people to consume, and certainly unworthy to be called the 'Body and Blood of Christ,' the healer of bodies and souls.

### *The Great Commandment*

Jesus teaches a primary commandment to love God and one's neighbour (every other person). While some churches focus solely on love of God, a 'personal relationship' with God, and individual 'salvation' in a world to come, Catholicism teaches that the Great Commandment (illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan) integrates love of God and neighbour, with socio-ecological implications for the present, material world in which we live.

*James and John: Faith and Love Require Compassion for the Poor*

The letter of James teaches about *faith*: ‘What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead’ (2:14-17).

James asserts that faith requires works of compassion; John states that *love* requires such works: ‘If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth’ (1 John 3:17-18). Moreover, one cannot claim to love God, who is unseen, if one does not love their brother, who is seen (1 John 4:20).

*Acts: An Ideal Christian Community*

In the Book of Acts, the early Christian community is a sharing community with a communal relationship (‘Christian communism’ eighteen centuries before Karl Marx) characterised by *agape* and compassion: ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need’ (2:42, 44-6); and: ‘The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common... There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need’ (4:32, 34-5). The equitable distribution of social and natural goods had the result that no one lacked life’s necessities. This communal ideal, even though not ‘practical’ for most Christians today, can be embodied when communities ensure that the necessities of life are provided for everyone.

**Singing a New Song in Christian Mission:  
Stimulating Socio-ecological Ethics Proposals and Projects**

The Catholic Church, based on the Scriptures and its developing tradition, seeks to stimulate social and ecological responsibility. Some old theological verses do not fit new melodies. Philosophical ethics is too abstract; purely contextual ethics is difficult to determine in diverse social milieus; the controlling economic system of global capitalism makes it impossible, in most places, to promote principles and practices of Catholic Social Teaching. Church members realise that a new approach is needed to enable the Good News of God’s compassion for all life and God’s solicitude for Earth’s well-being to be made manifest prophetically and concretely.

*Socio-ecology* and *socio-ecological ethics* suggest ways to do just that.<sup>5</sup> ‘Socio-ecology’ integrates social justice within and among human communities with the ecological well-being of Earth and the biotic community, in the present and into the future. ‘Socio-ecological ethics’ provides a way to engage social values, and principles and practices of right conduct, with socio-ecological issues present in a specific place. It is a dialogic interaction of theory and practice, text and context. In Christian missions, it would help pastors and laity to seek social change and societal well-being by analysing social injustices and catalysing concrete projects to effect social justice.

*Socio-ecological ethics* embodies the best of deontological or rule-based ethics, and teleological or consequences-based ethics. It promotes social justice in human communities and the integrity of creation. Just human conduct seeks to ensure human betterment and continuing advances towards a more holistic human community, and ecological well-being for all biota and their Earth context. Ecology (equitable interrelation of all beings) is practised in specific social and planetary environments, present and future.

Socio-ecological ethics is not contextual ethics; it is *ethics in context*. Its process is as follows: *first*, analyse the social and ecological setting to determine present socio-ecological problems and injustices. *Second*, reflect on resources from the Bible and particular Christian traditions that address these issues where religious ideals clash with present practices. *Third*, envision a changed place in which biblical and Christian ideals have become concretised in this place to eliminate these injustices and ecological problems. *Fourth*, engage in collaborative projects to make the vision a reality through goals that are both short-term (achievable in the near future) and long-term (achievable over time, perhaps generations).

Engaged in the socio-ecological ethics process, participants in the *missio Dei* might consider ways in which, in their current place(s), the ideals and ideas of the Jubilee Year and the Great Commandment, among other biblical teachings, might provide insights to address Christian realities and stimulate Christians’ hopes and visions. In economically oppressive and ecological devastated regions, they may develop concrete projects to catalyse the emergence of just people in just communities on renewed Earth common ground.

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<sup>5</sup> I coined the terms and concepts *socio-ecology* and *socio-ecological ethics* some years ago. They express the type of theory and practice in which I have been engaged for decades: the dialogic engagement of text and context, of thought in action, in particular places. *Socio-ecological ethics* and *socio-ecological praxis ethics* are elaborated more extensively in *Cosmic Commons*, 184-91.

## Representative Papal Statements

### *Pope John Paul II*

Themes of social justice for the poor, care for God's creation, and the relationship between them permeate the social teaching of John Paul II. In Cuilapán, Mexico, on his way to the Puebla Conference, he stated that 'private property always carries with it a social mortgage, so that material possessions might serve the general goal that God intended'.<sup>6</sup> While in Mexico he declared, too, that where there were extensive unused lands and a significant population of landless people who needed land for their subsistence, governments should consider expropriation and redistribution of lands, with appropriate compensation for landowners.

The environmental perspective of John Paul II is evident in his 1990 'World Day of Peace' Message, 'The Environmental Crisis: A Common Responsibility' (published also as *Peace With God the Creator, Peace With All Creation*).<sup>7</sup> In it, he deplores 'a lack of due respect for nature,' the 'plundering of natural resources,' and people's contrasting, ever-increasing awareness that 'we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past'. The reckless exploitation of natural resources and species extinction are, in the long run, destructive to humanity (paras 6 and 7). He states further that 'the earth is ultimately a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all... 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' (para 8). The ecological crisis indicates that 'an education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth' (para 13). He notes the relationship between economics and ecology: proper ecological balance will not be found without directly addressing 'the structural forms of poverty' (para 11). In these teachings, he emphasises that Earth's natural goods are intended by their Creator to benefit *all* people and peoples, not just a select few. Governments should regulate and limit private property ownership in the interests of the public common good. Moreover, economic well-being and ecological well-being are intertwined.

If Christian missions, regional and national governments, and citizens around the globe were to implement what he proposes, oppressive economic and political systems would be transformed or replaced, regional and international wars would become scarce if they existed at all, Earth

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Hart, *What Are They Saying About... Environmental Theology*, 12 (hereafter, *WATSA*). Pope John Paul reiterated this in the encyclical *On Social Concern* (1987), para 42.

<sup>7</sup> Elaborated in *WATSA*, 12-14.

would be renewed, and socio-ecological well-being would transition from a vision of the ideal to a concrete reality.

A highly significant teaching in the Message is the elevation of ecological involvement to a Christian *requirement* rather than merely a social *option*: ‘Christians, in particular, realise that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an *essential part of their faith*’ (para 15, emphasis added). This is a substantive addition to socio-spiritual consciousness. Focus on this concept in Christian mission could lead to projects that would express it in local and regional communities. It would help ‘people in the pew,’ and their bishops and other clergy, to fulfil their responsibilities to Creator and creation.

In ‘Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace,’ his 1999 ‘World Day of Peace’ Message, John Paul returns to key themes of the 1990 Message.<sup>8</sup> The danger of ‘serious damage’ to Earth’s earth and waters, climate and biota ‘calls for a profound change in modern civilisation’s typical consumer lifestyle, particularly in the richer countries’. Consumerism is complemented by the risk that impoverished people in rural regions ‘can be driven by necessity to exploit beyond reasonable limits’ the small landholdings they possess. In the ‘endless interdependence between human beings and their environment,’ the interrelated practices of dominating rich and oppressed poor illustrate the importance of the ‘safeguarding of creation’.

### *Pope Francis I.*

In the relatively short time since he was elected Pope, Francis I has made significant statements on ecological issues and on the relationship between social justice, particularly for the ‘least of these,’ and ecological well-being for Earth and living beings. He often relates ecological well-being with economic well-being.

In a General Audience in Saint Peter’s Square on 5th June 2013, the UN-sponsored ‘World Environment Day,’ Francis reflects on the relationship between today’s ideas about the environment and the charge given to the first humans in Genesis 2, and wonders, ‘What does cultivating and preserving the earth mean? Are we truly cultivating and caring for creation? Or are we exploiting and neglecting it?’ He reflects: ‘Cultivating and caring for creation... means making the world... a garden, an inhabitable place for us all.’ He observes that ‘*human ecology* [is] closely connected with *environmental ecology*... The human person is in danger... hence the urgent need for human ecology!’ Unfortunately, ‘It is no longer man who commands, but money, money, cash commands... men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the “culture of

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<sup>8</sup> Cited and discussed in *WATSA*, 15-16.

waste”... whenever food is thrown out, it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry!’<sup>9</sup>

In his ‘Message to the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Peru,’ Francis commented on the gospel story of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, in which twelve baskets of leftovers are collected when at first it appeared that there was insufficient food to feed the multitude: ‘... this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members. Human and environmental ecology go hand in hand.’<sup>10</sup>

Pope Francis I issued his latest teaching on care for creation and community, *Laudato Si’* (*Praise be to you, my Lord*) in June 2015; its official English title is *On Care for Our Common Home*.<sup>11</sup> The encyclical’s recurring theme is an integrated care for the poorest people in our common human community, and care for Earth, our common home.<sup>12</sup>

The Pope provides a solid foundation for the encyclical in the Bible, Catholic Social Thought, statements by his immediate papal predecessors, national councils of Catholic bishops throughout the world, and the ideas of Bartholomew I, Orthodox Church head and Patriarch of Constantinople. In the light of global environmental deterioration, his intended audience is more than Catholics; he seeks ‘to address every person living on this planet’.<sup>13</sup> Interwoven themes come initially from John Paul II, ‘a global ecological *conversion*’ and ‘an authentic *human ecology*,’<sup>14</sup> and Benedict XVI, who advocated ‘eliminating the destructions of the world economy and correcting models of growth’<sup>15</sup> which did not promote respect for Earth’s environment and people.

<sup>9</sup> w2.vatican.va/.../francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco\_20130605\_udienza-generale.html – 15k – 2013-06-05 (accessed 28th March 2015).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the 20th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Lima, Peru, 1-12 December 2014’: w2.vatican.va/.../en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2014/12/11/letteralima.html (accessed 28th March 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Papal encyclical titles in the official original Latin are named with the first two Latin words in the text. The official translation of each encyclical uses a title that indicates the overall theme of the encyclical. The Latin title here is derived from the *Canticle of All Creatures*, the song of Francis of Assisi which describes poetically the praise all creatures render to God. This poem of St Francis is honoured as the first work, or one of the earliest works, of Italian literature. All italicised words in the quotes that follow are from the encyclical.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (accessed 21st June 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, para 3.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, para 5.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, para 6.

A critique of individual- and profit-centred economic systems, policies and practices permeates the encyclical; it focuses on how they harm Earth, Earth's poor, and Earth's species. In this, he condemns excessive individualism, an economic prioritisation of profits over people, and the transnational corporations, governments and individuals that promote these and oppress people and planet. Throughout the encyclical, the plight of the poorest is frequently condemned, as are the economic attitudes that promote this injustice.<sup>16</sup> He addresses global climate change at length; he declares that the 'climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all'.<sup>17</sup> On a complementary ecology-social justice issue, he states that 'access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right'.<sup>18</sup>

Pope Francis addresses multiple other human ecology and Earth ecology issues in his lengthy encyclical, including inter-generational responsibility and science-religion co-operation. He suggests, too, particularly in Chapter 5, 'Lines of Approach and Action',<sup>19</sup> and Chapter Six, 'Ecological Education and Spirituality',<sup>20</sup> ways to effect change. He states that political institutions, social groups and the church all have a responsibility to raise public awareness and seek common solutions to social and ecological problems. In teachings of particular relevance for diverse Christians engaged in diverse missions, he declares that since the majority of Earth's people say that they are believers, this should 'spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity',<sup>21</sup> that 'living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience',<sup>22</sup> and that 'All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education,' with a particular 'concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The section 'The Common Destination of Goods' presents a focused summary of this teaching: paras 93-95. He reinforces the Catholic social teaching that, in the words of John Paul II, there is 'a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them' (para 93), and adds that the 'natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone' (para 95).

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 23.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 30.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, paras 163-201.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 201-45.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 201.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 217.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 214.



### US Bishops' National and Regional Ecology-Economy Pastoral Letters

In their pastoral letter *Renewing the Earth*, the US Catholic bishops state that 'at its core the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the foods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations and how we live in harmony with God's creation'. The US bishops several times make specific links between ecology and economy. They declare that 'we must seek a society where economic life and environmental commitment work together to protect and enhance life on this planet'. The bishops 'seek to explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology. The web of life is one...' They note the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation: 'It is the poor and powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness.' They advocate inter-generational responsibility: 'We need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.' They significantly advanced Catholic teaching when discussing a 'sacramental universe':

Throughout history, people have continued to meet the Creator on mountaintops, in vast deserts, and alongside waterfalls and gently flowing springs... We still share, though dimly, in that sense of God's presence in nature. The environmental movement has reawakened appreciation of the truth that, through the created gifts of nature, men and women encounter their Creator. The Christian vision of a sacramental universe – a world that discloses the Creator's presence by visible and tangible signs – can contribute to making the earth a home for the human family once again.

Humanity should work towards 'an environmentally sustainable economy' that has 'a just economic system which equitably shares the bounty of the earth and of human enterprise with all peoples'. Ecological and economic issues are intertwined: 'Both impoverished peoples and an imperilled planet demand our committed service'; 'Christian love forbids choosing between people and the planet'.<sup>24</sup>

In Christian missions, the well-being of people native to a country or region would be well served if missionaries were to bear in mind this relationship. A conserved ecosystem and a just economic system together lead to community well-being; a healthy Earth readily provides for pressing human needs; healthy people will not feel compelled to despoil their Earth home to meet their basic needs.

In *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* (2001), the bishops of the north-west US states and south-west Canada address extinction or endangerment of salmon populations in native people's communal fishers' and non-native people's private fishers' fisheries and rivers' waters, with consequent threats to the native people's

<sup>24</sup> Ideas presented here are discussed further in *WATSA*, 30-33.

subsistence needs and native and non-native sources of livelihood; treaty rights; radiation and chemical pollution from the Hanford Nuclear Reserve; and the negative impacts of the Snake River and Columbia River dams. The pastoral letter received a 'Sacred Gift for a Living Planet' award from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The bishops suggest ten 'Considerations for Community Caretaking,' which include: (1) consider the common good; (2) conserve the watershed as a common good; (3) conserve and protect species of wildlife; (4) respect the dignity and traditions of the region's indigenous peoples; and (5) promote justice for the poor, linking economic justice and environmental justice. These 'Considerations' would be useful for church bodies outside the Columbia River Watershed to help promote socio-ecological responsibility and well-being.

### Complementary Catholic Social and Ecological Thought

Socio-ecological Catholic thought has emerged from non-institutional Catholic sources. Independent scholars relate traditional teachings to current contexts.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest, was regarded as the 'guru' of Catholic environmental thought for decades. He carried forward several of Teilhard de Chardin's ideas, putting on them his own imprint. His books include *The Dream of the Earth*, which dialogues with Eastern religious traditions, and *The Great Work*, which envisions how humankind might relate better not only to Earth, through ecologically responsible thinking and action, but to the whole universe in which humans have evolved to become the cosmos reflecting upon itself. Among his many insights: Creation is a community, 'especially in the realm of living beings here is an absolute interdependence';<sup>26</sup> 'the future can exist only when we understand the universe as composed of subjects to be communed with, not as objects to be exploited';<sup>27</sup> the cosmos is a 'universe' where 'everything is intimately present to everything else... Nothing is completely itself without everything else. This relatedness is both spatial and temporal. However distant in space or time, the bond of unity is functionally there. The universe is a communion and a community. We ourselves are that communion become conscious of itself';<sup>28</sup> and, confronting reductionist scientism, Berry declares that 'beyond our genetic coding, we need to go to the earth, as the source whence we came, and ask for its guidance, for the

<sup>25</sup> An extended discussion of these and other independent Catholic socio-ecological scholars is found in *WATSA*, chaps 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 2000), 148.

<sup>27</sup> Berry, *The Great Work*, x.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 91.

earth carries the psychic structure as well as the physical form of every living being upon the planet... the universe 'carries the deep mysteries of our existence within itself'.<sup>29</sup> People must be intimately immersed in cosmic dynamics. Such integration is a 'Great Work,' a significant historical movement that gives 'shape and meaning to life'.<sup>30</sup> Berry declared that because of human exploitation of Earth, 'A Great Work is needed to confront the Earth crisis and to begin a process whereby consciousness of an integrated human-Earth relationship is restored, and humans live in harmony with each other, with all life, and with Earth. All people have a responsibility to engage in this Great Work, to move humans from their destructive relationship with Earth to a more benign relationship... The Great Work is simply restoring some integral relationship between humans and the planet Earth'.<sup>31</sup> In Christian mission, commitment to this Great Work would enhance local communities and ecologies.

Leonardo Boff, Brazilian theologian and one of the original theologians of liberation in Latin America who focused principally on poverty and politics, evolved in his thought to integrate economic and ecological well-being in *Cry of the Earth*, *Cry of the Poor* and *Ecology and Liberation*. Similarly to Thomas Berry, Boff states that 'everything that exists, co-exists' as part of an 'infinite web of all-inclusive relations'.<sup>32</sup> The 'population of the world is growing at an alarming rate';<sup>33</sup> 'Will the earth's ecosystem be able to sustain so many people?'.<sup>34</sup> Out of necessity, the multitudes of the poor deplete natural goods to survive. Therefore, 'it is as important to contribute to the reproduction of nature as to ensure that the interests of the work force are safeguarded... social injustice leads to ecological injustice, and vice versa'.<sup>35</sup> Current social structures constitute 'a social sin (the rupture of social relations) and an ecological sin (the rupture of relations between humankind and the environment)'.<sup>36</sup> God addresses humankind through other creatures because 'every creature is a messenger of God, and God's representative as well as sacrament'.<sup>37</sup> He discusses 'the reality of the Spirit's indwelling in creation. The Spirit has made the cosmos a temple, the scene of the Spirit's action and manifestation... The world is... the place where we meet God'.<sup>38</sup> Boff laments that 'humans

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<sup>29</sup> Berry, *The Great Work*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> Berry, *The Great Work*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Berry, 'Afterword' to Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 236-37.

<sup>32</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (trans. John Cumming; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 21-25.

<sup>36</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 46.

<sup>38</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 49, 51.

have shown that they can commit not only homicide and ethnocide, but biocide and genocide as well'.<sup>39</sup> Because of this, 'social (in)justice cannot be separated from ecological (in)justice'.<sup>40</sup> In the light of the preceding, the 'reign of God' in the teaching of Jesus symbolises 'the gradual realization of God's project for all creation'.<sup>41</sup> This innovative extension of a fuller meaning of the 'reign of God' present but yet to come could prompt Christians to include creation-consciousness and commitment in their socio-ecological mission efforts as a theological as well as social commitment.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a pioneering eco-feminist theologian, links Earth's despoliation to women's degradation, economics to ecology, and population impacts on creation, among other issues. In her seminal work *Gaia and God*, she describes how 'eco-feminism... explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected'. She adds that 'a healed relation to the earth... demands a social re-ordering to bring about just and loving relationships between men and women, between races and nations, between groups presently stratified into social classes, manifest in great disparities of access to the means of life... We must speak of eco-justice'.<sup>42</sup> In a context of socio-ecological devastation, *metanoia* is required, a 'conversion of our spirit and culture, of our technology and social relations, so that the human species exists within nature in a life-sustaining way'.<sup>43</sup> (Note her correspondence with Church teaching on the ecology-economy link.) Earth cannot long endure the related social issues of over-population and over-consumption: 'a significant curbing and eventual reduction of human population itself is also necessary'.<sup>44</sup> This requires 'promotion of effective birth controls on a widespread basis sufficient to halt and reduce the world population explosion... [and] the empowerment of women as moral agents of their own sexuality and reproduction...' [which includes] a double transformation of both women and men in their relation to each other and to 'nature'.<sup>45</sup> Ruether's ideas on birth control conflict with current Catholic teaching on the issue, but some Church openings to it have emerged.

The population issue was partially addressed by Archbishop Renato Martino, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the 'Earth Summit') in Rio. He links economic and ecological well-being: 'the responsibility to respect

<sup>39</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xi.

<sup>40</sup> Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 132.

<sup>41</sup> Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 199.

<sup>42</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Eco-feminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 86.

<sup>44</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 263.

<sup>45</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 264-65.

all creation' is complemented by respect for human life. People must live in interrelation not only with each other, but with God and 'creation in itself'. He states that '... the Catholic Church does not propose procreation at any cost... It is the right of the spouses to decide on the size of the family and spacing of births...' <sup>46</sup>

While initially the ideas of creative, 'unofficial' theologians of the Catholic Church are regarded as 'stretching the envelope' or 'on the fringes' of doctrinal tradition, eventually some are quietly incorporated into church teaching. For example, the originator of the theology of liberation in Latin America, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest, taught that the church should have a 'preferential option for the poor,' an idea that became incorporated into an official church statement of the Latin American bishops, the *Puebla Document*. Subsequently, it became part of not only Catholic but other Christian churches' teachings throughout the world. Although Cardinal Ratzinger (the future Benedict XVI) during John Paul II's era sought to condemn Gutiérrez's ideas, recently Francis I invited him to the Vatican for a conference of bishops to be honoured. Similarly, the ideas of Boff have become part of 'official' teachings in the statements of Francis I.

As Christians from diverse traditions engage with each other to address Earth's economic disparities and ecological destruction, and work with people from other theistic traditions to find common ground for common projects – socio-political and socio-ecological – they might bear in mind insightful words from secular humanist Edward O. Wilson, Harvard Professor Emeritus. In *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*,<sup>47</sup> an open letter addressed to a representative clergyman of his childhood Southern Baptist Church tradition, Wilson suggests:

Let us see then, if we can, and you are willing, to meet on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real world we share... I suggest that we set aside our differences in order to save the Creation... Religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today, including especially the US. If religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological conservation, the problem would soon be solved.<sup>48</sup>

As we 'meet on the near side of metaphysics,' we should consider our inter-generational moments:

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<sup>46</sup> Renato Martino, *Address to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*. Copy distributed to journalists, including this writer. Martino further stated that, while married couples have the right to choose the number of their children, the methods they use to do so must be part of an 'objective moral order'.

<sup>47</sup> E.O. Wilson, *The Creation*. Disclosure: E.O. Wilson and I wrote complementary book endorsements of our respective books published in late 2006: *The Creation* and *Sacramental Commons*.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson, *The Creation*, 4-5.

The past gave birth to the present: what our ancestors envisioned, and their socio-ecological conduct, resulted in the Earth ecology and social relations which we have today.

The present gives birth to the future: what we do today will influence Earth's and our descendants' reality tomorrow.

The future gives birth to the present: what we envision for tomorrow will influence how we care for creation and communities today.

Earth in ecological crisis and the oppressed poor in economic stress await Christian mission commitments, collaborations, and conduct that will effect an ecologically healthy world, conservation of species, and socially just societies.

### Reflective Questions

1. How might you, your family, and your faith community promote respect for Earth and Earth's natural goods by capitalising our planetary home in written language? How might you promote, in your oral and written language, the use of 'natural goods' rather than 'resources' to represent what Earth provides to be used in place or to be removed or diverted to meet biota's *needs*?

#### POSSIBLE PROJECTS

(a) In elementary grades (including in church Sunday school classes), have children do posters depicting our Earth home. Teach them to write Earth. Suggest, at some art sessions, that their posters (or other artistic representation) show a 'before and after' scene, pre- and post-clean-up. Earth Day would be an excellent occasion for doing the art, on an annual basis; perhaps an 'art exhibit' might be arranged for parents, or simply having the art all round the classroom during parent-teacher conference time. (b) In your letters and other writings, capitalise our planet's name. In church bulletins, use these language changes to promote ongoing consciousness of caring for creation.

2. How might people involved in missions, at home or abroad, see the social justice needs of the people(s) to whom they minister, and the socio-ecological justice needs of people(s) and planet, and respond to them? How might *you* do so as an individual and with your church (and missional) community?

#### POSSIBLE PROJECT

Reflect with your church community – in your home country and abroad – on social and ecological harm being done in local or regional settings. Be sure to listen carefully to those who live in a particular place, and have no other home to which they can return, such as after a mission assignment. Think about ways in which communities, by themselves as the 'leaven in

the dough' or collaboratively with other communities, can address these issues, including as guided by both 'the locals' and present or potential church teachings (from their own or complementary traditions). Envision what the community would like to be the new reality for itself and its local place. Engage in co-operative efforts to make your shared vision the new reality.

3. In what ways might your congregation work to mitigate or eliminate the rampant climate change afflicting Earth in the twenty-first century? What types of specific changes might you make? Have you had your state Interfaith Power and Light organisation do an energy audit to help your congregation cut energy costs and conserve Earth's environment? If not, how might you work with other congregants or parishioners to initiate this process?

#### POSSIBLE PROJECT

Contact your state branch of Interfaith Power and Light, where available. If not, explore other energy and Earth-conservation organisations and projects.

4. People have experienced more 'interfaith dialogue' when interaction occurs that is not simply an exchange of particular beliefs, but collaboration on ecological projects. What interfaith socio-ecological projects are feasible for your church? Besides members of Christian places of worship, are there people from other religious houses of worship, such as a synagogue or mosque, who might be interested in working on collaborative projects? What might you and other members of your church initiate?

#### POSSIBLE PROJECT

Enquire of leaders or members of other places of worship in your local or mission area about whether any members of their tradition are interested in analysing your community to find pressing environmental issues. Jointly organise efforts to address them and press, where necessary, for government assistance to do so.

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### Resources

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# JESUS IS LORD... OF ALL? EVANGELICALS, EARTH CARE, AND THE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL

Dave Bookless

## Introduction

The centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference was marked with at least four major missions conferences, respectively in Tokyo (May 2010), Edinburgh (June), Cape Town (October) and Boston (November). Their varied emphases reflected the diverse legacy of Edinburgh 1910, Tokyo emphasising John Mott's dictum, 'The evangelization of the world in this generation,'<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh strongly ecumenical in honour of its precursor's reputation as the start of the Protestant ecumenical movement, and Boston also ecumenical and strongly academic – as was Edinburgh 1910.<sup>2</sup> However, it has been argued by evangelical scholar Allen Yeh that Cape Town 2010, organised by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, was the fullest heir of Edinburgh 1910. Certainly it was the largest and most globally representative conference, attracting over 4,500 delegates from 198 nations.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, whilst Edinburgh 2010 rightly recognised the movement towards *missio Dei* and an integral understanding of mission, it paid insufficient regard to the fundamental importance of ecological issues for mission in the twenty-first century.

Despite a stirring contribution from Kapya John Kaoma arguing for a paradigm shift in mission thinking,<sup>5</sup> the inclusion of 'ecological perspectives' as a 'transversal' in the conference programme,<sup>6</sup> and a brief

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<sup>1</sup> John Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900). See also: [www.tokyo2010.org/articles/tokyo\\_2010\\_yeh.pdf](http://www.tokyo2010.org/articles/tokyo_2010_yeh.pdf) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Brian Stanley, *The World Mission Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 4; See also: [www.bu.edu/cgcm/files/2009/09/2010Boston-Conference-Summary.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/cgcm/files/2009/09/2010Boston-Conference-Summary.pdf) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Allen Yeh, 'Tokyo 2010 and Edinburgh 2010: A Comparison of Two Centenary Conferences': [www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/27\\_3\\_PDFs/tokyo\\_2010\\_yeh.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/27_3_PDFs/tokyo_2010_yeh.pdf) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>4</sup> [www.acton.org/pub/commentary/2010/11/10/cape-town-2010-stewardship-work-lausanne-movement](http://www.acton.org/pub/commentary/2010/11/10/cape-town-2010-stewardship-work-lausanne-movement) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, 'Missio Dei or Missio Creatoris Dei? Witnessing to Christ in the Face of the Current Ecological Crisis,' in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 296-303.

<sup>6</sup> Kim and Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, 353-54.

reference to 'a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment' in the Edinburgh 'Common Call',<sup>7</sup> Earth care was not a central concern theologically or missiologically.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, Lausanne's 'Cape Town Commitment' provided a theological springboard for evangelical involvement in 'Creation care'. Whilst evangelicalism is a complex movement, with wide variations in attitudes to Earth care through time, culture and denomination, it will also be shown that there have been a consistent series of voices and a coherent set of actors involved in Earth care, or as it is more commonly known in evangelical circles, 'environmental missions' or 'Creation care'.

### Evangelical Ecological Consciousness among Early Evangelicals

One early example of evangelical ecological consciousness is William Carey (1761-1834). Regarded as the father of the modern missionary movement, Carey was also renowned in the fields of botany, agriculture and forestry, establishing the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India in 1820 (thirty years before its British equivalent), and editing (and in parts rewriting) William Roxburgh's major three-volume 'Flora Indica; or Descriptions of Indian Plants'.<sup>9</sup> He had several plants named after him, including an indigenous eucalyptus, *Careya herbacea*<sup>10</sup> and the Saul tree or Wild Guava, *Careya aborea*.<sup>11</sup>

According to Vishal Mangalwadi, Carey's motivation for Earth care 'came from his belief that God has made man responsible for the earth'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Carey's ecological interests were no mere hobbies, but a practical outworking of his evangelical faith. Carey's evangelicalism made him passionate about evangelism but, equally, it convinced him that all truth was God's truth and that scientific, linguistic and literary studies could only enhance the self-evident truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As a nonconformist, Carey would have been familiar with the hymnody of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), based on reworking the Psalmist's celebration of God's glory in nature in the light of Christocentric New Testament theology. Watts's 'Divine Songs' (1715) was so popular that it went through over a thousand editions and was constantly in print for over two

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<sup>7</sup> Edinburgh 2010 'Common Call,' para 3: [www.emw-d.de/fix/files/Common\\_Call\\_final.pdf](http://www.emw-d.de/fix/files/Common_Call_final.pdf) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, 'Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission: Joys, Issues and Challenges,' in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (November 2014), 112-28.

<sup>9</sup> William Roxburgh, *Flora Indica or Descriptions of Indian Plants* (Serampore, India: W. Thacker & Co., 1832).

<sup>10</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi and Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> [www.wmcarey.edu/carey/flora/flora-indica.htm](http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/flora/flora-indica.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Mangalwadi and Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey*, 22.

centuries.<sup>13</sup> In ‘Praise for Creation and Providence,’<sup>14</sup> the final verse seems particularly apposite to Carey’s botanical interests, beginning ‘There’s not a plant or flower below, but makes Thy glories known’. Likewise in the still-popular ‘Joy to the World’ (1719),<sup>15</sup> Watts combines personal evangelical spirituality (‘Let every heart prepare him room’) with earthy imagery (‘Let heaven and nature sing’). The words express the joy that all creation (‘fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains’) experiences at Christ’s coming and the reversal of creation’s curse (‘Nor thorns infest the ground’). ‘Joy to the World,’ with its references to Psalm 98, Romans 8:19-22 and Colossians 1:15-20, predates some evangelicals’ understanding of the cosmic scope of Christ’s redemptive work by almost three centuries.

Carey was also inspired, as a 13-year-old, by listening to John Wesley (1703-1791), the foremost preacher of the evangelical revival. Wesley’s theology included reference to animal welfare and an eschatology affirming the renewal of all creation.<sup>16</sup> For Wesley, a convinced vegetarian, that included a literal realisation of the vision of Isaiah 11:6-9: ‘Nay, no creature, no beast, bird, or fish, will have any inclination to hurt any other; for cruelty will be far away, and savageness and fierceness be forgotten.’<sup>17</sup> Wesley’s reputation was such that Horace Walpole remarked in 1760 that a man was known to be ‘turning Methodist; for, in the middle of conversation, he rose, and opened the window to let out a moth’.<sup>18</sup>

Carey’s, Watts’s and Wesley’s breadth of evangelical passion drew on a tradition of evangelical concern for non-human creatures that arose with the seventeenth-century Puritans and Dissenters, and later spread into Methodism and evangelical Anglicanism. Belief in the divine inspiration of the Christian Scriptures and divine compassion for the whole creation were seen as fundamental to early evangelicalism. Thus, it was the Puritans who first campaigned against bear-baiting and cock-fighting, not (as Macaulay later insinuated) because these pursuits gave too much pleasure to their

<sup>13</sup> Wilbur M. Stone, *The Divine and Moral Songs of Isaac Watts: An Essay Thereon and a Tentative List of Editions* (New York: The Triptych, 1918), 45-93.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1866).

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (London: J. Clark, 1719).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Nothing is more sure, than that as “the Lord is loving to every man”, so “his mercy is over all his works”; all that have sense, all that are capable of pleasure or pain, of happiness or misery,’ Wesley, *Wesley Center Online*:

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-60-the-general-deliverance> (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Wesley, *Wesley Center Online*.

<sup>18</sup> Dr Philip Sampson, *Lord of Creation or Animal among Animals: Darwinism, Dominion and Duties towards Beasts* (Leeds, UK: WYSOCS. 28/07/2014), 6.

participants, but because they caused such pain to ‘fellow creatures’.<sup>19</sup> A typical view was that of Thomas Edwards (1640s) who wrote: ‘God loves the creatures that creep on the ground as well as the best saints; and there is no difference between the flesh of a man and the flesh of a toad.’<sup>20</sup>

The early evangelicals also generally welcomed scientific discoveries, seeing them as evidence of the scope of God’s work in nature. Thus, John Ray (1627-1705), ‘with whom the adventure of modern science begins,’<sup>21</sup> was an ordained Anglican who refused to sign the 1662 Act of Uniformity and became a nonconformist with evangelical leanings. In ‘The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation’ (1691), Ray sought to combine scientific discovery and biblical foundations in a comprehensive natural theology, and he rejected the anthropocentrism of many of his contemporaries, stating, ‘It is a generally received opinion that all this visible world was created for Man... But though this be vulgarly received, yet wise men nowadays think otherwise.’<sup>22</sup>

The fullest expression of an evangelical incorporation of social and ecological transformation was seen in the Clapham Sect, the loose association of wealthy evangelical Anglicans active between 1790 and 1830. Not only were the Clapham Sect committed to combining expository biblical preaching and evangelism with a great programme of social reforms (campaigning against the slave trade, poverty, debt, and for educational, healthcare and prison reform), but additionally the Clapham Sect’s interests included campaigning for the protection of non-human creatures. William Wilberforce (1759-1833), most famous for his anti-slavery work, was a founder-member of the world’s first animal protection organisation, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (now the RSPCA) in 1824, along with three clergymen, while Thomas Fowell Buxton MP (1786-1845), another prominent Clapham Sect member, served on one of its committees.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885), was at the forefront establishing not only the British and Foreign Bible Society (now the Bible Society), the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), John Groom’s Association for the Disabled, the Ragged School Union (now the Shaftesbury Society), but also the RSPCA and the National Anti-

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<sup>19</sup> Rod Preece, *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 119-22.

<sup>20</sup> Preece, *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb*, 120, from Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* 1, 20 (1646).

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Armstrong, *The English Parson-Naturalist: A Companionship between Science and Religion* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2000), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 167.

<sup>23</sup> *The History of the RSPCA, 1972*: <https://www.animallaw.info/article/history-rspca>

Vivisection Society.<sup>24</sup> Later, he was joined by fellow evangelicals C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), the greatest preacher of the late Victorian age, and Catherine Booth (1829-1890) of the Salvation Army. Shaftesbury wrote: 'I was convinced that God had called me to devote whatsoever advantages He might have bestowed upon me to the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast.'<sup>25</sup>

Evangelical involvement in Creation care in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries is summarised by social historian Rod Preece who writes, 'almost all the publications and pamphlets put out by the early Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals... have a very strong evangelical Christian bent,'<sup>26</sup> and the earliest legislation against cruelty to animals 'stemmed directly from the humanitarian influences which lay behind the evangelical protestantism of the period'.<sup>27</sup> Keith Thomas, whose *Man and the Natural World* is the definitive history of attitudes to nature in early modern Britain, writes that the 'initial impulse' for the campaigns against unnecessary cruelty to animals was 'strongly religious... The Old Testament was the authority which was most frequently cited by the propagandists. Clerics were often ahead of lay opinion and an essential role was played by Puritans, Dissenters, Quakers and Evangelicals'.<sup>28</sup>

### **Not in our Forefathers' Footsteps – Evangelical Dispensationalist Eschatology**

The major reason why this rich history of evangelical environmental engagement is largely forgotten today is due to what David A. Moberg terms the 'Great Reversal'<sup>29</sup> of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, evangelicalism in both North America and western Europe became more individualistic, dualistic and eschatologically focused. John Stott, writing in 1984, said: 'For approximately fifty years (c. 1920-1970) evangelicals were preoccupied with the task of defending the historical biblical faith against the attacks of liberalism, and reacting against its "social gospel"'.<sup>30</sup> Evangelicalism became synonymous with evangelism alone and with a retreat from cultural, social, political and environmental issues. Importantly, it was not only evangelicals that lost

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<sup>24</sup> Michael LeRoy, *Fighting on All Fronts: Charity versus Politics* (Third Way, August 1986), 21-26.

<sup>25</sup> Sampson, *Lord of Creation or Animal Among Animals*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> R. Preece and L. Chamberlain, *Animal Welfare and Human Values* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 36.

<sup>27</sup> Preece and Chamberlain, *Animal Welfare and Human Values*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 180.

<sup>29</sup> David A. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1972).

<sup>30</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), xi.

concern for animals and nature in this period. As Rod Preece states, 'It is a startling fact... that... from the [US] Edwardian era to the 1960s, animal well-being and animal rights became largely forgotten issues. The consensual view is that two world wars, and recurring depressions and recessions, focused minds elsewhere.'<sup>31</sup>

The hugely influential Scofield Reference Bible (1909, revised 1917),<sup>32</sup> illustrates how far early twentieth-century evangelical thinking had changed fundamentally from the days of Wesley, Wilberforce and Carey. Scofield's was the first English-language commentary in parallel with the biblical text and became the best-selling Bible in North America and thereafter in many countries. It used the 17th-century King James Version, whose archaic language made its readers dependent on the commentary for interpretation. It also used Archbishop Ussher's chronology, dating the Earth's creation to 4004 BC, thus automatically positioning many evangelicals within the growing Creationist movement. Finally, its eschatology was dispensationalist, popularising the apocalyptic ideas of J.N. Darby (1800-1882) including that of the 'rapture' wherein believers were removed from the earth before its final destruction by fire. Todd and Sweetman write, 'Historically speaking, the Scofield Reference Bible was to dispensationalism what Luther's Ninety-Five Theses was to Lutheranism, or Calvin's Institutes to Calvinism.'<sup>33</sup> Scofield's idiosyncratic commentary to an archaic biblical translation gave near-Scriptural authority to formerly fringe eschatological and anti-scientific ideas, with toxic effects upon evangelicals' attitudes to environmental concerns.

It is possible to trace a direct lineage from Scofield to influential later American Christian literature such as Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson's *The Late Great Planet Earth*<sup>34</sup> and the 'Left Behind' series of books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, both based on a dispensationalist eschatological world-view, portraying America as the righteous nation fighting against theological and political liberalism. LaHaye's 'Left Behind' series has sold over 65 million copies, and the impact of the first in the series was described by conservative Jerry Falwell as 'probably greater than that of any other book in modern times, outside the Bible'.<sup>35</sup> Its

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<sup>31</sup> Preece, *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb*, 355.

<sup>32</sup> Todd R. Mangum and Mark S. Sweetman, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Mangum and Sweetman, *The Scofield Bible*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> Both Lindsey and LaHaye have used their influence to significant political effect, the former describing US President Barack Obama as 'prepping the world' for the anti-Christ: [www.wnd.com/2008/08/71144](http://www.wnd.com/2008/08/71144) (accessed 5th March 2015), and the latter as founder of the Moral Majority, which attempted to corral evangelical votes within the Republican Party:

influence on human attitudes towards creation is undeniable. Whilst various factors contribute to environmental attitudes, research indicates that dispensationalist eschatology is the strongest indicator of negative environmental views.<sup>36</sup>

By the time environmental issues emerged in the 1960s as issues of global concern, evangelicalism was a very different movement from that of its forefathers. Its centre of gravity had moved from patrician British Victorians to the conservative 'Bible belt' of the USA. Scarred by battles over evolution and creation, many evangelicals were fearful of modern science. Influenced by a dispensationalist eschatology subtly linked to fears of Communism and nuclear conflagration, Christian mission was popularly presented as saving souls from a planet destined for destruction. To many North American evangelicals, the new environmental movement appeared to be associated with eastern or pagan 'New Age' philosophies, associated with liberal attitudes to personal morality and radical political and economic agendas. Consequently, many North American evangelicals rejected the new environmentalism on theological, ethical and socio-political grounds. Whilst more research is needed into the phenomenon of right-wing, anti-science, anti-intellectual and anti-environmental evangelicalism, and particularly its spread into South America and Africa, it has been a major influence upon significant sectors of American evangelicalism.

Yet, from the earliest days of the environmental movement there were exceptions, and the past fifty years have seen a gradual, although uneven and incomplete, recovery of evangelically-based concern for the non-human creation in both theological and practical ways. In 1970, Francis Schaeffer's 'Pollution and the Death of Man'<sup>37</sup> offered an astute biblically-based response both to the growth of environmental consciousness and to those who sought to blame environmental destruction on Christianity.<sup>38</sup> The book was well-received by evangelicals involved in theology, science and academia, but never reached the mass market of evangelicals who were more likely to be reading fictionalised stories of an 'end times' destruction of planet Earth.

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[http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235\\_1993243\\_1993291,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235_1993243_1993291,00.html) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>36</sup> James L. Guth, John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt and Corwin E. Smidt, 'Faith and the Environment: Religious Beliefs and Attitudes on Environmental Policy,' in *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995), 364-82.

<sup>37</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: the Christian View of Ecology* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

<sup>38</sup> Schaeffer particularly addressed Lynn White's argument against Christianity: Lynn White, Jr, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. Science, New Series,' 155, 3767 (Mar. 10, 1967), 1203-1207.



### Reclaiming the Space – The Lausanne Covenant

The Lausanne Covenant (1974) brought together the two most influential evangelicals of the twentieth century, Billy Graham (b. 1918) and John Stott (1921-2011), as leaders of a global evangelical movement. Whereas Graham was fearful that a ‘social gospel’ would dilute the urgency of the evangelistic priority, Stott had become convinced that evangelism alone failed to capture a biblical definition of mission. He argued passionately and ultimately successfully for the inclusion of social and political concern within the 1974 Lausanne Covenant.<sup>39</sup> In the years following, Stott’s own thinking on Earth care gradually became part of his writings. His seminal *Issues Facing Christians Today*, first published in 1984, contained a chapter on the environment from the 1990 second edition onwards,<sup>40</sup> while Stott’s final book, *The Radical Disciple* contained a chapter on ‘Creation Care’ as one of ‘eight characteristics of Christian discipleship which are often neglected and yet deserve to be taken seriously’.<sup>41</sup> In this chapter, Stott sought to base Creation care solidly in Scripture and to steer a course between ‘the deification of nature’ (‘the mistake of pantheists, of animists, and of the New Age movement’) and ‘the exploitation of nature’ (seen in ‘destructive domination’ of the earth), advocating instead ‘a responsible stewardship’ of the earth and its creatures.<sup>42</sup>

Alongside Stott’s writings, a growing number of evangelical initiatives, statements and theological writings emerged from the 1970s onwards. The Au Sable Institute in the USA (1979) and the A Rocha movement, initially in Portugal from 1983 and gradually from the 1990s spreading to twenty countries, explored the theology and practice of evangelical environmental concern through practical conservation, scientific studies and environmental education. In the USA, the Evangelical Environmental Network (1993) has provided a national voice in terms of faith-based advocacy, holding campaigns including the memorable ‘What Would Jesus Drive?’ and an increasing focus on Climate Change. However, the divisions within American evangelicalism have continued to cause tension. In 2008, when Richard Cizik, at the time Vice President of the National Association of Evangelicals, spoke publically on Climate Change, he was forced to resign his post. Similarly, after an ‘Evangelical Climate Initiative’<sup>43</sup> was launched in 2006, signed by many leading American evangelicals, it was countered in 2009 by the Christian Right’s ‘An

<sup>39</sup> Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*.

<sup>41</sup> John Stott, *The Radical Disciple* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Stott, *The Radical Disciple*, 49-59.

<sup>43</sup> [www.npr.org/documents/2006/feb/evangelical/calltoaction.pdf](http://www.npr.org/documents/2006/feb/evangelical/calltoaction.pdf) (accessed 5th March 2015).



Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming,<sup>44</sup> rejecting the scientific consensus on Climate Change and arguing that ‘abundant, affordable energy is indispensable to human flourishing’. This declaration was led by the Cornwall Alliance which claims to promote ‘environmental stewardship and economic development built on Biblical principles’<sup>45</sup> although, ironically, its energy seemed focused on defending economic liberalisation, free-market capitalism and campaigning against tackling Climate Change.

Although it is hard to know how representative anti-environmental views amongst American evangelicals are, independent research suggests a groundswell amongst younger evangelicals towards more positive environmental views and towards engagement with Climate Change. In a 2013 survey, significant majorities of American evangelicals supported funding renewable energy research (90%), tax rebates for fuel-efficient cars or for installing solar panels (80%), increased fuel efficiency of vehicles (72%), and regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant (71%).<sup>46</sup>

In the UK, leading evangelical scientists are significantly involved in Creation care. The geneticist and naturalist Professor R.J. (Sam) Berry (b. 1934) has produced a steady stream of publications<sup>47</sup> and worked amongst and beyond evangelicals to co-ordinate responses to environmental issues. Sir John Houghton (b. 1931), one of the world’s leading Climate scientists and a Baptist lay preacher, founded the John Ray Initiative (1997),<sup>48</sup> to connect environment, science and biblical Christianity, and Sir Ghilleen Prance, the globally-renowned botanist, ethno-botanist and former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew Gardens became involved in writing,<sup>49</sup> lecturing, and as Chair of A Rocha International’s Trustees.

Evangelical theologians and missiologists from many countries have become increasingly concerned with rediscovering the biblical mandate for Creation care. A list of names will inevitably be selective but significant thinkers and writers have included Steven Bouma-Prediger, Cal DeWitt, Jonathan Moo and Loren Wilkinson from the USA, Richard Bauckham, Bishop James Jones, Howard Peskett, C.J.H. Wright and N.T. (Tom) Wright from the UK, Ken Gnanakan and Vinoth Ramachandra from Asia,

<sup>44</sup> [www.cornwallalliance.org/2009/05/01/evangelical-declaration-on-global-warming](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/2009/05/01/evangelical-declaration-on-global-warming) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>45</sup> [www.cornwallalliance.org/about](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/about) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>46</sup> N. Smith and A. Leiserowitz, ‘American Evangelicals and Global Warming,’ in *Global Environmental Change* 23, 5 (2013), 1009-17.

<sup>47</sup> R.J. Berry, *God’s Book of Works: The Nature and Theology of Nature* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1983); (ed) *The Care of Creation* (Leicester, UK: IVP 2000); (ed) *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006); (ed), *When Enough is Enough: A Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos 2007).

<sup>48</sup> [www.jri.org.uk](http://www.jri.org.uk)

<sup>49</sup> Ghilleen T. Prance, *The Earth Under Threat: A Christian Perspective* (Glasgow, UK: Wild Goose, 1996); *Preserving Biodiversity: Is there a Biblical Reason?* (Christians in Science / St Edmund’s Lecture, Cambridge, 2002).

Bishop Zac Niringiye from Africa, and Ruth Padilla de Borst from Latin America. The field is growing fast and important works and authors have inevitably been omitted in this short list. One could also add a mass of more popular Christian paperbacks giving the evangelical market a biblical basis for environmental involvement.<sup>50</sup>

### **Cape Town 2010 – Recovering Evangelical Concern for Creation Care**

If the recovery of evangelical concern for Creation care began as early as Schaeffer and Stott in the 1970s, it has taken many years and many people to move it back into the mainstream of evangelical thinking and praxis. A major step in this direction was the fourth global Lausanne Congress, held in Cape Town in 2010. At this gathering, 4,500 evangelical leaders from nearly 200 nations affirmed the ‘Cape Town Commitment,’ which included the following significant statement:

If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ’s Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.<sup>51</sup>

Framing Creation care as a ‘gospel issue’ for evangelicals moves it from the margins to the centre of evangelical thinking and missional action. The Call to Action section of the Cape Town Commitment encourages Christians worldwide to:

A) Adopt lifestyles that renounce habits of consumption that are destructive or polluting;

B) Exert legitimate means to persuade governments to put moral imperatives above political expediency on issues of environmental destruction and climate change;

C) Recognise and encourage the missional calling both of (i) Christians who engage in the proper use of the earth’s resources for human need and welfare through agriculture, industry and medicine, and (ii) Christians who engage in the protection and restoration of the earth’s habitats and species through conservation and advocacy. Both share the same goal for both serve the same Creator, Provider and Redeemer.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Examples include: Dave Bookless, *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God’s World* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008); E.R. Brown, *Our Father’s World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation* (South Hadley, MA: Doorlight Publications, 2006); Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature: A Christian’s Call to Save Creation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> Rose Dowsett (ed), *The Cape Town Commitment: Study Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 28.

<sup>52</sup> Dowsett, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 81.

The use of the terms ‘gospel’ and ‘missional’ are particularly significant in terms of positioning environmental concerns as central to evangelical thinking and action. The Cape Town Commitment has also led to a global process under the joint auspices of the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance (representing 600 million Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians globally). Both organisations have appointed leaders to help ‘mainstream’ Creation care within the evangelical world, the Rev Ed Brown as Lausanne’s ‘Senior Associate for Creation Care’ and Dr Chris Elisara to lead the WEA’s ‘Creation Care Task Force’. Together with the current author, the Rev Dave Bookless, seconded by A Rocha International to assist in the process, and alongside major evangelical mission and development agencies including Church Mission Society, Compassion, Tearfund and World Vision, a ‘Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel’ was held in Jamaica in late 2012. This is now being followed by a series of regional conferences (South East Asia in 2014, East and Central Africa, West and Francophone Africa, North America, Latin America in 2015), each of which have the core aim of stimulating national evangelical Creation care movements.

Alongside the Lausanne and World Evangelical Alliance process, major evangelical mission agencies have begun to rethink their attitudes to the place of Creation care within mission. BMS World Mission (formerly the Baptist Mission Society, co-founded by William Carey) has gone through a major process in terms of reducing and offsetting carbon emissions, setting up an Eco-Grant scheme for mission partners, and producing the ‘FutureShape?’ set of resources (in partnership with the Baptist Union and A Rocha) to ‘help your church explore Creation care issues from a biblical perspective’.<sup>53</sup> CMS (formerly the Church Missionary Society, founded by members of the Clapham Sect), has supported mission partners seconded to A Rocha, working on Climate Change in Bangladesh, and on deforestation and indigenous rights in Argentina. Leading environmental voices in CMS have been non-western, including Serah Wambua and Karobia Njogu from CMS Africa, and Dr Kang-San Tan of Asia CMS. As a final example, OMF International (which began as the China Inland Mission founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865), has appointed David Gould as ‘Creation Care Advocate’ to help the mission’s 1,100 workers engage with the theological and practical implications of caring for God’s creation. This has led to a 40-page edition of OMF’s Mission Round Table bulletin on ‘Missional Creation Care,’<sup>54</sup> which gives a biblical basis for including environmental concerns within ‘integral mission,’ shares experiences of mission projects already engaged in this, and outlines three aspirations, that:

1. As part of being disciples we should practise Creation Care.

<sup>53</sup> [www.bmsworldmission.org/futureshape](http://www.bmsworldmission.org/futureshape)

<sup>54</sup> David Gould (ed), *Missional Creation Care* (Mission Round Table 9.1; Singapore: OMF International, 2014).

2. As part of our disciple-making we should teach Creation Care.
3. As part of our mission strategy we should consider Creation Care.<sup>55</sup>

Major evangelical development agencies have also begun to recognise that climate change and environmental depletion are, globally, major drivers of poverty. Thus, World Vision has, since 1998, affirmed, 'We are stewards of God's creation. We care for the earth and act in ways that will restore and protect the environment. We ensure that our development activities are ecologically sound.'<sup>56</sup> In a similar way, Tearfund, which has long been involved in advocacy on Climate Change, has also begun to think in terms of systemic change in attitudes to sustainability for the whole creation.

Alongside the transformation of evangelical mission and development agencies, there has been a growth in what have been termed 'environmental missions'. This is an umbrella term covering organisations combining Creation care with church-planting and 'disciple-making,' such as Eden Vigil,<sup>57</sup> and also organisations devoted specifically to Creation care as an expression of Christian mission, such as 'Care of Creation' and A Rocha. By far the largest of these is A Rocha, an international Christian conservation organisation which began with a single project in 1983, focusing on studying and protecting a threatened estuary and headland in southern Portugal, and by 2014 was working in twenty countries across six continents.

A Rocha's basis of faith is evangelical (its core commitments were drafted by John Stott), although it welcomes the involvement of and partnerships with those of other beliefs and traditions, and its focus is particularly around bio-diversity conservation, emphasising scientific research, environmental education, church and theological engagement, and community-based conservation projects. Its *modus operandi* is that each national project or organisation should be legally independent, nationally led and financed, whilst being connected globally through a Memorandum of Understanding and a small international co-ordinating and resourcing team. Its expressions are therefore extremely diverse, varying from urban conservation and food-growing in multicultural London, UK, to combating desertification through tree-planting in Peru, and mitigating human-elephant conflict in India. A Rocha is the only faith-based full member of the global conservation body, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and also seeks to be a catalyst in helping evangelical (and other) churches recover the theology and practice of Creation care.

<sup>55</sup> Gould, *Missional Creation Care*, 2-3.

<sup>56</sup> <http://danutm.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/neci-biblical-understanding-condensed-a4-final.pdf> (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Eden Vigil [www.edenvigil.org](http://www.edenvigil.org)

### Some Implications for Creation Care

This section offers a brief summary of material covered in more depth elsewhere,<sup>58</sup> and argues that David Bebbington's quadrilateral forms a useful matrix through which to assess evangelicalism's approach to Earth care, or Creation care, and the potential for evangelical approaches to missiology to incorporate it further. Bebbington's widely-accepted outline of evangelicalism has four distinctive emphases:

Biblicism – a particular regard for the Bible as the source of all spiritual truth.

Crucicentrism – a focus on the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

Conversionism – the belief that individual humans need to be converted to Christ.

Activism – the belief that the gospel needs to be expressed in practical outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

This outline has implications for Creation care. First, in terms of 'biblicism,' evangelicals have always held a high view of the canonical Christian Scriptures in terms of the revelation of God's purposes, asserting their priority over tradition, reason and experience, whilst acknowledging that each of these play a part in the hermeneutical task. It was their view of Scripture that led to early evangelicals justifying their engagement with animal welfare and suffering. As they read the Bible, they saw that all God's creatures were declared 'very good' (Genesis 1:31) and that God's compassion was 'upon all that he had made' (Psalm 145:9). Through the near-century of the 'Great Reversal,' evangelicals defined the Gospel in narrowly spiritual terms, effectively overlooking the doctrines of creation and new creation in favour of a fall-redemption paradigm. In recent decades, however, renewed biblical scholarship has convinced many of the inadequacy of such a view.

Besides, the scholarship of C.J.H. Wright both in Old Testament ethics and within the Lausanne Movement, of N.T. Wright in terms of the implications of the resurrection for the whole created order, and of Richard Bauckham in New Testament studies have each been key in the increasing evangelical recognition that Creation care is not only biblically justifiable, but integral to the gospel itself and thus to Christian mission. Today, evangelicals opposed to Creation care are increasingly seen as theologically on the margins, proof-texting using poor translations of the Hebrew and Greek biblical texts, for instance, in terms of 2 Peter 3:10 where the

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<sup>58</sup> David Bookless, 'Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Evangelical Reflection,' *Mission Studies* 25 (2008), 37-52; 'How Does Creation Care Belong within an Evangelical Understanding of Mission,' in R.S. White and Colin Bell (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730 to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman), 2-17.

Authorised Version spoke of the earth being destroyed, mistranslating a word that is better translated as 'laid bare'.<sup>60</sup>

The second key mark of evangelicalism, 'crucicentrism,' emphasises the centrality of the saving work of Christ on the cross. For some, there has been a fear that too great an emphasis on Creation care might dilute the centrality of the cross, particularly in the redemption of human beings. Memories of the ideological battle between the 'spiritual' and 'social' gospels of the earlier twentieth century remain vivid for some. Yet this was not the case for the Puritans or the Clapham Sect, and it need not be so today. The hermeneutical key is that evangelical approaches to Creation care must be firmly Christocentric, based not only on an Old Testament theology of creation, but on an understanding of Christ as Creator (the one 'through whom all things were made,' John 1:3), Sustainer (in whom 'all things hold together' Col. 1:17), and Redeemer – not just of people but of the whole created order ('For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' Col. 1:19-20). Thus, the cross of Christ becomes central not only in the redemption of individual people but in giving hope that the whole created order will be set free from decay (Rom. 8:21). Evangelicals can thus be involved in Creation care as an expression of worshiping and following Jesus, and demonstrating his Lordship over the whole of the natural world.

Thirdly, evangelicalism has always been 'conversionist,' believing that individuals need to respond in personal faith to God's offer of salvation through Christ. Evangelicals take sin and the Fall very seriously, and see no hope for human persons or the world of nature in moral improvement, education or political programmes, without an inner transformation wrought by the presence of God's Holy Spirit. They are thus generally suspicious of the kind of environmentalism that speaks of 'saving the planet and the poor,' believing that God alone can save. They are also very aware that too great an emphasis on Creation care could become a distraction from evangelism. However, evangelical conversionism can also be an advantage in that it has a theology which addresses the failure of contemporary environmentalism to change human behaviour adequately. Leading environmental lawyer and former White House adviser during the Carter and Clinton administrations, Gus Speth, stated to a group of faith leaders:

I used to think the top environmental problems facing the world were global warming, environmental degradation and ecosystem collapse, and that we scientists could fix those problems with enough science. But I was wrong. The real problem is not those three items, but greed, selfishness and apathy.

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<sup>60</sup> Bookless, *Planetwise*, 80-85.

And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that. We need your help.<sup>61</sup>

Evangelicalism recognises that a complete inner transformation away from a self-centred orientation towards a life centred on God's priorities is necessary. Conversion can be seen not only as a single moment of response but as a lifelong process of living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2) wherein attitudes and relationships (including to and with the non-human creation), lifestyles and choices are conformed to the likeness of Christ. Thus, evangelical spirituality can integrate Creation care into a Christocentric life of worship, discipleship and mission.

Finally, evangelicalism is characteristically 'activist'. This was exemplified by the Puritans and early evangelicals in their campaigns for social, moral and environmental reform. Today, as evangelicals slowly recover from the other-worldly Pietism of much of the twentieth century, there are signs that they are beginning to recover an activism in terms of Earth care as well. The examples of the Lausanne Movement, key mission agencies, and environmental missions such as A Rocha have already been mentioned. To those may be added a host of small and large-scale initiatives. In the UK and elsewhere, the ecumenically originated 'Eco-Congregation' scheme has begun to attract a range of evangelical churches. Derek Burnside, of the 550-member Belmont Chapel in Exeter, stated to the BBC that, 'The Bible teaches us that God has given us stewardship of his creation. He expects us to treat it as a blessing and not a commodity to be used up.'<sup>62</sup> The church has installed bicycle racks and battery recycling plants as well as holding services focusing on Creation care. In the USA, the Vineyard Movement of churches has committed itself to 'environmental justice',<sup>63</sup> and Boise Vineyard has initiated i-61 Ministries<sup>64</sup> (based on Isaiah 61) seeking to integrate spiritual, social and environmental concerns in mission. In India, the ministry of ACTS (Agriculture, Crafts, Trades and Studies) Group<sup>65</sup> includes bio-gas production and a national Programme for Environmental Action in Schools (PEAS). Elsewhere, an ever-growing number of evangelical churches and organisations are involved in tree-planting, sustainable agriculture, recycling, clean energy generation, water storage and nature protection.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://unc.news21.com/index.php/stories/rel.html> (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>62</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/devon/hi/people\\_and\\_places/religion\\_and\\_ethics/newsid\\_8708000/8708143.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/devon/hi/people_and_places/religion_and_ethics/newsid_8708000/8708143.stm) (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>63</sup> <http://vineyardjusticework.org/loving-creation> (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>64</sup> <http://i-61.org> (accessed 5th March 2015).

<sup>65</sup> <http://actsgroup.org> (accessed 5th March 2015).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that, despite the many current evangelical initiatives, environmental involvement remains divisive for some evangelicals. Particularly in conservative parts of the US and in areas such as Brazil, where evangelicalism has become associated with dispensationalist eschatology, it remains an uphill struggle to convince leaders and church members that Creation care is neither a fashionable novelty nor a distraction from gospel priorities. In these areas, there is significant theological and missiological work to be done, particularly in dismantling a deeply unbiblical dispensationalist eschatology which is, historically, far more of a novelty than Creation care. Yet, for those evangelicals who have analysed the history of evangelicalism, studied the Scriptures open to God's purposes for all creation, and observed what the Spirit is doing in churches and Christian communities right around the world, there are many grounds for hope. If, as St Paul wrote in Romans 8:19, 'the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed,' then those of God's children who call themselves evangelical – Gospel people – are beginning to rediscover that the Gospel is good news for the whole creation, and mission therefore means obeying Christ's commission in Mark 16:15 to 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'.

## Resources

- Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Recovering the Community of Creation* (London: DLT, 2010).
- David Bookless, *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008).
- Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).
- Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: A Theology of the Environment* (London: SPCK, 1999).
- Peter Harris, *Kingfisher's Fire: A Story of Hope for God's Earth* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008).
- Robert S. White and Jonathan A. Moo, *Hope in an Age of Despair: The Gospel and the Future of Life on Earth* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2013).



# THE *MISSIO SPIRITUS*: TOWARDS A PNEUMATOLOGICAL MISSIOLOGY OF CREATION

Amos Yong

## Introduction

This chapter triangulates around three theological topics: pentecostal or pneumatological theology, theology of creation, and theology of mission.<sup>1</sup> Although each has an established or emerging literature, they have not, to my knowledge, been brought together in any constructive manner. We thus seek to make contributions along two related lines: that of exploring the possibility of developing an explicitly pentecostal and pneumatological perspective on theology of creation, and that of contributing to thinking about mission theology from within such a framework. The two parts that follow take up these tasks respectively. I conclude with brief recommendations for mission practice from such a pneumatological theology of creation.

## Understanding Creation: Pentecostal and Pneumatological Perspectives

We begin by noting that, on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter connected the outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only with the charismatic and egalitarian empowering of ‘all flesh’ (e.g. sons and daughters, young and old, slave and free), but also with ‘portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below’ (Acts 2:19).<sup>2</sup> These portents and signs were anticipated long before – by the prophet Joel (2:28-32): ‘blood and fire and columns of smoke, [the] sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood’ – and associated with the salvation expected on the Day of the LORD. While these manifestations are thereby first and foremost signs of

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, I have written books on each of the three topics: on pentecostal theology in *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); on the theology of creation in *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); and on mission theology in *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology for the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). The following attempts to connect the dots even while forging a synoptic statement.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

God's eschatological salvation, two other observations are pertinent: first, that these heavenly and earthly phenomena are directly connected with the pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit of God, and second, that they serve as capable metaphors for signifying the salvation and eschatological mission of God inaugurated by the gift of the Spirit. Such observations invite further reflection on what might be called a 'pentecostal' or pneumatological theology of creation.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to define our terms. Both Pentecostalism and pneumatological theology are relative newcomers to the religion and science conversation, hence the need to define how they are used in this chapter. *Pentecost* and *Pentecostalism* (both capitalised) refer respectively to the Day of Pentecost described in Acts 2, and to the tradition of Christian churches and denominations linked to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906-1908.<sup>3</sup> *Pentecostals* (also capitalised) are adherents of modern Pentecostalism who often understand the Day of Pentecost not as an unrepeatable historical event, but as paradigmatic and (in some cases) normative for all Christian life and experience. When used adjectivally, *pentecostal* (uncapitalised) is either associated with phenomena on the Day of Pentecost or descriptive of the perspective informed by the experiences of Pentecostals.

The reason for the absence of specifically pentecostal voices in the public domain in general and in the religion and science conversation more specifically is that Pentecostals have only just recently begun to think about what is distinctive about a pentecostal world-view.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that, given the paradigmatic function of the Day of Pentecost for the modern pentecostal experience, and given the centrality of the Holy Spirit to pentecostal spirituality, a pentecostal world-view can and should be developed which is unambiguously pneumatological in orientation. By this, I mean that a distinctive pentecostal perspective should be informed at its core by their experience and understanding of the Holy Spirit, and should be comprehensively extended through the application of this pneumatologically informed frame of reference – what I call the 'pneumatological imagination'<sup>5</sup> – to any and all domains of knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> This would include denominations like the Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Church of God (Cleveland, TN), and Church of God of Prophecy; see Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially chap. 3.

<sup>4</sup> A sketch of a pentecostal world-view can be found in James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See part I of my 'Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective,' in *New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series* (Burlington, VT, and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

By ‘pneumatological theology,’ I am referring not to the theological or doctrinal study of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), but to a comprehensive theological vision starting from and informed explicitly by pneumatology. This work has been in progress across denominational lines – no one Christian tradition corners the market on the Holy Spirit – since the renaissance in pneumatology itself about a generation ago, and has borne impressive results so far, even when limited to the circles of pentecostal theological reflection in mission theology of work, social ethics and spirituality, among other topics. I suggest that the time has come to ask the specific question: what does a pentecostal perspective and pneumatological theology have to contribute to the Christian understanding of creation and the natural world?

A number of other attempts to develop a theology of nature have drawn upon pneumatological themes and perspectives. In what follows, I highlight the efforts of Sallie McFague, a Protestant feminist theologian, and Denis Edwards, a Roman Catholic theologian. McFague formulates an ecological theology and theology of nature appropriate to the challenges of late twentieth and early twenty-first century planetary life.<sup>6</sup> Drawing from process theology and feminist/liberationist epistemology, McFague articulates a theology of creation that is both theological and naturalistic. While concerned to avoid any kind of pre-modern supernaturalism, McFague realises that the positivism and scientism of modernity has been destructive for planetary life. As there is a ‘more’ to the natural world than materialism suggests, McFague exhorts, ‘Christians should not only be natural, understanding ourselves as *in* and *of* the earth, but also super, natural, understanding ourselves as excessively, superlatively concerned with nature and its well-being’.<sup>7</sup>

McFague’s metaphorical-theological discourse concludes that the incarnation is suggestive not only of the revelation of God in Christ, but also the embodiment of God in Jesus. Jesus Christ reveals (for Christians) the shape of the body of God which is inclusive of all (especially the needy and oppressed), and unveils the scope of the body of God which is inclusive of the cosmos (cosmic Christ). This notion of divine embodiment finds new meaning in the context of our present ecological crisis. Hence the world is reconceived metaphorically as the ‘body of God’ so as to articulate an interdependence and interrelational model for the God-human-world relationship (rather than a dualistic or hierarchical conception of God and world, or of human beings and creation), encouraging a reverential attitude towards the creation (rather than a utilitarian and instrumentalist one), and

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<sup>6</sup> Sallie McFague’s publications are numerous; for our purposes, her more recent trilogy is most pertinent: *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997); and *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 6; italics original.

motivating the development of an ethic of care, reconciliation and liberation (rather than an ethic of domination). Crucial to McFague's proposals is a creation spirituality and praxis aimed at replacing the neo-classical economic structure of middle class American life with one that attempts to embody the life of Jesus in ways that are more environmentally sustainable and friendly.

It is interesting also to note that McFague develops her panentheistic agential-organic model of the God-world relationship analogously to traditional conceptions of the spirit-body relationship. Even as the human spirit is understood to animate the human body, so also the divine Spirit universally gives life, empowers and energises all things. God as 'spirit-body' is thus neither fully impersonal (hence McFague's anti-modernism) nor fully personal (hence also McFague's anti-premodernism). Instead, Spirit-theology allows for emphasis not only on the divine intellect/Wisdom (Logos theology) transcendent over the world's evolutionary process, but also on the divine enmeshment within creation.

The ecological theology of Australian theologian, Denis Edwards, follows McFague's, but adds an explicitly pneumatological framework.<sup>8</sup> Edwards' thesis is that the story of the Holy Spirit is co-extensive with (what contemporary cosmological science says is) the fourteen-billion-year evolutionary history of the entire universe, not only breathing life into the world but also empowering the creative process. Bringing insights from both the biblical and patristic traditions into dialogue with contemporary science introduces new possibilities into the religion and science conversation. The dynamism of the Spirit or the *ruach* (breath) of God, for example, helps us think about the dynamic and unfinished character of the world. This open-endedness (I would emphasise) is also suggestive of an eschatological (to use theological language) or teleological (a more neutral category) dimension to the universe, and in turn provides for a connection Edwards sees between pneumatology and the emergence of novelty and complexity in the creation.

Edwards' notion of the Spirit of God immanent to and active within creation's processes contributes towards a more robust theological framework for understanding God as creator. In Edwards' theology of creation, Word and Spirit work mutually and reciprocally as the 'two hands of the Father' (Irenaeus) in the formation and transformation of the universe. Hence the self-organising principles guiding the evolution of complex processes and structures in the universe is inexplicable if a materialistic metaphysics is assumed, but appears to cohere well with the kind of pneumatological theology of creation suggested by Edwards. If the Word (or Logos) provides the divine pattern for creation's forms, then the

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<sup>8</sup> Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), especially chap. 3, 'Breathing Life into a Universe of Creatures'.

Spirit is the divine mind (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16) that communicates the patterns of the Logos to creatures and the divine breath that empowers creaturely formation. From this, the Spirit is not only the giver of life and the source of novelty and creativity in the world, but also the ontological basis for creation's intricately structured relationships: of each 'creature' with others, its environment, and the divine, and of the whole of creation with the Triune God.

The preceding very succinct exposition leaves much unsaid and only charts two trajectories for considering how to bridge pneumatological theology and theology of creation. Nevertheless, the following gains, at least, can be said to have been achieved: that the spiritual and material dimensions of the world ought not to be bifurcated; that the theological and the natural domains are interrelated; and that the pneumatological and the creational are interconnected. But how might pneumatological theology inform Christian mission? In the following section, I explore how this theology is the foundation of what might be called an environmental or ecological missiology.

### **Foundations for Christian Mission: Pneumato-Creational Perspectives**

The connection between theology of creation and missiology here is pneumatology: the Spirit of creation is also the Spirit that empowers Christian mission. The following discussion unfolds such a pneumatological theology of creational mission in three steps: by following out the salvation historical drama from creation through redemption to eschatological glorification. This will set us up to think about missiological praxis (the final section at the end) in the light of such a pneumatological theology of creation.

#### *Missio Spiritus – The Doctrine of Creation*

In thinking about pneumatology, pneumatological theology, and pneumatology of mission, we should begin with the doctrine of creation. This not only helps us to ground pneumatological reflection in the doctrine of God, but it also establishes the cosmic, creational and global scope of the work of the Spirit. Both points are important. Without a link with the doctrine of God as creator, the Spirit may turn out to be less than 'holy,' perhaps not even related to the God of Judeo-Christian faith at all, much less to monotheistic or even theistic sensibilities.<sup>9</sup> There are many spirits indeed, so Christian thinking about pneumatology must be defined, at least

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<sup>9</sup> There are also possibilities for thinking about the Spirit of God in relationship to monotheistic traditions more generally and to Islam in particular. I undertake a dialogue with the latter in my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, chap. 6.

initially, as the Spirit of the God who created the heavens and the earth. And without relation to the latter, cosmic compass of the Spirit's work, then we may be tempted to merely interiorise or subjectivise the Spirit's presence and activity.

The role of the Spirit in the Christian doctrine of creation has gradually been recognised.<sup>10</sup> In my own work, I have attempted what I have called a pneumatological reading of the Genesis narratives.<sup>11</sup> This begins with the observation that while 'the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,' the author of the creation account notes that 'a wind from God [*ruach Elohim*] swept over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1:2). So while traditional creation theologies have highlighted the creation of the world through the word of God, the word of God is uttered through the divine breath and the 'history' of the world is 'blown' or swept along by the presence and activity of the *ruach Elohim*. The partitioning of the waters from land, the emergence of vegetation, the evolution of life itself – each of these can be understood from this pneumatological vantage point as being propelled by the breath of God that transcendentally hovered over the primordial creation.

But the divine breath is not only transcendent over the creation but also immanent within it. This is because all living creatures have been constituted by Elohim's 'breath of life' (Gen. 1:30), and in particular, human beings, who are essentially constituted by the divine breath (Gen. 2:7). As it is said later in the Hebrew Bible, 'If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust' (Job 34:14-15). Beyond this, however, the Psalmist indicates that the divine breath not only gives life to creatures, but also that through it, the face of the ground is renewed (Ps. 104:29-30), and the prophet Isaiah proclaims that when 'a spirit from on high is poured out on us, [then] the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest' (Is. 32:15). This suggests that the rhythms of creation itself beats to the drumming of the creator Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note the missiological implications of a pneumatological theology of creation. If a Logos theology emphasises that the Word became flesh and, as the true light, 'enlightens everyone' in the world (John 1:9), then the doctrine of *creator Spiritus* suggests that such

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<sup>10</sup> The major text so far is Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> See Amos Yong, 'Ruach, the Primordial Waters, and the Breath of Life: Emergence Theory and the Creation Narratives in Pneumatological Perspective,' in Michael Welker (ed), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 183-204.

<sup>12</sup> See also Scott A. Ellington, 'The Face of God as His Creating Spirit: The Interplay of Yahweh's *panim* and *ruach* in Psalm 104:29-30,' in Amos Yong (ed), *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 17-29.

lights are intertwined through the infusion of the divine breath. Thus, as the ancient poets recognised, 'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28), and this can be understood both christologically and pneumatologically. On the pneumatological plane, however, when read in the light of ancient Israelite perspectives (above), humans are pneumatically interrelated not only with one another but also with non-human animals since all of life throbs with and through the breath given by the *ruach* of God. In this sense, Christian mission is thus always and primordially *missio Spiritus*.

But there is one more layer to pneumatological mission theology of creation that should be lifted up before turning to the doctrine of redemption. Divine redemption is required because although the *ruach Elohim* both hovered over the primordial waters and became the breath of life for all living creatures, nevertheless with the fall of creation, the cosmos and all of its creatures remain alienated from God the Creator. Paradoxically, then, the *ruach Elohim* is both present to all creatures – enlivening and vivifying the creation – and yet also absent from them – in the estrangement creatures feel towards other creatures and to their Creator – simultaneously. In anticipation of this redemptive work, then, the promise is given in the Hebrew Bible that God will redeem the world pneumatologically through the chosen or elect nation of Israel.

There are two moments constitutive of such a pneumatological promise. First, God pledges to Abraham that, 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:3). Second, however, even the divine promises are insufficient to preserve and ultimately save the people called of God. Rather, God needs to accomplish an internal work, a work of the Spirit: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances' (Ezek. 36:26-27). This anticipates the later gift of the Spirit in Christ. But for our purposes at this juncture, it is important to point out that the creational mission of the Spirit not only infuses the dust of the ground with life but also looks ahead to another pneumatic outpouring and infilling. In other words, the creation as a whole, as well as its creatures, is primed to receive the redemptive fullness of the Spirit.

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### *Missio Spiritus – The Doctrine of Redemption*

The second moment of the *missio Spiritus* moves us from the universality of the Spirit's presence and activity in the creation to the particularity of the Spirit's historical work in redemption. This redemptive history involves the incarnation of the Son via the power of the Spirit, followed by the Son's gift of the Spirit to the people of God. But why are both essential? For at least two reasons, one historical and the other spiritual: historically, the Son



came in order to renew and restore Israel as the people of God, and this renewal and restoration was intended both to serve as a template for the kingdom of God and to inaugurate that kingdom.<sup>13</sup> But God's offer of restoration and renewal in the Son was rejected and he suffered a violent death; yet his death became salvific for his people because it served as a scapegoat that prevented further outbreaks of violence (at least for one generation). Spiritually, the life and death of the Son represented the obedience that served as the basis of reconciliation of human beings in particular and the world as a whole with God; then the resurrection and ascension of the Son confirmed the potentiality of the world's transfiguration in the presence and power of God. Hence, as the ancient church confessed, the Son became human so that human beings might be redeemed as children of God; by extension, the Son was clothed with the dust of the earth so that the creation itself might be renewed as the dwelling place of God.

But the mission of the Son cannot be divorced from the *missio Spiritus*; in fact, they are inextricably intertwined. The Spirit is the power not just of the Son's breath of life but also of the Son's conception and generation in the womb of Mary; just as the *ruach Elohim* hovered over the structural ordering of the primordial chaos, so also did the Spirit both overshadow and come upon Mary (Luke 1:35). Then, the Spirit descends on the Son at his baptism in the Jordan (Luke 3:22) so that he can be filled with the Spirit for his public ministry, itself launched by his spiritual confrontation with the demonic powers of the world (Luke 4:1, 14). Thus does Jesus pronounce that his mission is that of the Spirit's: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18-19). The rest of his public ministry unfolds this agenda according to the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38).

If Jesus accomplished the saving works of God – proclamation of the gospel to all, in particular to the poor, healing the sick, delivering the oppressed and the captives, and inaugurating the Jubilee year of divine favour and redemption – through the power of the Spirit, then so also did his original disciples. They were initially told to wait in Jerusalem for 'power from on high' (Luke 24:49) and then later promised: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Whereas Jesus came first to renew and restore Israel, with forays into Samaria, the Spirit-filled ministry of the earliest followers of Jesus took them to the ends of the earth.

<sup>13</sup> Here I am in basic agreement with the central thrust of N.T. Wright's interpretation of the mission of Jesus; my own appropriation of Wright's account is in my *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), chap. 3.



The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost brings to historical fulfilment two promises made to ancient Israel. First, if ancient Israel had been disobedient to the covenant with Yahweh due to hardness of heart, the newly reconstituted people of God were no longer merely bound externally by law but were empowered internally by transformed hearts that had been touched by the Spirit. This is one of the central messages of the New Testament: that the Hebraic law provided for sacrifices for sins but the gift of the Spirit enables the evangelical obedience that produces sanctified and holy lives (see Heb. 9:13-14 and *passim*). In other words, the divine breath of life in every person as a result of the creative work of the Spirit is now, potentially, the divine breath of holiness as a result of the redemptive work of the Spirit unleashed on the Day of Pentecost.

Secondly, the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit inaugurates the promised redemption of the nations derived from the covenant made with Abraham. This occurred in two ways: through the presence at Jerusalem at the Pentecost feast of 'devout Jews [and proselytes] from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem' (Acts 2:5, 10), and through the apostolic missionary movement that not only went from Jerusalem to Rome (as recounted in Acts) but also commissioned others to take the gospel in other directions (i.e. as did the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8). The *missio Spiritus* thus generates ongoing surprises that involve the crossing of borders so that agents of mission continually find a blurring of the lines between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' – at least on this side of the *eschaton* when we all see through a glass dimly – in the divine scheme of things.

The lack of formal closure to the book of Acts invites readers in every place and time since to participate in the work and witness of the Spirit of God in Christ as part of the book's 29th chapter, as it were. The Spirit who empowered the Son and who was poured out upon and filled the apostles is the same Spirit who continues to accomplish the redemptive work of God in Christ and through the church in this post-apostolic period. This ongoing work in history, then, leads us to the third and concluding act of the *missio Spiritus*.

### *Missio Spiritus – In the last days*

We began with the work of the Spirit in creation and have in the preceding discussed the Spirit's redemptive work in Christ and the Pentecost outpouring that constituted the church. Now we turn to the eschatological work of the Spirit anticipating the final renewal and restoration of the creation as a whole. This eschatological work was inaugurated in the redemptive work of the Spirit in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. As the apostle Peter said (quoting the prophet Joel, at least as recorded by Luke the evangelist): '*In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...*' (Acts 2:17, citing Joel 2:28; italics

added).<sup>14</sup> Again, there are two dimensions to this eschatological work of the Spirit: the christological and the ecclesiological.

Christologically, the eschatological work of the Spirit is most clearly revealed in Jesus' proclamation regarding the coming kingdom and his accomplishing the signs of the kingdom. These latter include his miraculous deeds, his healings, and his exorcisms of evil spirits. These are signs of the coming kingdom precisely because they can be understood either as enacted by suspensions of the present order of things (i.e. the 'laws of nature' as currently conceived) or as anticipations of the ways in which the coming world will operate. The Spirit enables Christ to accomplish the works that bring about the shape of the coming kingdom, in the process announcing the end of the present cosmic order.

Most importantly, however, the Spirit announces the arrival of the kingdom in the resurrection of Jesus. If death is the most ubiquitous sign of the world as we know it, resurrection life provides us with a foretaste of the world to come. Yet even christologically, the fullness of the Spirit is not yet manifest in and through the Christ for that awaits the *parousia*, the return of the anointed Messiah that will finally and fully establish the coming reign of God. As the author of the first Johannine epistle writes: 'When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

But again, the work of the Spirit in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is now available to the followers of Christ, the church – the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit. We now also have received the Spirit as well as the gifts of the Spirit that are given liberally for the edification of all and for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7-11).<sup>15</sup> The apostolic empowerment by the Spirit thus also enabled them to work miraculous signs and wonders, including healing the sick, exorcising demons, and even raising the dead. These continued the pronouncement regarding the imminence of the coming kingdom even while precipitating its arrival. As people of the eschatological Spirit, the apostolic message was proclaimed 'not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:4). In this sense, then, the church as the people of the Spirit glimpses through the eschatological mirror dimly (1 Cor. 13:12), even now enacting the works of the kingdom in anticipation of the full glory that is to be revealed. There is a fundamental sense, then, in which the Spirit is both present (having already introduced the coming

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<sup>14</sup> Pentecostal mission has by and large been motivated by this eschatological impulse: e.g. James R. Goff, Jr, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles Fox Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), and D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> For more on my pneumatological theology of the charisms, see *God is Spirit, God is Love: Love as the Gift of the Spirit* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), chap. 7.

reign of God) and yet also absent (still to fully establish the righteousness of God).

Yet the eschatological work of the Spirit is not merely anthropocentric but has a cosmic scope. The apostle Paul wrote: 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:22-23). On the one hand, the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh has already begun the final transfiguration, to the point that the sun, the moon and the heavenly elements have also begun to anticipate the great and coming Day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-20); on the other hand, the gift of the Spirit here in the second Act has done no more than initiate the eschatological conditions under which the fulness of redemption – the third Act – will be fully accomplished in the coming reign of God. While Easter Sunday has occurred in the resurrection of Christ and in the regenerating work of the Spirit (the 'already' of the Spirit's presence), yet the world nevertheless remains also amidst the Holy Saturday of the present fallen order, betwixt and between the times anticipating the resurrection of all flesh (the 'not yet' of the Spirit's eschatological activity).

But beyond the resurrection of dead bodies, this final eschatological revelation of the Spirit signals the completion of the divine work begun in the creation of the world and brings to fruition what was set in motion in the hovering of the *ruach Elohim* over the primordial waters.<sup>16</sup> All of creation is destined to be reconciled to the Creator: not only human beings but also the entire cosmic order. This is so that all things may be reconciled to God in Christ (Col. 1:15-20) and that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28b): 'For from him and through him and to him are all things' (Rom. 11:36, italics added). The dynamic engine driving this eschatological reconciliation, however, is the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit of creation and redemption is also the coming Spirit, the one who enables the renewal and restoration of all things to the image of God in Christ. So if in Act 2 the redemptive work of the Spirit enables her inhabitation of human flesh – first the flesh of Jesus and then that of all flesh – then in Act 3, the eschatological work of the Spirit transforms and transfigures all creation as the dwelling place of the divine Spirit.

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### **Poured Out on All Flesh – To the Ends of the Earth: Towards a Pneumato-Missiological Praxis**

I conclude by suggesting three lines of mission praxis. First, if the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of creation as well as the Spirit of mission, then Christian mission ought to be intentional about engaging with the environment. The Spirit is said to groan through human creatures for the

<sup>16</sup> See Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, chap. 8.3.

redemption and renewal of all creation. If so, then while not all mission work will be environmentally or ecologically directed, such ought not to be wholly ignored. The Spirit poured out at Pentecost on all flesh (Acts 2:17) means that some Christ-followers<sup>17</sup> (not only Pentecostals) will be called towards Creation care even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), and those who are called ought to respond positively to such a vocational undertaking.<sup>18</sup>

Second, it is not only that Spirit-empowered Christian mission is environmentally sensitive and focused, but theological thinking about mission (missiology) ought also to be cognisant of the environmental or ecological horizon within which Christian mission unfolds. This means that every aspect of Christian mission is or ought to be carried out within such an environmental and ecological frame of reference. Missiologies of development, for instance, should be explicated in the light of such constraints, probing not only the challenges but also the opportunities to work missionally in environmentally sustainable ways.<sup>19</sup> The point is that the Spirit of creation is presumed to call and empower Christian mission only through methods and approaches that will not be destructive of their given habitation.

Last but not least, the theological academy ought to be more intentional about developing ministerial and missional curriculum that links pneumatology to theology of creation and missiology. Here I am talking not only about including pneumatological theologies of the environment in missiological courses and seminars, but also about including pneumatological missiologies in theologies of creation courses, and including environmental missiologies in pneumatology and theology courses. In other words, triangulating around these themes ought to generate multi-directional approaches so that each element both informs and receives from the other two, towards an interactive and holistic pneumatology, theology of creation, and missiology. Such a task is necessarily a dynamic one since we see through a glass dimly even as we are committed to working missionally in anticipation of the coming reign of God.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See also Christopher Wright in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> Such an environmental missiology is further developed in the final chapter of my book, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Triologue* (Philosophical Studies in Science & Religion 4: Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (revised and expanded edition: Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 183.

<sup>20</sup> Much, although not all, of the material for this chapter has been reworked from two previously published articles of mine: 'The Spirit and Creation: Possibilities and Challenges for a Dialogue between Pentecostal Theology and the Sciences,' in *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 25 (2005), 82-110;

### Resources

- Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).
- Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology for the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).
- Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).
- Amos Yong (ed), *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).
- Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Orbis, 2011).

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and 'Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the *Missio Spiritus*,' in *International Review of Mission* 100:2 (November 2011), 355-66; thanks to John Kaoma for revising and editing into a coherent whole, and for inviting my contribution to this volume, and to Ryan Seow, my graduate assistant, for proofreading the penultimate draft – all obscurities and incoherence remain my responsibility. Notice that my argument for creation care is theological rather than scientific. It is not that I wish to neglect arguments about global warming, for instance, but that there is currently no consensus about the science of this matter. I would invite Christians who are skeptical about the scientific data, however, to consider a Pascalian wager: if we heed the yea-sayers but they turn out to be wrong, one could argue there is no harm done; but if we listen to the nay-sayers and they turn out to be wrong, we have jeopardised our children's future. Conservative Christians are quick to adopt this Pascalian approach for the existence of God and vis-à-vis the stakes related to eternal life, but I am not sure they have considered contested issues in environmental science in these terms.

# ECOLOGY AND MISSION: SOME ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, PhD

## Introduction

For us Orthodox, every destruction of the natural environment caused by humanity constitutes an offense against the Creator Himself (sic) and ourselves, and arouses a deep sense of sorrow. In relation to the degree in which people are responsible for their action, *metanoia* – a radical change of course is demanded of us all. For this reason, each human act that contributes to the destruction of the natural environment must be regarded as a very serious sin. People must cease regarding themselves as the *proprietors of nature* and understand their mission as *priests of creation* who have as their duty the *anaphora* or offering up the material world to the Creator.<sup>1</sup>

These are words from the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, known worldwide as the Green Patriarch. These words from the Holy Father capture the Orthodox theological perspective on creation and mission. One cannot possibly go further than calling human destruction of the natural environment as sin. The missiological and moral imperative to preserve creation is very much at the heart of Orthodox theology and world-view. This essay is an attempt to give expression to some of the Orthodox theological insights that are relevant for an ecologically pertinent Christian mission thinking and praxis.

## *Cosmo-theandric Vision in Orthodoxy and its Implications for Mission*

The orthodox Christian tradition does not compartmentalise the spirituality and theology of Creation. The concepts of the world (*cosmology*), God (*theology*), and humanity (*anthropology*) are intrinsically intertwined in Orthodox thinking and can hardly be separated. These concepts offer the harmonious *cosmo-theandric* vision, in which God, humanity and the natural world interact. This vision informs orthodoxy spirituality, faith and Christian mission. The *cosmo-theandric* vision has enormous implications for Christian mission in the world that is confronted by, and threatened by,

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<sup>1</sup> Bartholomew and John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 195.

mounting life-denying ecological challenges. It can also inform human self-understanding as well as human attitudes to God's Creation.

### **The Divine Presence: Orthodox (Trinitarian) Vision of Ecological Theism**

The insufficiency of language to talk about God is more than obvious – we can only speak about God analogically or metaphorically. Within these constraints, however, Orthodox theology opts for the language of the Trinity as the best possible way to engage in God-talk, to do theology and to understand human participation in the mission of God. In other words, the Holy Trinity is the edifice of Orthodox theology and missiology. Theology in the ultimate sense of the term is the discourse on the Trinitarian God, itself deemed a community of diverse beings that is geared to creating and sustaining the bonds of relationships in the universe.

The Holy Trinity offers a wider vision of God that transcends exclusive, dualistic, anthropocentric and androcentric tendencies that are at the heart of the environmental crisis and the exploitation of the poor that we face today. This Trinitarian vision of God has profound social and ecological ramifications. Ecology is essentially about the interconnectedness of various beings, and so is the Holy Trinity. Mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) is what characterises the Trinitarian community of God in which humanity and the church are expected to exist. In this sense, the Trinity can be understood as a divine ecological entity. The hallmarks of a Trinitarian divine community are egalitarianism, mutual sharing, justice and mutual respect.

Mor Osthathios Geevarghese outlines the social and ecological implications of the Holy Trinity when he argues that since the Triune God is social, cosmic and kenotic in existence and in the Incarnation, humanity must be social, cosmic and kenotic in this world. While accepting that selfish exploitation and human greed destroy, exploit and spoil Creation, Geevarghese insists that Creation can only be restored by sharing of resources for all the children of God without distinction of caste, creed or colour. In an ideal earthly family, sharing invites the mission of seeking equality for all God's children in this world until full 'equality is achieved in the eschatological consummation'.<sup>2</sup>

### **God of Life and the Mission of (Trinitarian) Life Affirmation**

In Orthodox theological understanding, all life is a gift from God. As Paulos Mar Gregorios affirms, Life and the Giver are one. 'I am the Life,' Jesus said. Thus life is an offering of the creative love of the Creator. Mor

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<sup>2</sup> Paulos Mor Gregorios, 'Nuclear War and Human Life' in Robin Gill (ed), *A Textbook of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 400.

Gregorios further asserts that in Orthodox theology, there is hardly any dichotomy between biological (physical) life and eternal life. Both are gifts of grace from God the Creator and are therefore not ours by right. Without biological life, for example, eternal life is impossible. The former is the basis for the latter and therefore any attempt to glorify eternal life at the expense of biological life is a temptation that we ought to resist. Our failure to recognise this interconnectedness between biological life and eternal life, so holds Mor Gregorios, ‘lies at the heart of today’s ecological peril, of our social injustice and of our making a mess of our ordinary life’.<sup>3</sup>

The Orthodox theological affirmation that life in all its forms and dimensions (biological, physical, human, non-human, social, ecological and eternal or eschatological) is a sacred gift has serious missiological overtones and implications. The new Mission Statement of the World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL) picked up this important Orthodox contribution to missiology. TTL makes this fundamental missiological claim that mission is essentially an affirmation of the Life of the Holy Trinity and that we are called to participate in the life-affirming mission of the Trinitarian God. According to TTL, mission, in this sense, may be defined as the outpouring of love, justice, mutual sharing and equality that bind together the Holy Trinity. This understanding also means that the mission of the Trinity (*missio Trinitatis*) or the mission of the Triune God is one that affirms all life, as God’s sacred gift, without any distinction or discrimination. Again, as Mor Gregorios holds, ‘to acknowledge one’s life as well as that of others as a sacred gift has enormous consequences for the way we make decisions on many issues’.<sup>4</sup> The sacredness of life, one can safely argue, implies that the goal of mission is not the future redemption (eternal life) of humanity alone, but also the realisation of fulness of life (life in all its dimensions) for all Creation, humans, non-human beings and the natural environment.

### **The Cosmic Presence: Orthodox (Panentheistic) Theological Cosmology**

According to Orthodox theology, creation reflects the character and fellowship of the Triune God. It is the mirror of the Creator, a window to the divine and the revelation of the sacred. St John of Damascus calls the

<sup>3</sup> Jooseop Keum (ed), *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (hereafter referred to as *TTL*) is the new Mission and Evangelism Statement of the World Council of Churches (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mor Gregorios, quoted in Vincent Rossi’s Book Review of John Chrysavgis’s book, *Orthodox Ecology: Beyond the Sheltered Image* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing, 1999) in *Touchstone*, A Journal of Mere Christianity (January/February 2001): <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=14-01-066-b> (accessed 29th April 2015).



whole world as 'a single icon of God'. This is because the Trinitarian God is beheld and experienced in creation. To put it in the words of Irenaeus, God includes the fulness, the *pleroma*, of all things. Everything that exists does so in relation to God. The Cappadocian Fathers too affirmed that God chose to assume material matrix in order to redeem creation, thus rejecting completely the Gnostic dualism that conceived matter essentially as evil. Matter is the primary medium through which God revealed herself through the incarnation.

According to John Chryssavgis, 'all creation is a palpable mystery, an immense incarnation of cosmic proportion'.<sup>5</sup> This panentheistic perception of God and the world, as I argue elsewhere, provides us with a missiology that can be perceived as 'Turning to God in Creation'.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, our endeavours to preserve life, our struggles for rights to clean air, water and bio-diversity, and for climate justice, are to be deemed our mission imperative to turn to a God who manifests herself in and through creation.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, a Creation missiology is one that celebrates life in all its plurality as a sanctified gift from God. The act of creation and the celebration of life are acts of God through which the Creator affirms the essential goodness and intrinsic worth of all life. It implies that our missionary response to God's mission and act of creation should reflect a similar appreciation of the integrity of all creation and a responsibility to protect it.

What makes Orthodox missiology even more distinct is the aspect of the agency of mission that creation assumes. This is again picked up in TTL which reminds us that we often 'tend to forget that in many ways creation is in mission to humanity'.<sup>8</sup> The God who is present in creation also uses it as divine channel of grace and blessing. In other words, creation assumes agency of the mission of God. Resources from nature are endowed with power to heal and bless humanity and the world at large (I return to this aspect below).

The use of various elements of nature in worship and sacraments in Orthodox churches is one way of giving expression to the agency of mission that creation possesses. This helps us to overcome yet another shade of anthropocentrism, the understanding that only humanity can be active agents of God's mission in the world. Elizabeth Theokritoff elucidates this aspect of Orthodox missiology where creation is portrayed

<sup>5</sup> See Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, 'Towards a Missiology That Begins with Creation,' in *The International Review of Mission* 100, 2 (November 2011), 310-21, 318-19.

<sup>6</sup> Coorilos, 'Towards a Missiology That Begins with Creation,' 318-19.

<sup>7</sup> Keum, *Together Towards Life*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Elizabeth Theokritoff, 'God's Creation as Theme of Missionary Witness – an Orthodox View,' in Lukas Vischer (ed), *Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation* (Geneva: John Knox Series, 2007), 116ff.

as 'God's missionaries'.<sup>9</sup> According to her, creation is 'God's Mission Team,' charged with preparing the scene or the ground; the *missio Dei* and creation as the theatre or arena for God's work are thus interrelated. According to Acts 1:8, God tells his apostles that they would be God's witnesses. However, it is significant to note that the same book tells us that God did not lack witnesses before the apostles came onto the scene. There was nature already functioning as God's witness. Theokritoff provides a number of examples.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the rains from heavens and fruitful seasons were already bearing witness to the Creator (Acts 14:17).

The Advent liturgy in the Orthodox tradition brings out vividly the missionary agency of creation. Created things bear faithful witness to God. At the Nativity, those who adored the stars were instructed by a star to worship the Sun of Righteousness. In the song of the three children in the book of Daniel, the non-human creation is listed before humans when it comes to praising God. As the world was created through/by the Word of God, creation is composed of God's Word. The Fathers of the church called the world 'the Book of Nature' which is composed of innumerable *logoi*, 'words of God'.<sup>11</sup> Creation therefore echoes God's Word. This panentheistic theological cosmology is probably best articulated in the words of St Maximus the Confessor: 'the created world is God's witness'. TTL affirms this conviction when it says: 'The creation's life and God's life are intertwined and that God will be in all.'<sup>12</sup>

### **The Human Presence: Orthodox (Eco-) Theological Anthropology**

The place of human beings in relation to God and the rest of creation have been dealt with by Orthodox Christianity in profound theological terms. Orthodox theological anthropology has immense ecological pertinence. Church Fathers have described humanity as a 'microcosm'.<sup>13</sup> Humanity is poised between God and nature, and the human shares and unites with the divine and the natural (*cosmo-theandric* unity). The Cappadocian Fathers have reflected on this question at length.<sup>14</sup> St Basil's nine homilies on *Hexaemeron* (six days of creation) is one such example. Through an extended commentary on Genesis 1:1-26, he makes an important assertion that heaven and earth are of equal worth and that both are worthy of equal

<sup>9</sup> Theokritoff, 'God's Creation,' 116ff.

<sup>10</sup> Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, 'Mission Towards Fullness of Life,' in *International Review of Mission* 103, 1 (April 2014), 39-46, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Coorilos, 'Mission Towards Fullness of Life,' 43.

<sup>12</sup> Gennadios Limouris, 'New Challenges, Visions and Signs of Hope: Orthodox Insights on JPIC, in Preman D. Niles (ed), *Between the Flood and the Rainbow* (Geneva: WCC, 1992), 113.

<sup>13</sup> Limouris, 'New Challenges', 113.

<sup>14</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (CLS, Chennai, India: 1980), 54.

concern and honour since both have their origin in the same God, the Creator.

In line with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew above, another description of humanity vis-à-vis its commitment to the integrity of creation is humanity as 'priests of creation'. Reflecting on this notion of humanity as 'priests of creation,' Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon argues that this priesthood entails a particular level of human responsibility to the natural world.<sup>15</sup> According to him, God accorded this responsibility of careful handling of creation to humanity as distinct from other beings such as angels. Unlike human beings, who were created both with matter and spirit, angels are only spiritual beings *sans* any material essence. Due to this lack of material content in them, angels cannot bring the material world into contact with the Creator God. Humanity, as both the 'microcosm of creation' and 'priests of creation' has the mission of bringing creation (nature) into union with God. In this sense, mission, as far as humanity is concerned, is not simply bringing the natural world into contact with the Creator, but more importantly, purging it and raising it to the level of godly existence. To put it in the words of John of Pergamon, 'This act of elevation, the referring of creation to [the] Creator, is the essence of our priesthood, thus the creation is sanctified and partakes of the blessings that participating in divine life involves.'<sup>16</sup>

### **Mastery vs. Mystery: The Question of Human Dominion and *Kenotic Anthropocentrism***

If Orthodoxy holds the position that humanity and the non-human creation are of equal worth and dignity, then the question is: How does Orthodox theology deal with the issue of 'human dominion' over the rest of creation, a special privilege and power that God has granted humanity at the time of creation? This is hugely important since the Hebrew-Christian understanding of creation with this accompanying notion of divinely-granted human dominion has been identified as one of the root causes of the global environmental impasse today.

Lynn White's critique of the Judeo-Christian concept of creation, attributing the blame for the current ecological crisis to an unholy nexus between the modern scientific world-view and the anthropocentric creation narratives in the Bible has prompted serious soul-searching among Christian theologians and theological responses, making an ecological perspective a theological imperative. The concept of 'stewardship' has been

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<sup>15</sup> John Zizioulas of Pergamon, 'Orthodoxy and Ecological Problems: A Theological Approach,' Orthodox Research Institute: [www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/john\\_pergamon\\_ecological\\_problems.htm](http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/john_pergamon_ecological_problems.htm) (accessed 28th April 2015).

<sup>16</sup> John Zizioulas of Pergamon, 'Orthodoxy and Ecological Problems'.

one such theological response which has come up as an alternative paradigm. Counter arguments, some of which are reflected in this volume, claim that God's original intent of according humanity 'dominion' (*radah*) over the rest of creation (Gen. 1) has been misunderstood. Many biblical scholars, theologians and missiologists insist that dominion, properly understood, entails 'stewardship' of God's creation as spelt out in Genesis 2:18.<sup>17</sup> It has been argued that what God intended at the time of creation was not a free licence to humanity to exploit nature at will, but rather to exercise responsible power and care in 'tilling and keeping' the Earth as God's sacred garden.

It must be noted, however, that while the notion of stewardship was developed as an alternative to prevailing anthropocentric concepts, it soon came under close scrutiny. Mor Gregorios was one of those who contested the claim of 'stewardship' as a credible theological alternative to anthropocentrism. He holds that the image of stewardship still retains an inherent attitude of 'human management' which leads to nature being objectified. Supplanting 'dominion' with 'stewardship' will not take us far since 'we would still be reducing nature to... nothing but an object given into our hands for safekeeping and good management'.<sup>18</sup>

We have examples to prove that the notion of stewardship can, in fact, sit comfortably with frameworks of feudalism (as applied and seen in the Benedictine monastic ethos with its rather esoteric emphasis on 'labour') and capitalism. There is a gross neglect of the concerns of social justice and the intrinsic worth of creation, and therefore there is the need for alternative paradigms.

It is in this context that Orthodox theology offers the idea of what I term 'kenotic anthropocentrism'. Orthodoxy affirms 'dominion' as part of the 'image of God' in humanity. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, affirms this position *albeit* in a qualified sense. According to Gregory, 'dominion' is something to be exercised in love and justice. Elaborating on this notion and linking it with the concept of *kenosis*, Fr K.M. George puts forward a 'kenotic image of God,' exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ, who despite having 'dominion' and power and equality with the Father, he chose not to hang on to those privileges but emptied himself and sacrificed himself for the sake of the world.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is not in exercising dominion and power but in voluntarily relinquishing it that the image of God is meaningfully encountered. As Gregory of Nyssa puts it: 'We see the

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion on 'stewardship,' see my earlier work written as George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 257-65.

<sup>18</sup> Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation*, 257. See also Ian Bradley, *God is Green* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> Paulos Gregorios, K.M. George and Kaigham Jacob Gabriel, *Towards a New Humanity: Essays in Honour of Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios: Published in Connection with the Seventieth Birthday Anniversary* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1992).

royal stature of the human person best in those who have become free by learning to control their own wills. When the human person wears the purple of virtue and the crown of justice, he becomes a living image of the King of kings, of God himself.<sup>20</sup>

This is still anthropocentrism but with a difference. I prefer to call it *kenotic anthropocentrism* as I delineate in *Green Liberation*. Fr Andrew Ross calls it 'voluntary self-divestiture'.<sup>21</sup> It is in the capacity to serve others, and to sacrifice ourselves and our power for the sake of others, that we claim our uniqueness. Andrew Linzey calls it 'suffering servant humanism'.<sup>22</sup> Kenotic anthropocentrism is modelled after the Christ who chose to empty himself of all his 'dominion' and became a servant of all. It is no coincidence that the Latin term *dominus* is used to refer to the 'Lordship' of Christ who demonstrated his Lordship (dominion) in humility and service, and not in mastery and domination (Phil. 2:6-11). We are called to exercise our dominion likewise.

Mor Gregorios enriches this theological discourse of 'servanthood humanism' or kenotic anthropocentrism by focusing on the distinction between 'mastery' and 'mystery' in Orthodox theology. Whilst it is true that humanity has been given 'mastery' over creation, we must not forget that creation is meant to be a 'mystery'. As Fr Jaroslaw Buciora argues, because God is, in essence, a mystery, the mysterious God reveals Godself in creation; nature becomes the mystery of God's revelation. In his words:

The Trinitarian God relates to His created world. God participates in the nature of the world as the Persons of the Trinity relate to each other. The identity and value of the created world are rooted in the fundamental relationship with the Triune God. For Orthodoxy... nature is theocentric. The cornerstone of Christian ecology is theocentricism. According to Orthodox theological thought, the creation of the world by the Trinitarian God became God's second revelation or the sacred Scripture written by the Logos. As a consequence, creation has a holy origin that is to be found in the Holy Trinity.<sup>23</sup>

Our exercise of mastery over creation is akin to the way we exercise our mastery over our own bodies.<sup>24</sup> This perspective has mission connotations as it is a missionary call to 'walk the precarious path and live in the difficult

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, 'De Hominis Opificio,' chap. 4, in *Patrologia Graeca*, 44 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1863), cols. 135-36.

<sup>21</sup> Coorilos, 'Toward a Missiology That Begins with Creation,' 310-21; also quoted in Milton B. Efthimiou, 'Orthodoxy and Ecological Crisis,' and in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 94.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Fr Jaroslaw Buciora, 'Theology of Nature: Trinitarian Paradigm for Ecology,' 5: [www.uocc.ca/pdf/theology/Theology%20of%20Nature.pdf](http://www.uocc.ca/pdf/theology/Theology%20of%20Nature.pdf) (accessed 29th April 2015).

<sup>24</sup> See also Tallessyn Zawn Grenfell-Lee, 'The Missing Link' in this volume.

rhythm between mastery and mystery'.<sup>25</sup> This understanding is best expressed in the sacramental life of the Orthodox tradition, as it is in the sacramental life that the worlds of mastery and mystery are meaningfully reconciled. It is to this aspect of Orthodox missiology that we turn in the following section.

### **Mission as Earthly *Askesis*: The Orthodox World of Sacraments and Liturgy**

The Orthodox theological world-view is essentially sacramental and hence 'earthly'. The whole cosmos experienced as a mysterious sacrament is at the heart of Orthodox cosmology and theology. This is reflected in almost every aspect of ecclesial life. In the very structures of church buildings in the Orthodox tradition, and in the placing of icons and mosaics, etc., as Metropolitan Gennadios argues, we encounter a 'microcosm' of the whole universe.<sup>26</sup> This has both temporal as well as theological implications as they constitute expressions of not only what we experience on earth here and now but also what we long for in the *eschaton*, the 'yet to be' (Rom. 8:21).

The use of various resources from nature such as water, incense and so on add a 'natural' (environmental) flavour and dimension to worship and liturgy in Orthodox spirituality. The earth is depicted as a theological category, the medium of God's incarnation in Christ. God became 'earth' (an 'earthling') in Jesus Christ. It was matter that Jesus Christ assumed to become one with humanity and the universe – thus the church is meant to be the continuation of this incarnation. 'I shall not cease reverencing matter by means of which salvation has been achieved,' writes St John of Damascus.<sup>27</sup>

Icons, windows to the divine, are made of matter. The elements that are portrayed in iconography such as animals, plants, rivers and mountains affirm not only the intrinsic worth of creation, but also the important place of creation in the divine scheme of cosmic redemption. In Orthodox spirituality and theology, so Fr Fitzgerald asserts, icons are sacramental 'vehicles of God's presence'<sup>28</sup> through which we encounter the Triune God on earth. The liturgy of Palm Sunday and the feast of Pentecost, in particular, are significant as there are special prayers offered here for non-human creation. All these prayers affirm the agency of creation in God's mission.

<sup>25</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Chennai, India: CLS, 1980), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Limouris, 'New Challenges,' 114.

<sup>27</sup> Limouris, 'New Challenges,' 115.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald, 'Gospel and Mission in the Early Church: A Vision of God's Good Creation,' in Lukas Vischer (ed), *Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation* (Geneva: John Knox Series, 2007), 76.

Water, over which the Spirit of God hovered at the time of creation, is also sent as God's grace to people. As we read in Ezekiel 47, 'God's grace and blessings flow as water into the temple of God. Eventually it becomes a huge ocean on the banks of which trees of food and healing grow.'<sup>29</sup> This is also the eschatological vision of 'the new earth and new heaven' that we find in the apocalyptic vision of the early Church.<sup>30</sup> These biblical accounts of the natural world (in this instance, water) become agents/channels of God's grace, and healing is 'enacted' in the liturgy of Pentecost in the Orthodox tradition. From an eco-theological liturgical perspective, the 'blessing of the water' reveals the sanctifying and redemptive power given to an element in creation through the invocation of the Holy Spirit by the church. A prayer for the blessing of waters at Epiphany, for example, brings out the cosmic aspects of worship: 'Therefore, O King, who lovest man (sic)... be present thyself now as then through the descent of thy Holy Spirit and sanctify this water. And confirm on it the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease.'

Theokritoff dwells on these aspects of the use of natural resources in sacraments, worship and liturgies. She contends that the bread that we use in the Holy Eucharist through which we receive eternal life is also the same bread that sustains our physical life. The wine that makes our hearts delightful also grants us eternal bliss when it is sanctified. Water that sustains our earthly life also sanctifies us in and through baptism where we die and live through water. Trees that are critical to the very survival of the whole planet are the stuff that the Cross of Christ was made of, the Tree of Salvation.<sup>31</sup> All this suggests that every aspect of creation has a place and purpose in our journey towards the new heaven and the new earth. In sum, Orthodox liturgy and worship celebrate nature, the integrity of creation, and its missionary agency as God's channel of healing, blessings and eternal life.

In addition, through the harvest festivals, the Orthodox tradition celebrates creation. Through such festivals, the worshiping community offers back to God the fruits of the earth in all their fulness. These acts articulate a powerful theological affirmation that the ownership of creation (nature) is with God, and that humanity cannot claim ownership of nature or natural resources in the ultimate sense. The missiological and ecological significance of this theological position is more than evident in Christian liturgies and prayers – 'Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee': these are the words with which St Chrysostom captures the spirit of our

<sup>29</sup> 'And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade... and the leaf thereof for medicine' (Ezk 47:12).

<sup>30</sup> 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal... the tree of life... for the healing of the nations' (Rev. 22:1-2).

<sup>31</sup> Theokritoff, 'God's Creation as Theme of Missionary Witness,' 119.



relationship with God and the natural world. Orthodox theological anthropology, which perceives human beings as priests of creation, is implicit in these prayers. This is where mission as doxology and 'the liturgy after the liturgy' become ecologically and missiologically pertinent. The Holy Eucharist for example, is the ultimate expression of the organic sacramental ethos and life in the Orthodox ecclesial world. This is the most serene expression of creation being engaged by God as the agents and medium of God's redemption. As Irenaeus puts it: 'The Eucharist is not simply a memorial of Christ's death and resurrection but is a cosmic event including the whole creation, bread [and] wine.'<sup>32</sup>

In the partaking of bread and wine, humanity in fact reclaims its 'original stuff,' the matter out of which human beings were created. Every time this partaking takes place, a process of overcoming the artificially constructed binary between matter and spirit occurs in us. In addition, the dichotomy between the secular and the sacred dissolves when bread and wine are received in faith in the Holy Communion. In the partaking of the holy elements, the faithful undergo an ontological metamorphosis and a spiritual rediscovery where humanity becomes once again an earthling, matter that is sanctified. In the words of Metropolitan Gennadios: 'When we partake of the body and blood of Christ, God meets us in the very substance of our relation with creation and truly enters into the very being of our biological existence.'<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Theokritoff brings out the aspect of mission agency of creation in the Holy Eucharist. As she maintains, 'the Eucharist implies that when mundane foodstuff that are basic for life are given thanks for and received in the Holy Communion, we are in fact receiving God, the Creator Himself (sic). When God wants to give Himself, He offers creation to humanity'.<sup>34</sup> When God incarnate raises a loaf in his hands and proclaims 'This is my body,' it is also a theological statement that is boldly proclaimed – that God indeed is in creation.

What is also important in the Holy Eucharist is that the resources used in the Communion are stuff that are the results of human labour and skills. In other words, humanity recreates, out of God's creation, and offers them back to God. The role that humanity plays in the Eucharist therefore is that of a 'priest' and a 'co-creator'. However, this role has been grossly overlooked today and human beings have supplanted this role with that of an 'arch destroyer and consumer'. Here, Orthodox Eucharistic spirituality reminds us that God wants the material world to be preserved and the Earth's integrity kept intact – the eschatological consummation is about God reconciling humanity with the whole creation.

This perspective leads us to our final point of consideration of this chapter, viz. the question of lifestyle or mission as living – the 'being'

<sup>32</sup> Limouris, 'New Challenges,' 113.

<sup>33</sup> Limouris, 'New Challenges,' 118.

<sup>34</sup> Theokritoff, 'God's Creation as Theme of Missionary Witness,' 120.



mode of mission. This is certainly an area where Orthodoxy has contributed a great deal in terms of raising ecological sensitivity. It is in the Orthodox world of monasticism and asceticism that the tension between mastery and mystery is most creatively lived out. Those who choose this path of *Askesis* also choose to voluntarily empty themselves of all 'mastery' over creation and respect the mystery of creation. They also choose to play the role of 'priests' of creation. Relatedly, the monastic tradition and ascetic living are about being freed from the fallen nature of wanting 'to destroy and kill;' it is about living out a new freedom from our bondage to egotism, self-will and from our consumerist attitudes.<sup>35</sup>

An organic/earthly lifestyle is what constitutes an ascetic mode of Christian living. It is a life of harmony with creation where human needs do not give way to human greed and where humanity as priests of creation will not surrender themselves to the image of humanity as destroyer and consumer. *Kenosis* (self-emptying) and not 'dominion' is the hallmark of this lifestyle. Theokritoff puts it succinctly: 'In this living, matter and material things become means of "communion", not consumerism.'<sup>36</sup> As we confront the challenges of consumerism and its effects on the natural world and the poor, we need to liberate ourselves from consumerism and become communicants with God, one another, and the whole created order.<sup>37</sup>

The observance of the spiritual discipline of Lent and fasting in Orthodox ascetic practice is another example of orthodox ecological spirituality. As Christians, we learn to control our pleasure-seeking self, and strive to identify with the pain of the hungry, the oppressed and the whole Creation. However, more often than not, monasticism or asceticism is perceived as developing a negative attitude towards the material creation. The ascetic is often seen as a person who runs away, withdraws from, or even dismisses the material world as of no value. Yet, the ascetic does not withdraw from the world because he or she considers it evil or inferior, but because he or she respects it and wants it to be preserved. In other words, it is a voluntary choice that one makes to refrain from exploiting the natural world to meet personal greed and pleasures. This spirituality is, one can argue, an effective critique as well as an antidote to our consumerism-driven lifestyles of the dominant contemporary society. Human quest to satisfy unlimited pleasures leads to indiscriminate exploitation of God's Earth and creatures. Like ascetics, the 'communicant lifestyle' of Orthodox *Askesis* provides a counter-cultural response to the ongoing 'consumerist lifestyles,' which are compounding the mounting ecological crisis as well as the future of life on planet Earth.

<sup>35</sup> Theokritoff, 'God's Creation as Theme of Missionary Witness,' 133.

<sup>36</sup> Theokritoff, 'God's Creation as Theme of Missionary Witness,' 133.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksandr Shmeman, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965).

## Conclusion

The quintessential Trinitarian theological world-view in Orthodoxy, as it is argued here, offers a missiological paradigm that is cosmic (ecological) in orientation and reach. Both Trinity and ecology signify a web of life: interconnectedness and mutual indwelling. The Orthodox perspective on Life – that is, life in all dimensions including physical, biological, human, non-human and eternal life – provides us with a missiology where mission is primarily understood as Affirmation of Trinitarian Life. The Orthodox theology of ‘panentheism’ with its accompanying cosmology, where the *oikos* is perceived as an icon of God, a reflection of the Creator God, has immense ecological significance.

Moreover, creation is also accorded the agency of mission in Orthodox theology. Creation, as it is portrayed in Orthodox liturgy and sacraments, assumes the role of God’s ‘mission team’ where nature is used as channels of divine healing and blessings to humanity. Orthodox theological anthropology is also ecologically relevant. Humanity is perceived as ‘priests of creation’ and hence is entrusted with the mission of bringing creation into union with the Creator God.

Besides, the Orthodox notion of ‘kenotic anthropocentrism,’ as against the ‘stewardship’ image, brings the ideas of human ‘mastery’ over creation and creation as ‘mystery’ into a creative encounter. It challenges humanity missiologically in that humanity is called to exercise dominion in the way Jesus Christ exercised it, that is, by emptying itself of all dominion and becoming a servant of God – tending God’s creation.

Relatedly, the Orthodox world of liturgy and sacraments where the role of creation as agents of mission challenges us to take the ‘being’ mode of mission as seriously as the ‘doing’ mode. Mission as *Askesis*, with its emphasis on simple and organic lifestyle, challenges the dominant world-view of consumerism which is at the heart of the contemporary environmental crisis. In the Orthodox world of asceticism, the spirituality of communion replaces the culture of consumerism.

Finally, this organic and ecological emphasis in Orthodox Mission Spirituality is best expressed in sacraments, especially in the practice of Holy Communion. The Green Patriarch places this spirituality succinctly within the current ecological predicament in which we find ourselves:

Ecological issues are definitely important to us because they are important to God. The ecological crisis is not a political or economical (sic) issue; it is a profoundly spiritual issue. Our God created all things ‘very good’, ‘very beautiful’, as the Book of Genesis says. Indeed, our Savior assumed flesh, as the Evangelist of love states (John 1:14), thereby sanctifying all human nature and all material creation. As Christians, then, we are maximalists; everything matters to God; everything is included in God’s plan of salvation; and everything is called to transformation through God’s grace. This is our worldview in the sacraments and especially in the Divine Liturgy, where material creation is raised up to heaven, becoming the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same worldview that is proclaimed in the icons

of our Church, where (as St John of Damascus claims) we witness and worship the Creator through the creation; that is to say, we see God's face in the very beauty of creation.<sup>38</sup>

With these words, the Holy Father and Patriarch nicely presents the *cosmo-theandric* vision in which the natural world, the Creator and humanity are intrinsically intertwined in divine fellowship. And just as the Triune God dwells in harmonious unity, the mission of God invites humanity to relate to the natural world with love and care.

### Resources

- Bartholomew (ed. John Chrysavgis), *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).
- George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999).
- John Chrysavgis, *Orthodox Ecology: Beyond the Sheltered Image* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing, 1999).
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<sup>38</sup> Interview of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch, 25th October 2008: [www.ortodoksi.net/index.php/Interview\\_of\\_His\\_All\\_Holiness\\_the\\_Ecumenical\\_Patriarch](http://www.ortodoksi.net/index.php/Interview_of_His_All_Holiness_the_Ecumenical_Patriarch) (accessed 29th April 2015).

# MISSIO DEI, ECO-JUSTICE AND EARTH CARE: ASKING HARD QUESTIONS

Norman Faramelli

## Introduction

It is essential to understand ecology and mission in the context of eco-justice and *missio Dei*. The natural environment, created by God, has to be seen in its relationship to Equity/Justice and the Economy. Mission needs to be viewed not just as expanding religious institutions, but as the work of God in the world.

In this essay we will highlight the connections between *missio Dei* and eco-justice and how they are linked in Incarnational theology, where the material and the spiritual realms come together. It is in the Incarnation that spirit and matter are fully integrated, and dualistic thinking such as nature vs. history can be overcome.

Much has already been said in this volume about *missio Dei* and its relationship to Global Ecological Issues. I would specifically like to focus on the eco-justice aspects of the global environment as related to God's Mission, as we address some difficult questions.

Since we are exploring from a Protestant or Reformed tradition, it is important that the biblical foundations of both *missio Dei* and eco-justice be spelled out clearly, as we work to build sustainable global communities. The Creator God is the One who redeems humanity and creation, promotes social justice for all, and corrects diverse forms of oppression.

In this essay we will explore:

(1) How do we articulate and internalise the biblical roots of both *missio Dei* and eco-justice?

(2) How can the dualities of matter and spirit, nature and history, and the personal and the social, be overcome?

(3) How can the care of God's Creation be understood and internalised in our lives and in our institutions?

(4) How can we find handles on (or points of entry into) large-scale global eco-justice issues so that our visions can be turned into concrete realities? And how do we find the strength to continue in the struggle for eco-justice in the context of *missio Dei*?

### The Significance of the Biblical Roots of Missio Dei and Eco-justice

The biblical roots of *missio Dei* have been noted in previous essays in this volume. The emphasis on being sent by God into the world permeates the books of the New Testament. As David Bosch noted, ‘God is a missionary God,’ or as Jürgen Moltmann said, ‘It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.’<sup>1</sup> Or, it is not that the church has a mission, but that God’s mission has a church! The fullest expression of *missio Dei* is found in our understanding the Holy Trinity. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not fully developed in the Scriptures, we have hints of it in the Great Commission Matt. 28:19 – ‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit’ – and in the closing of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you’ (2 Cor. 13:13).

The biblical roots of eco-justice are numerous but have often been misunderstood. In a famous article by Lynn White, ‘Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis,’<sup>2</sup> White placed great stress on the texts in Genesis 1:26, 28 that speak of the dominion of humans over nature. Too many needless arguments have been fought over the meaning of these texts. It is regrettable that the entire context of those early chapters in Genesis has not been adequately considered. For example, Genesis 1 begins with God the Creator who made the entire created order, including our world. This is not a ‘Big Bang’ scientific interpretation, but a beautiful story that God is indeed the Creator of all that is. Moreover, God declared the creation to be ‘good’ several times, long before human beings came on the scene (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And clearly implied in Genesis 1 is that the non-human creation has intrinsic value or inherent worth conferred by God. Human beings – both male and female – are made on the sixth day in the ‘image of God’ and are given the responsibility of taking care of the world God has entrusted to them.

Tucked away in another creation account in Genesis 2, God speaks of the special gifts and responsibilities bestowed upon human beings. Whatever humans called every living creature, that was its name, and ‘humans gave names to all cattle, to every animal in the field’ (Gen. 2:19b-20a). The capacity and power to name is at the heart of the development of human skills, and build the foundation for the emergence of science and technology.

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1991), 369-90; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn White, Jr, ‘The Historical Roots,’ in *Science, New Series* 155 (10th March 1967).

But the biblical narrative in Genesis continues. It moves on to Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve – the first human beings – are given a garden to care for and are told they could eat fruit from any tree in the garden except one. Here we see the human trait that prohibition increases desire. This story speaks of one of the first forms of human rationalisation. The fruit was ‘good for food, a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desired to make one wise’ (3:6a). Note: since the fruit had nutritional value, aesthetic qualities and was a source of human wisdom – so how could one resist? In this story, we have not only an early account of human rationalisation but also a seminal account of human scapegoating. When confronted about their misdeeds, Adam blames God for giving him Eve; Eve blames the tempter, etc. The end-result is that both male and female were expelled from the garden. All three chapters in the Genesis narrative need to be considered, not just the texts dealing with ‘dominion’. They provide a helpful context for addressing eco-justice concerns.

A fine liturgical expression of this theme, found in a eucharistic prayer in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, captures the spirit of Genesis 1–3: ‘(God)... blessed us with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust, and we turned against one another.’<sup>3</sup> Creation and human history need to be seen together, not separately.

The larger problem we have in reading the Bible is that we often view it through the lens of nineteenth century biblical criticism. That criticism is frequently rooted in the neo-Kantian split between the natural order and human history. In much of nineteenth century Protestant theology, the natural order was seen to be the neutral arena where the God of history performs his/her mighty acts. But when one explores the Scriptures through a different lens, one sees a full integration between the God of History and the God of Nature. Let us consider some of the Psalms such as Psalm 146, a Psalm with a Jubilee motif, where the Creator and Redeemer are identical:

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord thy God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who keeps faith for ever, who executes justice for the oppressed; and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow... (Ps 146: 5-9).

Consider Psalm 19 which has a glorious opening line, ‘The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork’ (v 1). After several more allusions to the God of creation, the Psalm focuses on

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<sup>3</sup> Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 370.

the Law of the Lord - 'The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul' (v 7a). The Torah is God's gift to the people.

This is not a matter of proof-texting to find eco-justice motifs; these motifs permeate the Scriptures. Consider the integration of the Creator God with the God of History in Second Isaiah (42:5-7):

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it. I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you, I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (See other passages in Second Isaiah: 40:21-24, 28-31; 41:17-20; 42:5-7, 14-16; 43:1-5, 14-21; 45:16-19.)

Eco-justice is a comprehensive term. It forces us to see things in a holistic manner. Eco-justice always includes the 'Three Es' – Ecology, Economy and Equity. The term eco-justice covers much more than Environmental Justice, although it includes it. Assessing the disproportionate impact of economic activity on various groups is important but, by itself, insufficient. Eco-justice also entails resistance to false choices. For instance, it is not a choice between whether there will be jobs at a strip-mining site or a clean environment. Eco-justice states that it is not an 'either/or' proposition; it must be 'both/and'. Jobs are necessary, but so is the restoration of the strip-mined area, as well as the prevention of the pollution of the waterways and the drinking water supply. Eco-justice forces us to 'think outside the box' when there seem to be no alternatives that embrace both Ecology and Economy. When natural resources are extracted from the earth in any corner of the world, there must be a cry for both economic justice as well as ecological integrity, and when there does not seem to be a resolution of the issue, then new options and alternatives need to be explored and developed. And beware of countless amounts of money being spent by the proponents of economic activity to convince public officials and the public that no other alternatives are possible or feasible.<sup>4</sup>

When considering the 'Three Es,' it is important to understand the enormous power of economic institutions. Economic forces often dwarf concerns for equity and ecological integrity. That is why socio-political community-based power is required to offset the domination of the economic sector.

Eco-justice must always include gender justice. One of the first American Roman Catholic theologians to note the connections between race, inequality, gender and ecology was Rosemary Radford Ruether. In a more recent article, 'The Biblical Vision of Eco-justice,' Ruether begins

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<sup>4</sup> See eco-justice materials: Dieter T. Hessel, 'Eco-Justice Ethics', Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale; also William Gibson, *Eco-Justice – the Unfinished Journey* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2004).

with Isaiah 24: 4-6a: 'The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenants. Therefore a curse devours the earth and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.' Ruether noted that the split between nature and history is unbiblical:

God is seen as taking profound pleasure in his work of creation, and creation in turn responds to God with praise. God rejoices in the world which God creates, and the planets, mountains, brooks, animals and plants return this rejoicing in their relation to God. In Psalm 65: The hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows cloth themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout, they sing together for joy (vv 9-13).

Ruether spoke of the danger of reading the Bible through the eyes of nineteenth century biblical criticism. She writes: 'Nature is decried as static and stifling to the spirit, while history is seen as emancipatory, allowing us to transcend nature. This split between nature and history, however, is foreign to the Bible.'<sup>5</sup>

Another Roman Catholic theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, spoke in a recent lecture – 'Relinquishing Domination: Women, Nature and Eco-justice'<sup>6</sup> – of the need to move beyond the 'domination' motif. Johnson noted that, 'Until we untangle the threads that weave the subordination of women and the domination of nature together... the pillar of gender dualism will continue to hold in place nature's inferiority and man's right to rule.' Johnson calls for a 'sacramental imagination,' where the natural world 'reflects the One who created it'... The natural world is sacred because God who is its creator is not outside or above it, but God is immanent, dwelling within the world. Johnson calls for a greater focus on the work of the Holy Spirit: 'If we had this theology of the Holy Spirit active, we'd see that, rather than being divorced from what is sacred, nature is imbued with a spiritual radiance... The Spirit moves in every bit as vigorously as in souls, minds, ideas.' Johnson also notes: 'Poor people suffer disproportionately from environmental damage inflicted in the pursuit of corporate profit... And the plight of the poor is intensified in poor women, whose own biological abilities to give birth and nurture children are compromised by depleted environments, and whose daily workload is increased exponentially by lack of water, food, and fuel.'<sup>7</sup> What Johnson describes is a global phenomenon in both rich and poor nations alike.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary R. Ruether, 'The Biblical Vision of Ecojustice,' 11th August 2011: <http://feminismandreligion.com/2011/08/19/the-biblical-vision-of-ecojustice-by-rosemary-radford-ruether/>; (Accessed 29th April 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, 'Casella Jones Lecture at Fordham University,' November 2013: [fordham.edu/campus\\_resources/enewsroom/inside\\_fordham](http://fordham.edu/campus_resources/enewsroom/inside_fordham) (4th November 2013; accessed 29th April 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, 'Casella Jones Lecture'.



Larry Rasmussen addressed the Earth community by linking together the human community and the care of the earth as essential for ecological wholeness. Eco-justice needs to be pivotal for the church. The obstacle to an Earth community is injustice, moral privilege and moral exclusion. Unless eco-justice is central to the mission of the church, the natural environment will not be taken seriously. Also, according to Rasmussen, 'All creation has a standing before God and is an object of redemption. A major task of the Christian communities is to adapt its major traditions to evaluate nature and culture together in order to prevent their destruction, and to contribute to their sustainability'.<sup>8</sup>

Before we proceed to address some of the questions noted earlier, it is essential to consider some of the criteria or basic norms necessary to promote eco-justice, beginning with a principle of *Intrinsic Worth* of all creation, all species and all elements, not just the value of the non-human world as economic commodities. Other criteria or norms are:

*Solidarity* with other people and creatures in the earth community – companions, victims and allies – reflecting deep respect for a diverse creation. This norm understands the full dimension of the earth community and of inter-human obligations.

*Ecological Sustainability* – the development of ecologically fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish, and to use ecologically and socially appropriate technology. It comprehends ecological integrity, including the use and conservation of natural resources.

*Sufficiency to Promote Fairness* – as a standard for organised sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or fair distribution. (In this regard, growing inequalities in wealth, income and in the use of resources globally are morally objectionable. It is difficult, however, to find agreement on 'floors,' but even more difficult to reach agreement on 'ceilings'.)<sup>9</sup>

*Just Distribution of Costs and Benefits* – we need not only to assess the overall costs and benefits of a specific project, but also to ascertain who pays the costs? Who receives the benefits?

*Economic Feasibility* – are the projects or the alternatives proposed economically feasible? This norm cannot be sidetracked, particularly when we consider the power of economic institutions.

*Socially Just Participation* – in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and manage community life for the common good and for the good of the commons.

*Understanding Interconnectedness* – to show that the Earth is a community of interconnected living beings that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. Human beings are part of that natural order,

<sup>8</sup> Larry Rasmussen, 'Is Eco-Justice Central to the Christian Faith?', in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 54, 3-4 (2000), 115-24.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to the work of Dieter Hessel – 'Eco-Justice Ethics and William E. Gibson,' *Eco-Justice – the Unfinished Journey*.

and are not above it. All of God's creation is involved in the same web of life.<sup>10</sup>

*Earth Resistance* – Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice. [Note the Roman poet Horace who said: 'Even though you drive out nature with a pitchfork, she will rush right back.'<sup>11</sup>]

*Human Resistance and Will to Promote Eco-justice* – it is essential to oppose the 'either/or' choices (such as jobs or pollution), as we work to explore and create new alternatives. In evaluating projects or promoting new alternatives, always remember the 'Three Es' – Ecology, Economy and Equity.<sup>12</sup>

### Overcoming Dualistic Thinking

One of the hard questions we need to address is: How can the dualistic thinking of matter vs. spirit, nature vs. history and the personal vs. the social be overcome? It is important that we approach eco-justice issues in a proper frame of mind. Therefore, let us consider each separately.

#### *Matter vs. Spirit*

There are many historical and philosophical roots to this dualistic problem: Platonism, Neo-Platonism, etc. or, in the modern era, the work of R. Descartes that separated the thinking subject from the inanimate non-thinking world. The big question facing us is: How do we overcome this dualism? We can begin by thinking of our understanding of God. If God is both transcendent and immanent in creation, then such a split is unfounded. But how do we internalise that? In the Hebrew language, there is no word for 'mind'. In Hebrew, we think with our hearts: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in Him' (Ps. 34:8) – the integration of the sense of taste and sight with the experience of the divine. That integration is the pathway to internalisation.

There has also been much confusion about the use of the word 'flesh' when used in a negative sense in the letters of Paul. In Galatians, Paul juxtaposes the 'works of the flesh' with the 'fruits of the Spirit'. What is

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<sup>10</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> *Epistles* I, x, 24, in 'First Book of the Epistles of Horace,' in *Complete Works of Horace* (translated in the metre of the original with notes by Charles E. Passage) (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983). The full text reads: 'Even though you drive out nature with a pitchfork, she will rush right back and secretly burst in triumph through your sad disdain.'

<sup>12</sup> See also 'Earth Bible Project for Eco-Justice Principles,' in N. Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 223-31.

seldom recognised is that Paul's use of the term 'flesh' (in Greek, *sarx*) is not primarily referring to sexual or carnal activity, but to different natures – a higher and a lower nature. That lower nature is ego-centred. For instance, most of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 have nothing to do with carnal activity ('... idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy...' vv 19-20). These are all characteristics of negative human behaviour. One of the best ways to begin overcoming dualities is to recognise and understand our bodies as a gift from God. The body is not a hindrance to the Spirit; it is a vehicle that helps us appreciate the life in the Spirit. Paul was correct: 'The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6:19).

For Christians, it is essential that we understand and internalise the significance and the fact of the Incarnation. The infinite has become finite. To people like Søren Kierkegaard, the Incarnation is the ultimate paradox. Yes, it is a paradox. But when we understand that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14), we see the full integration of the spiritual and the material worlds. The historical Jesus, the eternal Son of God, is the one who suffers pain, deals with temptation, and possesses all the human qualities and emotions. The story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11) is a good example. Although Jesus knew that the glory of God would be revealed in the resurrection of Lazarus, he wept along with others over his death (11: 35).

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the official doctrinal product proclaimed that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine – not half-human and half-divine, or some combination thereof. To some, the metaphysical words of Chalcedon seem obtuse or even absurd. The formula agreed to at Chalcedon is certainly not the last word about the Incarnation, but it sets the parameters and boundaries for understanding the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Here the material world and the divine are fully integrated. Although there are incarnations in other religions, among the monotheistic religions, it is only in Christianity that this claim is made. Indeed, it is in the Incarnation where we see the full integration of matter and spirit.

Earlier we encountered Elizabeth Johnson who spoke of the need for 'sacramental imagination'. The church has defined a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. In the sacrament, God takes the things of this world (water, bread and wine) to reveal to us the mysteries of regeneration (in the waters of baptism) and the spiritual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (in the Holy Communion). Archbishop William Temple called for an understanding of 'a sacramental universe' where we see the grace, beauty and power of God manifested in and

through the material world.<sup>13</sup> The work of John Hart elaborates on this theme in an ecological context as he calls for a Sacramental Commons.<sup>14</sup>

### *Nature vs. History*

Much has already been said about the misreading of the Scriptures, with the false dichotomy between nature and history. As noted previously, the God of the Bible is the God of Creation as well as the God of History. Throughout recent times, too much has been made of the conflict of Elijah with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) as a battle between the God of nature vs. the God of history. This conflict is not about nature versus history; it is about the power of Yahweh compared with other gods.

As Christians, we need to take our Creeds seriously. When we say, 'We believe in God the Creator of heaven and earth,' it has to be taken seriously, just as when in the Nicene Creed we say, 'We believe in God, the Maker of all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible,' we should meditate on its real significance. It is essential that the work of God in creation not be divorced from the redemptive work in history by God's Son, Jesus Christ. As various scholars have indicated in this volume, Creation and Redemption go hand-in-hand. Again, the language of the Creeds speaks of both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Although Manicheism has been officially refuted by all the churches, it still lives on in the modern mind-set. In a Cartesian world that separates the knowing subject from the inanimate object, it is easy to retain such views, even after we claim to have officially rejected them.

### *Personal vs. the Social*

It is here that many of us encounter great difficulties by compartmentalising the personal from the social dimensions of human existence. Even the Gospel message has frequently been compartmentalised. Jesus is 'my personal Saviour,' and the personal Gospel is contrasted with the Social Gospel. There is no Personal Gospel by itself, nor is there a Social Gospel by itself. There is one Gospel of Jesus Christ that has both personal and social dimensions. If we try to compartmentalise it, we truncate and ultimately distort the full manifestation of the Gospel.

Human beings are individuals, but we are not merely a collection of atomistic individuals. We live in society and interact with a natural and social world. As individuals, we are also political and social animals. We

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<sup>13</sup> William Temple, *Nature, Man and God: Gifford Lectures – 1932-1934* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2003). See the chapter on 'Sacramental Universe.' Lecture XIX.

<sup>14</sup> John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

need to remind ourselves of the idea expressed in the poetry of John Donne: 'No man is an Island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.'<sup>15</sup> If Donne's words are extended to include our 'kinship' with the non-human world – organic and inorganic, we will have the foundation for an eco-justice perspective.

It is essential that we respect the individuality and the dignity of every human being who is made in the divine image. The concept of rights needs to be extended to all of the non-human world as well. But rights fully extended to all in the 'kingdom' are still inadequate, because we need to understand all of life in terms of the common good of the human and the non-human world, as well as the good of the commons.

In an industrialised or post-industrialised society, it is very easy to compartmentalise. Even religion can be assigned a place in the 'personal experience' department. To be sure, there are different roles and different spheres of activity, but there is an interdependence between all of us – including the non-human world.

In the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, he speaks of the Body of Christ (chap. 12). Paul notes the different functions of each part of the body, and sees the church as an organic institution. Although it is important to understand the limitations of the body metaphor (i.e. sometimes an arm wants to be a brain), the interconnectedness of all the parts is essential.

Paul also speaks of the whole creation as part of the cosmic redemption: 'For the creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... the creation will itself be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8: 20-21).

What does all of this mean for us as we proceed on our journey? Dualistic mind-sets are highly problematic, whether they be in making sharp dichotomies between matter vs. spirit, the natural order vs. human history, or the compartmentalisation of religion by emphasising the personal vs. the social. It is unified thinking – the opposite of dualistic thinking – which first needs to be internalised in our minds, and in our personal lives and in our social, political and economic action. It is critical that we proceed on the work of eco-justice in a proper frame of mind.

### Understanding and Internalising Earth Care and Eco-justice

It is critical that the theological and biblical understanding of *missio Dei* and eco-justice not be just an academic exercise; it needs to touch the core

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<sup>15</sup> *Meditation XVII*, in 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions,' in John Donne and Charles M. Coffin (ed), *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2001).

of our being. As we view the ecological concerns that seem to mount every day, it is important never to forget the social/economic/political justice components of eco-justice. Social justice is the foundation. It is the application of the concepts of justice on a social scale. In the wider biblical sense, the term 'social justice' implies the application of law, love, justice and equity to the entities that make up society. Love without law has no direction; and law without love punishes without mercy.

Social justice is a ministry priority: 'The Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy' (Ps 140:12). Justice is a Biblical command: 'Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow' (Is. 1: 16b-17). (See also Ps. 82:3-5, Ps. 72, Prov. 31: 8-9, Jer. 22:3, Matt. 25:37-40.) Social justice is also an attitude of the heart '... what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Mic. 6:8). With these biblical motifs in mind, how can the care of God's Creation be understood and internalised in our lives and in our institutions?

Ecological problems are growing daily. The pollution of land, air and water looms large, despite the progress that has been made in curbing pollutants. The problems of global warming are enormous, and seem to be intensifying with every international report. Here are several illustrations of the global ecological problems confronting us, but as we shall see, they are eco-justice issues, not just environmental concerns:

- In Bangladesh, millions who are living in coastal areas are dealing with the problems of rising sea levels due to global warming. This is not just a serious ecological problem. It is clearly a social and economic justice issue.<sup>16</sup> What options do people have when they are losing their dwellings places as well as their livelihoods?
- In Nigeria, there are conflicts between transnational corporations drilling for oil, and local communities who are being accused of being terrorists when they affirm their inherent rights to the land. This is another example of a complicated but not uncommon eco-justice issue.<sup>17</sup>
- Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff writes about his native Brazil and the economic and historical links between the rain forests and the Indians and poor people. The decimation of the rain forests is not just an ecological problem; the impacts have serious political, economic and social ramifications in the lives and communities of the natives and other poor people, who have historical and cultural

<sup>16</sup> Gardiner Harris, 'Borrowed Time on Disappearing Land (Facing Rising Seas, Bangladesh Confronts the Consequences of Climate Change),' in *New York Times*, 28th March 2014.

<sup>17</sup> See O. Douglas, D. von Kemedt, I. Okonta and M. Watts, 'Alienation and Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petroleum, Politics and Democracy in Nigeria,' in Robert D. Bullard (ed), *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (Sierra Club, 2005), 239-54.

ties to the land. These are truly eco-justice issues, and Boff calls for liberation theology to join with ecology to address them.<sup>18</sup>

### **Making Eco-justice Decisions – Which Issues to Engage**

As important as the global warming issue is, it is not the only ecological problem. There are many other forms of pollution as well as the depletion of natural resources. The question always arises: how do we pick the issues in which to engage?

There are several approaches we can follow. One approach is to be attracted to the popularity of the issue and the critical mass it is developing. Another is to assess which ecological problem requires the most attention. This approach considers the actual effects of toxic pollutants in the environment. There are three things to assess: (a) What is the toxicity of the chemical pollutant(s)? (b) What are the concentration levels of the pollutant(s) being emitted into the environment?, and (c) What is the pathway of the pollutant(s) into the human as well as the non-human world? I call this the TCP approach. Consider some examples. There are times when toxic chemicals are found in such low concentrations and their pathways are not directly into the human and non-human world. These should not be our priority issues. We should focus on problems where elevated concentration levels and the pathways of the toxic pollutants are really problematic, such as one where high concentration levels of toxic chemicals migrate into the drinking water supply or endanger fisheries, wildlife or vegetation.

It is necessary to wrestle with the criteria or basic norms as we engage eco-justice problems. Are we grappling with the most significant eco-justice issues? Are the rights of both the human and non-human world taken into consideration? Do we see the intrinsic worth/value of ALL creation? As we assess costs and benefits: Who is paying the costs? Who is receiving the benefits? Is the project in harmony with the flows of nature or will it lead to nature resisting it? Do we have a holistic view of the interconnectedness of all the elements? Are we willing to confront those who claim that there are no alternatives, and offer resistance as well as work to create new alternatives? Is the project moving us towards ecological sustainability?

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After assessing the problem, the big issue is: How do we act? First, we do it as individuals and as families as we consider our lifestyles. Today, in the western world and elsewhere, it is fashionable to speak of our 'carbon footprint' and to make changes in our purchasing habits and activities that minimise our carbon emissions. Lifestyle changes are important, not only

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<sup>18</sup> See Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

as they benefit the natural environment, but also as they serve as a reminder to us of the ecological issues we confront.

In addition to what we do in our personal and family lives, we need to ask: What are we doing in our institutional lives? What about in the institutions in which we work? It is essential for us to understand the possibilities and limits of affecting change in the institutions where we work. The Serenity Prayer by theologian/social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr speaks of both constraints and possibilities. Adapting that prayer, we can say, 'God, grant us the serenity to accept those institutional realities that cannot be changed, the courage to change those institutional realities that can be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.'<sup>19</sup>

Yes, there are always institutional constraints, and those constraints vary depending upon where we work and where we are in the organisational structure. But there are possibilities for change in our institutions. We should never minimise the power of the courageous individual to effect change within an institution.

It is sometimes useful to develop a force-field analysis of those forces promoting social change versus those forces that are resisting it, and to consider how the forces promoting such change can be amplified and expanded while the forces opposing the changes are actually reduced or minimised. This approach might be useful in understanding the power dynamics at play.<sup>20</sup>

### **Finding Handles – or Points of Entry into Complex Eco-justice Issues**

We need not elaborate on the complexity of some of the global ecological issues; they have already been alluded to in great detail throughout this volume. Our main question is: How do we find handles on (or points of entry into) large-scale eco-justice issues? How can our visions of eco-justice be turned into realities? And: How are we to be sustained in our struggles for eco-justice? That is a tall order, but let us set forth some ideas.

I begin by considering a slogan attributed to a microbiologist René Dubos: 'Think globally, act locally.' In his later years, Dubos probed the interaction between environmental factors and the physical, mental and spiritual development of humanity. In his philosophy, Dubos saw that global problems are influenced and conditioned by local circumstances and choices. Social evolution enables us to re-conceptualise human actions and change direction to promote an ecologically balanced environment. Dubos

<sup>19</sup> See Elisabeth Sifton, *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of War and Peace* (New York: Norton, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Kurt Lewin and Dorwin Cartwright, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers* (New York: Harper, 1951). For a simplified understanding of Lewin's Force Field Analysis, see Mark Connelly, 'Force Field Analysis': change-management-coach.com



was optimistic about the future of humanity and the planet because humanity has become deeply aware of the dangers inherent in the interaction between the human and the non-human environment.<sup>21</sup>

Eco-justice requires global comprehension as well as technical understanding of ecological issues as we see in the 'Three Es': Ecology, Economy and Equity. But there are warnings here. First, beware of the power imbalances in the 'Three Es' noted previously. Second, although analysis is vital, we need to avoid the trap of 'paralysis by analysis'. That is, we can probe so deeply that the issues become overly complicated and then we are unable to take any necessary or meaningful action. That is why an approach like the triad TCP – toxicity of the chemical, the concentration level, and the pathway into the ecosystem and other approaches are useful.

Thinking globally and acting locally first requires personal change and a willingness for ongoing personal change. It also means that we have an international understating of why things are done in a certain way in other cultures. This is more than tolerance of the viewpoints of others; it is an opportunity to expand our vision and learn from each other. There needs to be mutuality between people in different cultures so we can learn from one another, and work co-operatively. 'Thinking globally and acting locally' (TG-AL) also entails support for bioregional development. TG-AL also means supporting local agriculture and local businesses. The rapid expansion of farmers' markets globally is a case in point.

Visions are essential for humans. Without them, we will perish. But visions must be turned into some concrete realities or they will soon become illusions. We are called upon not to build the New Jerusalem on this earth, but we are called upon to build some part of the foundations for a New Jerusalem. Tiny victories in our efforts are vital, because they show us that some changes are possible, and they remind us that we can make a real difference. Without any signs of victory, despairing attitudes can grow and deepen. And despair is absolutely deadening to the effectiveness of any social movement.

The hard question is: How do we find handles for a specific issue that can help us make a difference? Although we need to think on a global level, we also need to act on a global level. One of the most effective ways is for people in our religious institutions in different parts of the globe to be in frequent contact with one another on issues of mutual concern. Although there is no world government, there are many signs of international co-operation. The conversation between churches in different part of the globe is a sign of real mutuality where we all have something to learn from each other, and to give to one another. For example, in the western world, rich in financial resources, there seems to be a growing deficit in our understanding of the common good. Some of the communal patterns in the

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<sup>21</sup> René J. Dubos, *So Human an Animal: How We are Shaped by Surroundings and Events* (original in 1968; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

less industrialised nations might be able to help us in the West understand and move beyond individual concerns and even individual rights, to a more communal understanding.

There are many vital roles that religious institutions can play. The first is an educational role. Solid and ongoing Bible study is essential – showing especially how the Bible encompasses the God of Creation and the God of History. It is absolutely essential that we understand that the dualisms that infect our mind-set do not exist to the same extent in the Bible. Second, the church can and should build models for community-based activities. African Earthkeepers and A Rocha in this volume can be most instructive. Third, the church needs to help its members engage in advocacy for public policies that promote eco-justice. The need for relating a ‘bottoms up’ to a ‘top down’ approach is essential. Advocating for policies that promote sustainable development and eco-justice can only be effective if there is a solid community-based foundation. Decision-makers respond to public pressure from the ‘bottoms up’.<sup>22</sup>

To continue in the struggles for eco-justice can be tedious and disheartening at times. Yet we must move on. Another hard question is: How are we sustained in our efforts over the long haul? We are sustained by the power of the Gospel message. Our religious beliefs need to touch the core of our being. The work of William Law is instructive as he influenced the Evangelical movements of the eighteenth century, including the work of George Whitefield and John Wesley. Law wrote: ‘Christianity does not consist in any *partial* amendment of our lives, any particular moral virtues, but in the entire change of our natural temper, a life wholly devoted to God.’ Again: ‘If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day. If we are to live unto Christ at any time and any place, we are to live unto him in all times and in all places. If we are to use anything as a gift from God, we are to use everything as his gift.’<sup>23</sup>

If our religious beliefs are not internalised, we will have a difficult time internalising our understanding of eco-justice issues. Global eco-justice concerns affect not only Christians but billions who are committed to non-Christian religions. Interfaith dialogue is essential and necessary. As Christians, however, we come to the interfaith dialogue with a particular perspective. We recognise that God loves all and works in all religions, but God has acted in a particular way through the Incarnation of his Eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Yes, we are sustained by the gospel message; for, as Paul said, ‘The Gospel is the power of God to those who believe’ (Rom. 1:16).

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<sup>22</sup> See websites of Eco-Justice Ministries ([www.ecojustice.org](http://www.ecojustice.org)) and Eco-Justice Notes ([www.ecojustice.org/e-about/asp](http://www.ecojustice.org/e-about/asp))

<sup>23</sup> William Law, *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (original 1729), in Paul G. Starwood (ed), *Classics of Western Spirituality Series* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

In the end, the most difficult question we need to ask ourselves is: How do we get empowered, sustained and refreshed to move on in our efforts to promote eco-justice?

### Concluding Note

Difficult questions emerge with great frequency, especially in an area as complex as eco-justice and understanding the issues in the light of *missio Dei*. The Bible is a valuable resource and guide, but it is not a textbook where we can find ready-made answers to eco-justice or *missio Dei* concerns. We need to take the words of Scripture seriously and probe them regularly, but not with the understanding that there are simple biblical solutions to complicated issues. First, we need to overcome all forms of dualistic thinking, as noted previously. The Incarnation of God in Christ serves as a marvellous way for us to escape the duality traps – for it is in the Incarnation that the spiritual and the material worlds come together.

Further, those promoting eco-justice need to understand the vast web of interrelated life, and the need to proclaim and promote all forms of social and distributive justice – social/political/economic and gender justice, as well as ecological integrity. Unless our dreams are economically as well as ecologically sustainable, they will soon come to an end. That second E of eco-justice – the economic – serves as an important reminder to us. We always need to remember that we, as human beings, are part of the natural order, not above it, but that we are entrusted with a special responsibility to see the intrinsic value and worth of all creation, and to confer rights and protection to the non-human world. Most importantly, we always need to keep in mind that, when the natural order is violated, nature fights back, sometimes with fury.

In addition, we are required to find approaches to sort out the significant from the less significant ecological issues. That is why the TCP approach was offered. We also need to think and act at local, regional, national and global levels. The slogan ‘Think globally, act locally’ is a useful handle but, by itself, it is not sufficiently comprehensive.

One of the most creative approaches to a global eco-justice ethic can be seen in the work on the Earth Charter. The Charter is a ‘People’s Treaty’ that was endorsed by an increasing number of NGOs (non-government organisations) and governmental representatives forming the Union for the Conservation of Nature. The Charter is based on the eco-justice norms of solidarity, sustainability, sufficiency and participation. One of the members of the drafting committee, J. Ronald Engel, wrote:

The Charter repeatedly drives home the message that, only through the elimination of poverty and other human deprivation, and the establishment of just and non-violent social and economic relationships, will the citizens of the world be in the position to protect and restore the integrity of the Earth’s ecological systems. The Earth Charter embraces what has come to be called

an 'eco-justice' ethic – a comprehensive and holistic moral approach in which ecological and social (including economic and cultural) well-being are considered both dependent and independent variables. It is not possible to adequately address one without addressing the other; yet each also needs to be addressed on its own terms.<sup>24</sup>

We believe in a God who created and sustains all that is, a God who has redeemed and continues to redeem history. The mission to promote eco-justice on a global scale is God's mission, and the church is to be a vehicle for making it happen. That is the linkage between the *missio Dei* and eco-justice.

### Resources

- Robert D. Bullard, *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 2005).
- Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (New York: Orbis, 2001), Earth Charter Initiative: [www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-charter.html](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-charter.html)
- John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).
- Larry Rasmussen, 'Is Eco-justice Central to the Christian Faith,' in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 54, 3-4 (2000).

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<sup>24</sup> Ronald J. Engel, 'The Earth Charter as a New Covenant for Democracy,' in *Religion and Culture Web Forum at the Martin Marty Center* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2007): <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/022007/earthcharter.pdf> (accessed 20th January 2015).

# THE MISSING LINK: CREATION EMPATHY AS THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN MISSION (A WESLEYAN ECO-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE)

Tallessyn Zawn Grenfell-Lee

## Introduction

Approaches to ecological Christian mission might logically begin with ministering to the areas of greatest suffering – vulnerable human populations, species, and maybe even ecosystems. Yet the underlying causes of the socio-ecological crisis lie in the policies and practices of those governments and populations suffering the least, particularly in the industrially developed world. In order to address this crisis, we need a community of informed citizens passionately committed to the kind of widespread socio-economic policy reform that will have a sufficient impact. Instead, we in the US seem to plod along in the vain hope that some people, somewhere, will fix things before it gets too late. Perhaps the greatest challenge in the field of Ecology and Mission lies not in encouraging more from those disciples already dedicated to the cause, but rather in transforming the inadequate response of the majority of people of faith.<sup>1</sup> By now, we all more or less know the depth of the crisis, we know what needs to be done, and we even know that we are not responding sufficiently to avert Armageddon-like catastrophes of human suffering, ecosystem destruction and species extinction. Despite the good intentions of Christians in the developed world, the general response could be summarised by the phrase, ‘Of course I recycle! Pass the bacon?’ Given plentiful information and opportunities for activism and transformation, why do we as people of faith continue to respond so slowly to the greatest mission call of our time?

In this essay, I argue that we do respond, emphatically, to situations that engage us passionately; but deeply held cultural and individual fears impair our empathic ability to identify with and respond to the socio-ecological crisis. Our fears of isolation, finitude and mortality have contributed to an epidemic of alienation from our bodies, our villages and our ecosystems, and thus a traumatised relationship of self with body, other, and the natural world. Our fear of poverty and insecurity leaves us vulnerable to manipulative societal forces that falsely pit ecological decisions against

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<sup>1</sup> Gernot Wagner, *But Will the Planet Notice?: How Smart Economics Can Save the World* (first edition) (New York: Hill & Wang, 2011).

economic stability, leading us to choose our own supposed security at the expense of our neighbours, other species ('other kind'), and a sustainable future. This interconnected, fear-based world-view, characterised by alienation and a lack of properly developed empathy, leads to cognitive dissonance between what we know we should do and what we are actually capable of doing to address the crisis.

The Christian mission to embody Christ in the world focuses and relies upon empathy with other humans; but our faith ancestors were not alienated from their bodies or from the rest of the natural world, which together form the 'Creation'. Today, we must actively develop empathy with the Creation, both in nature and with our own physical bodies, in a focused effort towards healing the fear, alienation, complacency and apathy that inhibit fully engaged discipleship. I approach analysis of this challenge using a Wesleyan eco-feminist model, in which the world – and each of us – is both full of grace and riddled with disease, interconnected in systems of patriarchal, ethnocentric and anthropocentric oppression. Widespread complacency indicates a deep form of brokenness that nonetheless can find healing through the power of the Spirit, moving through intentional communities committed to eco-justice and peace.

### Empathy and Attachment

Evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould argued decades ago that 'we cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature – for we will not fight to save what we do not love'.<sup>2</sup> Various scholars and activists have studied what motivates people to respond to issues and what hinders that response. Recent research corroborates Gould: hammering people with more and more images and statistics about a particular environmental issue has no impact on their views or their activism – a trend that Bishop Cederholm in this volume confirms. All that additional information motivates only the people who already hold environmentalism as a value, and may even drive non-environmentalists further away. This data-driven strategy bounces off generally altruistic people as well; in other words, we must *already care* about the Earth *specifically* in order for either new or reinforcing information about ecological devastation to impact us.<sup>3</sup>

In short, we live in the information age. We do not need more information – scientific or biblical – explaining to us *why* we should care about and for the Creation. Most people agree that we all *should* care; we likely believe we *do* care. Instead, we must re-learn *how* to care: how to

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1993), 40.

<sup>3</sup> J.W. Bolderdijk et al, 'Values Determine the (in)Effectiveness of Informational Interventions in Promoting Pro-Environmental Behavior,' in *PLoS One* 8, 12 (2013).

love the Creation and all its creatures passionately, as an integrated part of our inmost selves; and the rest – the healing and justice – will follow. We must re-learn Creation-empathy.

An examination of the general development and inhibition of empathy provides intriguing possibilities to help explain seemingly apathetic attitudes towards socio-ecological suffering and destruction. The 'empathy-altruism' hypothesis describes how people respond to the distress of others: some move away from others in distress; however, people with properly developed empathy stay and help alleviate the suffering of others. Early childhood trauma, abuse and neglect lead to improper empathy development, and later to bullying and abusiveness. Attachment plays an integral role in this process: when infants do not experience proper attachment with a nurturing care-giver, they learn to protect themselves from hostile environments by isolating themselves emotionally, which leads to an inability to experience empathy.

In particular, infants and young children undergo neurological development in which proper attachment has a formative impact on later empathic ability. When young children experience abuse or neglect, they exhibit high anxiety, fear, panic, dissociation, and the inability to transition from a fearful state to a calm state. Dissociation from a needed source of care and attachment involves 'a submission and resignation to the inevitability of overwhelming, even psychically deadening, danger'.<sup>4</sup> In extreme cases, 'the infant does not really come into existence, since there is no continuity in being; instead, the personality becomes built on the basis of reactions to environmental impingement'.<sup>5</sup> In summary, in order to develop a sense of self, kinship, security and empathy, we must experience consistent and safe nurturing when we are young; in the absence of such nurturing, the human psyche develops early wounds that often result in behaviours ranging from isolation and apathy to fearfulness and abusiveness towards self and others.

### **Empathy, Bodies, and the Creation**

Lack of Identity? Isolation? Apathy? Fearfulness? Abusiveness? These descriptors sound eerily identical with the prevalent relationship of humanity with the Creation in the developed world. Could it be that we industrialised humans have somehow developed into a culture of traumatised earthly creatures, alienated not only from one another but also

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<sup>4</sup> Jody Messler Davies and Mary Gail Frawley, *Treating the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Psychoanalytic Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Allan N. Schore, 'The Effects of Early Relational Trauma on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation, and Infant Mental Health,' in *Infant Mental Health Journal* 22, 1-2 (2001), 201-69, 237.

from our own bodies and the rest of the natural world, and existing in a wounded state of fearful dissociation from both?

Robert Louv describes the alarming characteristics of a culture that spends less and less time interacting with the natural world. Louv notes that as we spend more time indoors and interacting with electronics (and less time outside or interacting with animals and plants), we also see staggering increases in both physical and mental illness, such as obesity, depression, anxiety and other diseases. In particular, in the global North and in large cities, children spend less time in nature now than at any other time in human history, as our culture increasingly separate from the Creation, we sentimentalise it in an attempt to calm our growing fear of this alien and threatening 'other'.

Our bodies represent our most intimate connection with the rest of the natural world; yet our relationships with our physical bodies have also changed for the worse. Feminists have long studied the alienation from and demonisation of bodies and sexuality as a main factor contributing to the oppression of women and girls. This objectifying paradigm, which is directed more intensely against women of colour, harms all who participate in it, including men and boys, as well as otherkind.<sup>6</sup> Despite decades of feminist activism, young women continue to internalise a paradigm in which they have no integrated understanding of self or sexuality, but rather an alienated, frightened, disembodied view of their bodies as objects developed in order to please men.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, our western culture associates maleness with emotionless isolation, violence and domination. Both women and men develop impaired empathy with self, body and sexuality.

We are not born hating and fearing our bodies and our sexuality. How did we get to a place such as this, particularly when some cultures – and otherkind – somehow avoid our fate? Laurel Schneider asserts that the roots of this modern disease lie in patrilineal cultures, such as biblical and European-based cultures, where property inheritance follows paternal lineage. In patrilineal socio-economics, the need to secure the absolute paternal identity of children necessarily creates cultures that violently restrict women's sexuality as a commodity 'for the purposes of economic stability and social order'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Deep Ecology, Eco-feminism, and the Bible,' in David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb (eds), *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 231-40.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Isherwood, 'The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: The Spiralling of Incarnation,' in *Feminist Theology* 12, 2 (2004), 152.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Schneider, 'Promiscuous Incarnation,' in Margaret D. Kamitsuka (ed), *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 234.



As cultures grow farther away from nature, this value system logically extends a sense of objectified commodification to the natural world. Catharine McKinnon discusses how this concept of sovereignty divides people and spaces into male-dominated spheres of power, jealously guarded from one another, in which hegemonic leaders pledge to protect those under their power, but nonetheless can violate their own spheres with virtual impunity.<sup>9</sup> The cruelty possible in such a 'rape' culture, where in extreme cases, perpetrators videotape genocidal mass rape and sell it as pornography,<sup>10</sup> mirrors the extent of the cruelty with which we treat factory farm livestock animals daily. These extreme examples of impaired empathy lie on a continuum of societal alienation and fear that undermines the dignity and sacredness of each part of the Creation, particularly of women, people of colour, and the non-human Creation.

### Restoring Kinship with the Whole Creation

Could an increasingly underdeveloped capacity for empathy also underlie our inability to respond to the ecological crisis? If improper attachment between infants and care-givers leads to impaired empathy among humans, could human isolation from and objectification of nature and otherkind lead to alienation, fear and, ultimately, the reduced ability to experience kinship, responsibility and passion for *all* of the Creation?

Chellis Glendinning and Paul Shepard independently assert this exact argument. For several decades, they and others in the field of eco-psychology have explored the dynamics of a human species that once interacted with the natural world in a constant and sustainable way, and has now regressed to occasional, structured interactions and perpetuated stunning levels of destruction. Glendinning argues that this traumatic dislocation applies to the history of our cultures as well as to each child during development and each individual in daily life: 'The trauma endured by technological people like ourselves is the systemic and systematic removal of our lives from the natural world: from the tendrils of earthy textures, from the rhythms of sun and moon, from the spirits of the bears and trees, from the life force itself.'<sup>11</sup> She describes the traumatic responses of dissociation and split consciousness exemplified by current human fear of the 'wild' and domination of the 'tame'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher and Martha Roth, *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Chellis Glendinning, 'Technology, Trauma, and the Wild,' in Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kanner (eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1995), 50.

<sup>12</sup> Glendinning, 'Technology, Trauma, and the Wild,' 52-53.

Shepard agrees that our disconnectedness from the Creation represents the loss of an essential part of attachment during early development; moreover, this unhealthy ‘ontogeny,’ or sense of self, may also explain our inability to engage with the socio-ecological crisis effectively: ‘Something uncanny seems to block the corrective will, not simply private cupidity or political inertia... technology does not simply act out scientific theory, or daily life flesh out ideas of progress, biblical dogma or Renaissance humanism. A history of ideas is not enough to explain human behaviour.’<sup>13</sup> These scholars see our intensifying alienation from the Creation as a fundamental, irreplaceable part of our ability to understand who we are as individuals, communities and societies.

Fortunately, it is not too late for healing. John Robbins describes the journey of a struggling pig farmer through Creation-empathy development, suppression and resurrection. As a boy, this farmer had developed a deep love of the land and its creatures, particularly his favourite pet pig: ‘In the summer... he would sleep in the barn. It was cooler there... and the pig would come over and sleep alongside him, asking fondly to have her belly rubbed, which he was glad to do.’ His traumatic dissociation began when his father forced him to slaughter the pig: ‘I ran away, but I couldn’t hide... He told me, “You either slaughter that animal or you’re no longer my son”.’<sup>14</sup> Dissociation increased throughout adulthood, as he was forced to implement increasingly inhumane, abusive practices in order to feed his family and make ends meet:

He owned and ran what he called a ‘pork production facility’. I, on the other hand, would have called it a pig Auschwitz. The conditions were brutal... It didn’t help when, in response to a particularly loud squealing from one of the pigs, he delivered a sudden and threatening kick to the bars of its cage, causing a loud ‘clang’ to reverberate through the warehouse and leading to screaming from many of the pigs... even though he didn’t like doing some of the things he did to the animals – scooping them up in such small cages, using so many drugs, taking the babies away from their mothers so quickly after their births – he didn’t see that he had any choice. He would be at a disadvantage and unable to compete economically if he didn’t do things that way.<sup>15</sup>

Through Robbins’ empathy, the farmer recalled the bond with his childhood friend, and he was then able to rediscover his own empathy for himself and for his pigs. He left factory farming behind and transitioned to a sustainable, healing relationship with the Earth:

He grows vegetables organically... He’s got pigs, all right, but only about ten, and he doesn’t cage them, nor does he kill them. Instead, he’s got a

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Shepard, ‘Nature and Madness,’ in Theodore Roszak, *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 23, 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> John Robbins, *The Food Revolution: How Your Diet Can Help Save Your Life and Our World* (San Francisco, CA: Conari Press, 2001), 159-60.

<sup>15</sup> Robbins, ‘The Food Revolution,’ 157.

contract with local schools; they bring kids out in buses on field trips to his farm, for his 'Pet-a-pig' program... He's arranged it so the kids, each one of them, gets a chance to give a pig a belly rub.<sup>16</sup>

This inspiring story illustrates the trauma paradigm present in each of us. We are taught to objectify and oppress our body, other humans, and other parts of the Creation. In order to heal the deepest sources of our alienation from the Earth, we must look to its origins in our own development.

We first experience the created world through our bodies and the bodies of those around us. Babies' bodies represent innocence, pure love, the presence of the Divine. Yet by the time children in the US reach adulthood, society, family and friends have bombarded them with alternative messages about the purpose and value of their physical bodies. Children go from loving and celebrating their beautiful selves to feelings of fear, shame and alienation from their developing bodies. Children also inherently love rolling in the grass and dirt; but here, too, they transition to spending most of their time indoors, avoiding getting 'dirty,' and seeing nature as a fearful, alien landscape full of poisonous plants and dangerous creatures carrying deadly diseases.

For Christian mission to take ecology seriously, we must engage in mission to all three areas of woundedness: we must minister to our own bodies, taking into account the deep, early wounds we still carry from our development, societies and faith traditions; we must seek to understand and heal the ways in which we continue to alienate other humans from our understandings of kinship and empathy; and we must recognise and address our anthropocentric, objectifying relationship with the rest of the natural world, to restore an empathetic bond of kinship for the whole Creation. We must learn to see every kind of suffering in the crucified body of Christ, from the victims and perpetrators of human trafficking, to the tortured livestock on factory farms and those who cause this torture; from the poisoned air, waters and soils to the parts of us that enable the poisoning. Our Scriptures speak of the reconciling of *all* things, through the crucifixion and through the many narratives of rebirth that witness hope and healing through the darkness and pain. From our broken relationships with our bodies and our lands beckons a fertile mission field.

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### *Mission, Empathy, and 'Other'*

Christian mission, in its goal of continuing the healing and liberating ministries of Jesus, relies upon empathy with the 'other'. In order to reach out and proclaim a gospel of liberation and healing, we must hold one another in our hearts in kinship, as one family of God. This kind of empathy transcends paternalistic charity; it allows the building of the relationship itself to guide and foster mutual understanding and

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<sup>16</sup> Robbins, 'The Food Revolution,' 153-163.

transformation. As Dana Lee Robert argues, mission necessarily involves crossing 'boundaries'. The missionary journey brings us into contact with new contexts, which transform us as we transform them, and which also therefore cause us continually to redefine the essence of Christian identity.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the history of global missions, missionaries have devoted themselves to learning not only new peoples and cultures but also their lands, waters, plants and traditions. As globalisation and ecological destruction increasingly threaten vulnerable populations, 'missionary identification with indigenous peoples built bridges with modernity for the preservation of indigenous lifeways'.<sup>18</sup> These missionaries who learned from the peoples *and* their lands provide inspiring examples of justice and peace-building: reforestation through blended indigenous Christian tree-planting rituals; economic and ecological stability through native medicinal plant cultivation; and rain forest preservation through eco-tourism programmes that celebrate traditional crafts and legends.

In our ministry to *humans*, in need, we must remember the wisdom and healing we can also find in mission with our own bodies and with the rest of the natural world. In each case, we humbly reach out with our own wisdom and healing, and receive wisdom and healing in return. The question of Creation mission invites us to explore whom else to include in a gospel of hope: *is my body my neighbour? Are the trees, waters, rocks and soil? Because, once we include the Samaritans and the Gentiles of the Cosmos, we acknowledge this 'other' forevermore as kindred.*

We cannot approach Christian mission to human communities with a fully developed spirit of compassion unless we also relate empathetically with these other two integral parts of our Earthly kinship. Conversely, empathy with our bodies and with the Creation further strengthens our empathy with other human communities, such that we can more fully minister *and* allow ourselves to receive the ministry of others. As in the examples listed above, Creation kinship and empathy must lead to the hard work of committed ecological discipleship. In order to address the many kinds of damage wreaked by this socio-ecological crisis, we must significantly alter our socio-economic structures such that we use and distribute our power and resources both justly and sustainably; but the process must stem from a deep well of passionate empathy in order to succeed. The church is not a bank, or a government, or even a university. We as Christians are in the healing and liberating business of empathy.

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<sup>17</sup> Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Robert, *Christian Mission*, 111.

### Feminism, Incarnation, and Sensual Theology

How can Christianity help build empathy with our created bodies? Feminists have spent considerable time exploring the spiritual and theological significance of physical bodies and sexuality, as well as its ties to the rest of the material world. In *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, Carter Heyward lifts up the power of bodies and sexuality; she asserts that we must respect this power through healthy boundaries with one another and around behaviours. These boundaries should not isolate or alienate; mutual boundaries emerge collaboratively in order to share power and respect diversity, rather than to maintain abusive power dynamics. Our bodily senses provide the matrix in which we form these relationships with self and other, and thus we must trust our bodies, our senses and our sexuality as not only ethically authoritative but also as primary ways through which we come to know and understand the Divine. Heyward acknowledges the Augustinian erotophobia that led to a pervasive Christian fear of sexuality in general;<sup>19</sup> by contrast, Heyward draws out an alternative concept:

the sacred character of nature – flesh, dirt, wetness, sex, woman... We see, hear, touch, smell, and taste the divine, who is embodied between and among us *insofar as we are moving more fully into, or toward, mutually empowering relationships in which all creatures are accorded profound respect and dignity*<sup>20</sup> [emphasis added].

Thus, Heyward does not argue for sensuality for its own sake, but as the primary way in which we experience all our relationships in the Creation. In communities of mutual respect and dignity, passion will foster the empathy we need to work for healing and justice. Heyward asserts that reclaiming and trusting our sensuality requires letting go of isolation and control, and risking vulnerability. Biblical sexual mores reinforce the importance of healthy, mutual boundaries around issues of power and sexuality. If we can embrace the incarnation within and around us, we tap into a powerful divine force of both outrage at abuses of power and wisdom to seek healing and justice.

Laurel C. Schneider and Lisa Isherwood also uphold a deep respect for the theological value of the sensual; in fact, they agree that we need to allow 'the flesh to show us the divine, rather than the other way around'.<sup>21</sup> Schneider also offers an alternative biblical theology, in which the messy, exuberant abundance of the Creation reveals the Incarnation of a 'promiscuous' God that refuses to remain stifled within narrow boundaries.

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<sup>19</sup> Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (first edition; San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Heyward, *Touching Our Strength*, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Schneider, 'Promiscuous Incarnation' cf. Isherwood, 'The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: The Spiralling of Incarnation,' *Feminist Theology* 12, 2 (2004), 140-156.

Limiting the Incarnation to Jesus, or even to humanity, denies the very principle of Incarnation, replacing it with a disembodied, exclusivist kind of idolatry that goes against the radically inclusive, fleshy, boundless love of God and expressed in the narratives of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Schneider acknowledges the difficulty of transforming entrenched cultural and religious structures that continue to legitimate patrilineal theologies, particularly since our Scriptures harbour them; but she insists that these toxic ideas hinder a full understanding of the Divine. We must find the courage to release exclusivity and embrace God's presence within and around us:

... the narratives of Jesus of Nazareth suggest that the divinity which his flesh reveals is radically open to consorting with anyone... The claims of exclusivity that Christians place on divine incarnation reveal Christian insecurities about a God who loves too freely, too indiscriminately, and too often, rather than jealousy on the part of God... The erasure and vilification of sex in Christian theology and in the canonical narratives about Jesus represent a serious error at the core of the tradition. This error is founded not on theological grounds but on economic grounds and cannot be corrected until the patrilineal economics of Christian sexual morality is fully dismantled. The astonishing revelation of flesh in divinity... cannot fully emerge without that correction, because without it, incarnation is desiccated in abstraction and exclusive isolation, which is the opposite of embodiment.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, these feminists reveal how narrow understandings of incarnate divinity provide a limited and idolatrous basis on which to build theological and ethical systems of sexual and societal morality. Instead, if we can find a path towards openness, we can begin the journey of empathy towards one another, self, and the Creation, that will continue to heal our fear and grief as it also leads us in a mission of justice and liberation for the rest of the world.

### *Scripture, Bodies, and Sexuality*

Our Scriptures can also help us build empathy with our bodies. Prevalent birth imagery in our Scriptures provides a rich theological foundation from which to address our bodily alienation today. Far from a limited experience of occasional female bodies, biblical birth includes the whole Creation in a continuing journey of redemption and resurrection. Humans and the rest of the Creation experience birth through the womb waters of the deep, birth as the people of God through a birth canal in the Red Sea, and many other cycles of rebirth, including as a new people of God through the labouring Passion narratives. The messy, wet, dark and scary process of birth-resurrection offers a fully incarnational theology, through which we as humans can understand the Divine only through the material Creation and its seasonal cycles. Our human, sexual bodies exist as part of a glorious

<sup>22</sup> Schneider, 'Promiscuous Incarnation,' 238, 242.

<sup>23</sup> Schneider, 'Promiscuous Incarnation,' 244-245.

matrix of fertility and life, which embraces death as a prelude to new life, and therefore refuses to let death have the final word.

Not surprisingly, the Scriptures also abound with erotic images of sexuality and fertility. The ancient mind fluidly integrated sexuality into concepts of self and divinity: fertility, liberation, birth and resurrection intertwine. These foundational birth-resurrection narratives heavily influence our understanding of the Christian identity and call to mission. In order to reconcile our spiritual selves with our alienated, physical, sexual bodies, we can begin by acknowledging and embracing the sexual femininity in our Story: for example, the common symbolic use of water as a symbol for wombs and birth. Despite later misogynistic denigration of the woman body, in Scripture it can also represent divine power, liberation and renewal. When Jesus washes the feet of his friends (John 13:4-5), these cleansing birth waters point to the rebirthing of the People of God, in an identity of service, humility and caring for those in need. We find more examples in the abundant Scriptural use of oil. In the ancient world, the religious significance of oil evolved from its uses to preserve, cleanse and to prepare a woman's body for childbirth.<sup>24</sup> When a woman anoints Jesus' feet with oil (e.g. Luke 7:38), she not only prepares for the burial of the old, but she also administers a ritual of pre-birth massage to make way for the coming of the new. During the crucifixion, Jesus' body symbolises the transition to a new beginning: a soldier pierces Jesus' side and water flows out (John 19:34), a bursting of the waters of birth from Christ as a cosmic womb, and the advent of a labour that ends in the birth of the new (resurrected) Body of Christ in the world.

### *Wisdom from the Creation*

We face an intimidating task if we truly seek to heal the underlying trauma in our empathic kinship. Yet we may find some simple ways towards these vital missionary goals if we listen more closely to the Creation itself. In addition to examining the psychological and physical benefits of time spent in nature, research has also explored both modern ideas and ancient indigenous practices, which have shown how various interactions with nature or emulation of otherkind behaviours can heal trauma, promote disaster resilience, and build stronger communities. Wild animals live in environments where traumatic events frequently occur in daily life; yet nature has provided animals with innate tools with which to respond to violence and trauma, so that self-care, care of young and others, and general communal adhesion do not suffer. Humans must rediscover nature. In fact, educational studies now confirm that combining social and

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<sup>24</sup> See D. Todman, 'Childbirth in Ancient Rome: From Traditional Folklore to Obstetrics,' in *Aust N Z J Obstet Gynaecol* 47, 2 (2007). Oil was used to massage the skin of the womb and in perineal massage.



emotional intelligence with ecological intelligence provides a significantly stronger, synergistic foundation for empathic development.<sup>25</sup>

The nature connection research cited above reflects both simple acts, such as taking a walk, and concerted programmes specifically designed to foster healing and growth in a supportive communal environment. Interestingly, nature connection programme participants describe these experiences in terms that parallel religious communities, experiences and sanctuaries. Outdoor events proceed at a gentler pace, in time set apart from worldly cares, to focus on other things; and outdoor space feels like a refuge, with less noise and stimulation. The atmosphere is less formal and categorised, with fewer barriers, pressure or social hierarchy; and the community, both ecological and human, accepts people as they are, providing feelings of dignity along with a sense of welcome and no longer being alone.<sup>26</sup> These outdoor experiences yield interwoven positive impacts on empathy for self, other, and the natural world.

Given the remarkably religious-sounding descriptions of nature connection experiences, it is no wonder that our forebears designed religious spaces to emulate the Creation, with their high ceilings and sense of refuge from the busy world outside. Religious communities also seek to provide acceptance, healing, challenge and growth. In fact, the temple of ancient Israel did not seek to confine the Divine to an indoor realm, but to represent the Creation, a holy mountain, and the creating waters of the seas. Rather than limiting the Divine to dwell inside, the Temple provided access to the wild Divine as experienced only in the wilderness.

### A Wild Tradition

Looking to the Earth itself for insight and healing may seem like a New Age or even pagan practice; however, our Scripture narratives continually point to the Creation, not just in illustrative metaphor, but also as a source of wisdom and guidance. According to V.J. John, 'As a means of communicating divine activity, Nature has its own value. It does not merely exist for the sake of humanity, but for its own sake and as witness to God...'<sup>27</sup> To address humanity's deepest fears, such as insecurity, hunger and finitude, Jesus calls us to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (Matt. 6:25-30). When people sought solace, clarity or inspiration, they

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Goleman, Lisa Bennett and Zenobia Barlow, *Ecoliterate: How Educators Are Cultivating Emotional, Social, and Ecological Intelligence* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint, 2012), 465-78.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Adams et al, *The Grow Project: A Report on the Well-Being Benefits of Nature Connection for People with Experience of Mental Distress* (Brighton, UK: Community University Partnership Programme, University of Brighton, 2014), 15-20.

<sup>27</sup> V.J. John, 'Towards a Biblical Understanding of Ecology: Re-Reading the Agricultural Parables of Jesus,' in *Theologies and Cultures* 4, 1 (2007), 142.



went to the wilderness and encountered the Divine. The wildness – the chaos – of biblical wilderness, deserts and seas allows the Spirit to move and speak in unique and transformative ways. In our post-urbanisation world, we tend to read ancient texts through a lens of sentimentality, alienation and even fear towards wilderness, beasts and anything that smacks of nature worship; yet the ancient mind did not see the divide between humanity and the rest of the Creation that we have inherited in prevalent Christian theology today.<sup>28</sup> Scripture supports the idea that the wildness of the Creation alone offers the most authentic, powerful and transformative divine experiences, and that humanity can participate with integrity in both civilisation and wilderness. At times, the Spirit calls us to tend our vineyards, hearth and home; yet we must balance this cultivated life with the transfiguration, rebirth and resurrection that can happen only through the freedom of the Creator and the wild Creation.

As with the Divine, we humans both revere and fear wildness, because it represents that which we cannot fully understand or control. In our discomfort, we try to tame and categorise what we can, and we label everything else as dangerous. Fear can inspire respect, but often it turns into prejudice. Delores Williams describes how prejudice and power worked together to justify Euro-American denigration and oppression of 'wild' African-American and 'savage' native American Indian communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;<sup>29</sup> yet the very diversity of humanity and all Creation reflects the depth of divine creative power. The most bio-diverse regions weather natural disasters with the greatest resilience; so, too, will diverse human communities survive and flourish, if we can release unwarranted human fears – and instead embody empathy.

Wesleyan theology grew in the wilderness as well. A strong pneumatology enabled the Methodist movement to see the workings of grace in all communities and creatures; it also correlated with the commitment to outdoor ministry, particularly with marginalised communities. Early on, Wesley saw the impact of outdoor ministry, and he began to focus on its unique ability to reach people in ways unattainable in church buildings.<sup>30</sup> Like the outdoor travelling ministries of Jesus and other biblical prophets, the Methodist movement incorporated outdoor ministry as a central part of its understanding of the Christian vocation. This aspect of the Methodist movement resonated with communities on the margins,

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<sup>28</sup> For an interesting exploration of the development of human cities and the fear of nature, see Vito Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear: Perceptions of Nature and the City in the Middle Ages* (trans. Shayne Mitchell; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), especially 8-14, 76-89, 180-85.

<sup>29</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 113-14.

<sup>30</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 135, 161-62.

including not only the miners and other poorer communities in Britain but also the African-American slave and American frontier communities across the ocean.<sup>31</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Wesleyan theology also holistically integrates human and Creational well-being: human sanctification includes physical, psychological and spiritual healing and growth, inextricable from the rest of the earthly community. Humanity does not stand on a pinnacle, isolated from the rest of the created universe; rather, we collaborate with the Creation and the Divine through a continuum in which no human experience of the Divine can occur without the Creation participating as well. In Genesis 1, the Creation and the Divine work together to create humanity in a shared divine image, not isolated to humanity alone, but representative of the divinity in the whole created realm. As Mvula argues in this volume, we share the precious *Imago Dei* with all Creation, which imbued it into us along with the Spirit of Life; thus, the full Incarnation includes all of Creation as well, reaching infinitely backward and forward in both space and time.

### Empathy, Eco-literacy, and the Church

Where does this analysis of alienation, empathy and Christian mission leave the church today? In fact, ecological mission effectively unites all our missionary goals, from personal healing and growth, to healing local, societal and systemic oppression. If ecological concerns are simply tacked onto the end of a long list of Christian missionary concerns, the magnitude of brokenness in the world overwhelms us, yet our foci come together in the literally global perspective of ecological healing and justice. With ecological mission as our central focus, we simultaneously work to feed the hungry and welcome the outcast, but with an expansive understanding of the connections of this work in our bodies, ecosystems, and across the planet.

If churches truly seek to transform into a people of faith who fully embody the mission call of ecological healing and justice, I propose that we begin our journey with perhaps the hardest and the easiest step: I propose that we begin by going *outside. Somehow. Everyone. Every week.* Even though we admonish our children with this advice, do we follow it ourselves? What kind of message do we send to our youth if we limit connecting with the Creation to liturgical lip service? Churches have long incorporated summer camps and wilderness retreats into their ministry and mission; and many churches increasingly use outdoor space for gardens, meditation, ecological and eco-justice missions, community building, and occasional worship. Yet so long as only a sub-set participates in these

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<sup>31</sup> John Galen McEllhenney, *United Methodism in America: A Compact History* (revised edition; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 23, 63.

ministries, Creation care will remain at the fringe of the central identity of the congregation.

Ecological theologians, ethicists and missiologists have long implored the People of God to find ways to reconnect with our rootedness in the soil of the Earth, as a matter of vital ethical urgency.<sup>32</sup> An outdoor identity will not only connect us with our past but also with the many worshipping communities around the globe who have no buildings. I submit that every urban, suburban and rural church can find ways to incorporate Creation care into its central identity and mission goals. Growing together into this new identity will help heal the trauma in our relationships with self, other, and the Creation as it leads us into new ministries of peace and justice.

### A Horizon of Holy Kinship

We have grown very *comfortable* inside; it's convenient, safe and familiar. It may also be killing us. The church of the past took Creation connection for granted. Today, we inherit a church that must address Creation alienation to understand and meet the needs of the world. Just as the rituals, spaces and culture of the biblical people of God experienced cycles of change and rebirth, *a living church cannot look like the church of yesterday*. Life and growth require change, in our space, language, structure, music and ritual. We ignore the synergy of wilderness connection with Christian mission at our peril. Ecological discipleship calls us out of our buildings and into holy conversation and holy transformation with other communities and creatures. The Spirit calls communities of faith to let go of fear and to embrace the new and strange, to venture outside, one step at a time, on a journey of redemption for the whole Earth. To drum, shout, dance. To sit, listen, be still. To grieve. To heal. And through it all, to be reborn.

### Resources

- Bruce Stanley, *Forest Church: A Field Guide to Nature Connection for Groups and Individuals* (Llangurig, UK: Mystic Christ Press, 2013).
- Wayne J. Pratt, *Worship in the Garden: Services for Outdoor Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013).
- Jon Young, Ellen Haas and Evan McGown, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature: For Kids of All Ages and their Mentors* (Shelton, WA: OWLink Media, 2008).

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<sup>32</sup> There are too many to list, but McFague's suggestions well represent the general voice of ecological ethics in Christianity – see Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 118-29.

Julie Tallard Johnson, *The Thundering Years: Rituals and Sacred Wisdom for Teens* (Rochester, VT: Bindu Books, 2001).

Kristi Meisenbach Boylan, *The Seven Sacred Rites of Menarche: The Spiritual Journey of the Adolescent Girl* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press LLC, 2001).

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# SECTION THREE

## GREENING MISSIOLOGY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Our world needs to find God,  
In noise and restlessness,  
God cannot be found.  
In the silence of the natural world  
God is present  
For a friend of silence, God is.  
See how nature – trees, flowers, grass  
In silence, they grow, sing and speak.  
See the stars, the moon and the sun,  
In the beauty of silence,  
They majestically move,  
Giving life to all creatures big and small  
In the wild and in the waters,  
Without them, no life exists!

– adapted and rearranged from Mother Teresa

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# THE CARE OF CREATION, THE GOSPEL AND OUR MISSION

Christopher J H Wright

It is an encouraging and positive sign (which one hopes has not come too late in the day), that Creation care is firmly on the agenda of Christians committed to global mission. The Lausanne Movement in the Cape Town Commitment (2010), called on evangelicals globally to include creation within their understanding of the Bible, the gospel and mission. So I am happy to contribute these reflections to strengthen and deepen our understanding and commitments in this area. Let's think first of the glory of God in creation, then of the goal of creation in God's plan of redemption, and finally whether Creation care can properly be regarded as a 'gospel issue' and included in our mission.<sup>1</sup>

## The Glory of Creation

### *God's glory expressed through the praise of creation*

The first question in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith (as I recall from childhood!), is: 'What is the chief end of man?' To which the answer is: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.' I believe the same question and the same answer could be applied to creation as a whole. Creation exists for the praise and glory of God, for God's enjoyment of his creation and its enjoyment of him.

So the ultimate purpose of *human* life (to glorify God) is not something that *distinguishes* us from the rest of creation – but rather something we share in common with the rest of creation. Of course, we as human beings glorify God in uniquely human ways – with our rationality, language, emotions, poetry, music, art – 'hearts and hands and minds and voices, in our choicest psalmody,' as the hymn says. We know what it is for us humans to praise and glorify God.

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<sup>1</sup> I have discussed Creation care in relation to both biblical ethics and Christian mission much more fully elsewhere: *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham, UK and Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), chap. 4; *The Mission of God* (Nottingham, UK and Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), chap. 12; and *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), chaps 3 and 15.

But the Bible affirms that *all creation* already praises God and can be summoned repeatedly to do so – and that includes not just animals, birds, etc. but even the inanimate creation – mountains, rivers, trees, etc. (Pss 145:10, 21; 148; 150, etc). Indeed, John’s vision of the whole universe centred around the throne of God reaches its climactic crescendo of praise when he says, ‘Then I heard *every creature* in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them’ bringing worship ‘to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb’ (Rev. 5:13).

Now, we may not be able to grasp or explain *how* creation praises God, or how God receives the praise of his non-human creatures. I really can’t imagine how that happens. I have a feeling (no more than that), that creatures praise and glorify God simply by being and doing what they were created for, and God is pleased and glorified when they do. The pleasure of God in his creatures simply doing their own thing in the places they belong is part of the message of Psalm 104. The non-human creation brings glory to God simply by existing, for it exists only by his sustaining and renewing power. But simply because we cannot understand *how* creation praises and glorifies God, we should not deny what the Bible so often affirms – namely, that it *does*!

### *God’s glory seen in the fulness of creation*

The glory of God is sometimes linked to the fulness of the earth (literally in Hebrew, ‘the filling of the earth’). The rich abundance of bio-diversity itself is celebrated in Genesis 1 as creation moves from ‘functionless and empty’ to ordered and full. Here are some more examples:

- Psalm 24:1 – ‘The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it’ (lit.) ‘its fulness’.
- Psalm 50:12 – ‘The world is mine and all that is in it’ (lit.) ‘its fulness’ (after listing animals of the forest, cattle, birds and insects)
- Psalm 104:31 – ‘May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works’ (after a psalm celebrating the diversity of creatures).

This gives an interesting perspective on the cry of the seraphim during Isaiah’s vision of God in the temple. What they cry out is literally: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy [is] YHWH Sabaoth. The fulness / filling of all the earth [is] his glory.’ This is usually translated: ‘The whole earth is full of his glory,’ and that is true, of course. But reading the sentence in English in that way can marginalise the word ‘full,’ as if the earth is just a kind of glory-bucket. But the word ‘fulness’ stands emphatically first in the Hebrew sentence as a noun. And the fulness of the earth, as we can see in several Psalms, is a shorthand expression for the abundance of life on earth in all its wonderful forms. Accordingly, it would be possible to translate, ‘The abundance of life that fills the earth constitutes the glory of God’ – that is to say – ‘the glory of God can be seen in the abundance of God’s own creation.’



Of course, we need to be careful not to read pantheism into such a statement, as if there were nothing more to God and his glory than the sum of creation itself. God's glory *transcends* creation ('You have set your glory above the heavens' is a way of expressing that truth). But having said that, we can certainly affirm that the glory of God is mediated to us through creation itself, not only in the awesome majesty of the heavens (Ps. 19:1), but also including the abundance of life on earth. We live in a glory-filled earth – one reason why Paul says that we are without excuse when we fail to glorify God and give thanks to him (Rom. 1:20-21).

Proverbs 14:31 says: 'Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.' The principle is that since human beings are made in God's image,<sup>2</sup> then whatever we do to other people, we are in some sense doing to God (Jesus applied the principle in relation to himself in Matthew 25). I would argue that it is a legitimate extension of this same principle to conclude that, since the fulness of created life on earth in some sense constitutes God's glory (at least, as one of the ways we experience God's glory), then whatever fulfils Genesis 1 and 2, by developing, enhancing and properly using the resources of the earth while at the same time serving and caring for it, acknowledges and contributes to the glory of God. Conversely, whatever needlessly destroys, degrades, pollutes and wastes the life of the earth diminishes God's glory. How we treat the earth reflects how we treat its Creator and ours.

### The Goal of Creation

When seeking for a fully biblical understanding of creation, we should not only look back to the beginning of the Bible and the story of creation itself, or look around at the glory of God expressed in the praise of creation and the fulness of the earth. We also need to look forward to God's ultimate purpose for creation. And it is a very encouraging place to look!

#### *a) Creation is included in the scope of God's redemptive purpose*

The first thing we need to say is that creation *needs* redemption. From the very beginning of the Bible, it is made clear that sin and evil have affected the natural order as well as human and spiritual life. 'Cursed is the earth because of you,' said God to Adam. I think the primary focus of that statement is on the earth as soil, ground ('*adamah*', rather than '*erets*') in relation to human work, rather than on the geological structures and functioning of the planet. That is, I do not personally believe that we should attribute all natural phenomena that are potentially destructive (the shifting

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<sup>2</sup> See also Hermann Mvula's chapter, 'The Imago Dei and the Missio Dei: Loving Creation amidst African Poverty'.

of tectonic plates, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, etc.) to the curse. In fact, we know that without the movement of tectonic plates (that also cause earthquakes and tsunamis) there would be no mountains, which are the source of rivers and soil, etc.). Nevertheless, Paul does make the clear theological affirmation that the whole of creation is frustrated, subjected to futility in some sense, including ‘decay and bondage’ – and will remain so until it is liberated by God and ‘brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:19-21).

The truth is, then, that just as creation shares in the effects of our sin, so we will share in the fulness of creation’s redemption. For God’s ultimate purpose is ‘to bring unity to all things in heaven and earth under Christ’ (Eph. 1:10 – one of the most astonishingly universal and cosmic affirmations in the Bible). We are not going to be saved *out of* the earth, but saved *along with* the earth.

Where did Paul get such an idea from? Clearly from the Scriptures, the Old Testament. For the prophets certainly included ecology in their eschatology.

- Isaiah 11:6-9 – The messianic era will include environmental harmony
- Isaiah 35 – The restoration of God’s people will herald creational abundance
- Isaiah 65:17-25 – God is ‘creating’ (the word is participial) ‘new heavens and new earth’. The picture that follows depicts life on earth that is full of joy, free from tears, life-fulfilling, with deep satisfaction and fruitfulness in ordinary labour, free from the curses of frustration and injustice, and with environmental peace and harmony. It is a glorious picture that provided the images and vocabulary for Revelation 21-22.
- Psalm 96:10-13 – The whole of creation is called to rejoice because God is coming to put things right.

This is not a case of ‘Old Testament earthiness’ – an earthbound materialism that gets transcended by the more spiritual message of the New Testament. Not at all!

Paul speaks of a new, redeemed creation being brought to birth within the womb of this creation – whose groanings are the labour pains of creation’s future as well as our own (Rom. 8:18-25). For we will inhabit the new creation in our redeemed bodies, modelled on the resurrection body of Jesus (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 1 John. 3:2). That is why the bodily resurrection of Jesus is so vitally important. They thought he was a ghost, but he deliberately demonstrated to his disciples that he was fully physical – with body parts, flesh and bones, and the ability to eat food (Luke 24:37-43). The resurrection is God’s Yes! to creation. The risen Jesus is the first fruits of the new creation.

*Purging, not obliteration*

Some people struggle with the whole idea of the redemption of creation because they believe that the future of the universe is total obliteration in a cosmic conflagration. This is sometimes linked with an unbiblical dualism in which matter itself is seen as inferior, tainted and temporary, whereas only the spiritual realm is pure and eternal. They envisage the future, then, in terms of ultimate release from the shackles of physicality on earth into the enjoyment of a spiritual heaven with God. However, even those who are not infected by that kind of dualism still want to take seriously the language of destruction by fire in 2 Peter 3:10-12. Surely, they argue, the picture of the Day of the Lord given here portrays final destruction, not redemption and renewal?

However, we need to see the context and argument of the whole chapter. Peter is arguing against those who scoff at the idea of a coming future judgment, complacently believing that everything will go on just as it always has for ever (vv 3-4). What they forget, however, says Peter, is that such an attitude was around before the Flood, but God did intervene and act in judgment. So God will assuredly and finally do in the future what he prefigured in the past. What he did then by water, he will in the end do by fire.

Now the key thing to observe here is that the language of *destruction of the world* is used of both events. Look at the parallel points in verses 6-7:

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.

What was destroyed in the Flood? Not the whole planet or creation itself, but the ungodly human society on the earth at that time – ‘the destruction of the ungodly,’ as Peter says. The apocalyptic language of fire in the second part of the chapter, then, should be understood in its biblical sense of purging, cleansing judgment. The universe will be purged of all evil and ‘the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare’ – i.e. to the all-seeing eyes of our Creator and Judge. And after that fiery cleansing, after the destruction of ‘the world as we know it’ – in the sense of the world in its sinful rebellion against God – then Peter continues with the wonderful verse 13, ‘in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells’.

*Reconciled to God through the cross and resurrection of Christ*

But how will all this be accomplished? In fact, it already has been! We may not be able to imagine with our finite brains what the new creation will be like or ‘how will God do it?’ But Paul assures us that it is already guaranteed, accomplished in anticipation, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:15-23 must be one of the most breathtaking passages Paul ever wrote about Jesus Christ. He paints in truly cosmic colours and dimensions. Five times he uses the phrase ‘all things’ [*ta panta*], and makes it clear by the addition of ‘in heaven and earth,’ that he means the whole of creation at every possible level. And he tells us that the whole creation

- was created by Christ and for Christ
- is sustained in existence by Christ
- and has been reconciled to God by Christ – specifically ‘by making peace through his blood shed on the cross’.

That last phrase is vitally important. We must ‘lift up our eyes’ and see the truly cosmic scope of Christ’s death. Paul says that, through the cross, God has accomplished the reconciliation of creation (not just people). And in that vast context he then goes on to add ‘And you also...’ (v 21). We tend to start at the personal level (Christ died to atone for our sins and grant us eternal life – wonderfully true); then we might go on to the ecclesial level (all of us who are redeemed by Christ are part of the church, the people of God, the body of Christ); and just possibly we might go on to the rest of creation (we have to live here on earth until Christ returns to ‘take us home’). In this text, Paul moves in exactly the opposite direction. He starts with Christ’s cosmic, creational Lordship over all creation (which incidentally is where Jesus himself also starts in the so-called Great Commission, Matthew 28:18), then he moves on to speak about the church of which Christ is the head, then he returns to the redemption of all creation through the cross, and finally comes to individual believers who have heard the gospel and responded in faith – ‘You also’. ‘This is the gospel,’ he says (Col. 1:23). And it is the biblical gospel that includes creation within the redeeming, saving, reconciling plan of God accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ.

### The Gospel and Creation

This helps us to understand a phrase in the Cape Town Commitment that has raised the eyebrows of some. It speaks of Creation care as ‘a gospel issue’. There are some people who have said that, while they agree that it is an important issue, a biblically-grounded responsibility, and even perhaps a legitimate part of Christian mission, they would not agree that it is ‘a gospel issue’.

Let’s first of all quote the full context of that phrase, since it is theologically important.

The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ.<sup>3</sup> We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:2-3.

for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The whole context of the words 'gospel issue' is important, since it defines the 'gospel' in relation to Jesus Christ as Lord of all creation, not just in relation to our human need for salvation. That points to another lengthy part of the CTC, which expounds a 'whole-Bible' understanding of the gospel (CTC I.8). It speaks of the gospel not just as a personal salvation plan, but in its full biblical richness as the good news of all that God has done through Christ and the imperative that it addresses to us. So it speaks of the story the gospel tells, the assurance the gospel brings, and the transformation the gospel produces. Here is the full summary of the first of those:

*We love the story the gospel tells.* The gospel announces as good news the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As the son of David, the promised Messiah King, Jesus is the one through whom alone God established his kingdom and acted for the salvation of the world, enabling all nations on earth to be blessed, as he promised Abraham. Paul defines the gospel in stating that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve'. The gospel declares that, on the cross of Christ, God took upon himself, in the person of his Son and in our place, the judgment our sin deserves. In the same great saving act, completed, vindicated and declared through the resurrection, God won the decisive victory over Satan, death and all evil powers, liberated us from their power and fear, and ensured their eventual destruction. God accomplished the reconciliation of believers with himself and with one another across all boundaries and enmities. God also accomplished his purpose of the ultimate reconciliation of all creation, and in the bodily resurrection of Jesus has given us the first fruits of the new creation. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'.<sup>5</sup> How we love the gospel story!<sup>6</sup>

### *More than the means of personal salvation*

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Now, first of all, if you understand the words 'the gospel' to mean only 'the mechanism by which you can ensure your personal salvation – and the *only* means of doing so,' you will necessarily consider that the phrase 'a gospel issue' can be applied only to matters that affect *how* you get saved, or

<sup>4</sup> 'The Cape Town Commitment,' I.7a.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 1:1, 14-15; Romans 1:1-4; Romans 4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; 1 Peter 2:24; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Ephesians 2:14-18; Colossians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 5:19.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Cape Town Commitment,' I.8b.

*whether* you get saved. But the biblical gospel is not just a means of personal salvation (though of course it assuredly provides that, thank God). The gospel is the good news that is contained in the grand story of God's good purpose for all creation, a purpose in which, by God's grace, we can have a share. 'Gospel issues' are much broader than those issues that only affect individual salvation.

### *'Obeying the gospel'*

Furthermore, secondly, if you reduce the gospel to something that has to do only with what you think in your head and assent to by faith (primarily a cognitive matter), then you will consider 'gospel issues' to be only those things that have to do with faith, or the lack of faith, or anything that might threaten the essential message of salvation by grace through faith. But Paul speaks of 'the *obedience* of faith' and of '*obeying the gospel*'. That is, the gospel is something that we respond to not only by believing it, but by acting upon it and living in the light of it. We must live *now* in the light of the whole biblical story as *the* story – the story that begins with creation and ends with new creation, and that summons us to live in the first in preparation for the second. That is *gospel living* – living in faith and obedience in response to the good news, living a life 'worthy of the gospel'. And such *gospel living* includes creation within its scope since the *gospel message* does. 'Gospel issues,' then, include actions, not just beliefs; what we do, not just what we say. I think both Paul and James would agree with that.

### *The gospel of the kingdom of God*

And thirdly, if you see the gospel as primarily to do with 'me and my needs,' or 'other people and their needs,' you will see 'gospel issues' as only those things that either contribute to, or militate against, the solution to our greatest need, on the understanding that our greatest need is our sin and rebellion against God and our consequent need for forgiveness – a very serious issue indeed. There are real gospel issues at stake when we are dealing with people's eternal destinies. Of course there are.

However, while such concern is entirely valid, it can easily overlook the fact that the New Testament (including Jesus himself) presents the gospel as the good news, not first of all about us and our destiny (though, of course, including that), but about the reign of God. In a world that calls Caesar Lord, the gospel declares: 'There is another king – King Jesus'. The gospel proclaims the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the fact that he exercised that Lordship through his self-emptying incarnation, earthly life, atoning death, victorious resurrection, glorious ascension and ultimate return. Then the gospel calls us to respond in repentance and faith to that proclamation. From that point of view, 'gospel issues' take on a wider level of meaning

and scope. The essence of our responding to the gospel is that *we choose to submit to Jesus of Nazareth as Lord*. The gospel calls me to recognise Jesus as Lord, not just of my personal discipleship, but of the whole environment in which I live, for ‘all authority in heaven *and on earth* (i.e. in all creation) is given to me,’ said Jesus. If the gospel declares Jesus to be truly Lord of all creation, then how I live out my discipleship to Jesus must also include creation. It is, as the CTC says, ‘a gospel issue *within the Lordship of Christ*’ (that defining phrase is intentional and crucial, and should not be omitted when quoting the document).<sup>7</sup>

To put it the other way round: for someone to claim to be a Christian, to be a follower and disciple of Jesus, to be submitting to Jesus as Lord and King, and yet to have no concern about the creation, or even to reject with hostility those who do act out of such concern, seems to me to be a denial of the biblical gospel which proclaims that Jesus Christ is the creator, sustainer and redeemer of creation itself. I cannot claim Christ as *my* Lord and Saviour while at the same time denying (or acting as if I denied) what the biblical gospel proclaims, that he is *creation’s* Lord and Saviour too. It is, I would argue, for that reason and in that sense, a gospel issue.

### *Don’t read a damaged Bible*

It is baffling to me that there are so many Christians, including sadly (and especially) those who claim to be evangelicals, for whom this matter of Creation care, or ecological concern and action, is weak and neglected at best, and even rejected with hostile prejudice at worst. It seems to me that the reason for this is a very defective theology of creation among contemporary evangelicals. To put it bluntly, some people seem to have damaged Bibles, in which the first two and last two pages have got mysteriously torn off. They start at Genesis 3, because they know all about sin. And they end at Revelation 20, because they know all about the day of judgment. And they have their personal solution to the sin problem and

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<sup>7</sup> The Lordship of Christ over the earth also affects the way we think about the actual places where we and others live. Peoples and places are connected with one another, within the purposes of God. Both the Old Testament (Gen. 10; Deut. 2; 32:8) and Paul (Acts 17:24-26) affirm God’s sovereign distribution of the planet to peoples – and his overall involvement in their migrations too. So God is ‘interested,’ not just in whisking souls to heaven at some future point, but in the physical locations and environment of people’s lives. Ecology is much more than merely having a sentimental love of nature, nice views and endangered species. It is intimately connected with *human* well-being too. Comprehensive care for people (‘love’ in its biblical breadth) includes care for their physical environment – and whatever enhances or threatens it. It is a logical extension of the accepted view that our mission should attend to people’s physical, intellectual and spiritual needs (in medical, educational, evangelistic and pastoral ministries), since all three of those dimensions will be affected in various ways by the quality of the environment in which they live.

their personal security for the day of judgment, provided of course by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Praise God, I believe that too. But the Bible has a much bigger story. It starts with creation in Genesis 1–2 and ends with new creation in Revelation 21–22. This is the story of the whole creation, *within which* my personal salvation fits, and within which the good news / gospel fits. And the Lordship of Christ spans that whole story, not just my little slice of it. So I need to acknowledge Christ as Lord of my physical environment as well as my spiritual salvation, and behave as his disciple in relation to both.

### The New Creation

What, then, is our final destination? It is amazing (and regrettable) how many Christians believe that the world ends with us all leaving the earth behind and going off to heaven to live there instead. It may well be the influence of countless hymns that use that kind of imagery, but it is decidedly not how the Bible ends.

There is, of course, an important truth that gives great comfort and hope in saying that when believers die in faith and in Christ, they go to be with him – safe and secure and at rest, free from all the perils and suffering of this earthly life. But the Bible makes it clear that that ‘intermediate state’ (as it is sometimes called) is just that – ‘intermediate’. It is not our final destiny to ‘stay in heaven’. The Bible’s final great dynamic movement (Rev. 21–22) is not of us all going off up to heaven, but of God coming down here, bringing the city of God, establishing the reunification of heaven and earth as his dwelling place with us for ever. Three times the loud voice from the throne of God says *with mankind... with them... with them*. We should remember that Immanuel does not mean ‘Us with God,’ but ‘God with us’. We will not go somewhere else to be with God; God will come to earth to be with us – as the Psalmists and prophets had prophesied and prayed for. ‘O that you would rend the heavens and come down!’ (Is. 64:1).

And in that new creation, with God dwelling at last in the cleansed temple of his whole creation (so that no microcosmic temple will be needed, as John saw), the tribute of the nations will be brought into the city of God – the ‘glory of kings,’ <sup>Copyrighted Material</sup> purged and purified and contributing to the glory of God (Rev. 21:22–27).<sup>8</sup>

What does all this mean for our ecological thinking and action in the here and now? It means that in godly use of, and care for, the creation we are doing two things at the same time. On the one hand, we are exercising

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<sup>8</sup> I have discussed the theme of new creation, and what is implied by the glory and splendour of the nations being brought into the city of God, in *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).



the created role God gave us from the beginning, and in so doing we can properly be glorifying God in all our work, within and for creation. And on the other hand, we are anticipating the role that we shall have in the new creation, when we shall then assume fully our proper role of kings and priests – exercising the loving rule of God over the rest of his creation, and serving it on God's behalf as the place of God's temple dwelling.

This is what gives wonderful resonance to that song of praise to the crucified and risen Christ (the Lamb who was slain who sits on the throne), sung by the four living creatures who represent all creation and the twenty-four elders who represent the whole people of God:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

Ecological action now is both a creational responsibility from the Bible's *beginning*, and also an eschatological sign of the Bible's *ending* – and new beginning. Christian ecological action points towards and anticipates the restoration of our proper status and function in creation. It is to behave as we were originally created to, and as we shall one day be fully redeemed for.

The earth is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of its appointed kings and priests – redeemed humanity glorifying God in the temple of renewed creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

### Christian Mission

I hope we have adequately sketched a biblical theology of creation and our responsibility within it. But does that amount to a biblical theology of *mission* in relation to creation? Does Creation care sit legitimately within the category of Christian mission? I believe that it does. I would certainly argue that, for all Christians, ecologically responsible behaviour is right and good as part of Christian discipleship to the Lord of the earth. But I would go further and argue that God calls some Christians to ecological vocation and work, as their primary field of mission in God's world. Just as medicine, education, community development, and many other forms of service are viewed as God's calling on different people which they can put as his disposal as intentionally missional, so there are many ecological functions that Christians can take up as their specific missional calling – scientific research, habitat conservation, political advocacy, etc. The work of A Rocha International, has been a pioneering and prophetic initiative in this.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Mission of God* I set out some reasons why I believe that Christians should regard such callings to specific tasks of Creation care as

<sup>9</sup> See 'A Rocha in Brazil and Elsewhere' in this volume.

among legitimate missional vocations. In order to press the case for the relevance of this dimension of the mission of God's people, I quote selectively from that book here (the remainder of this section is abbreviated from pp. 412-20):

*Creation care is an urgent issue in today's world*

Does this need to be repeated? Only a wilful blindness worse than any proverbial ostrich's head in the sand can ignore the facts of environmental destruction and its accelerating pace. The list is depressingly long:

- the pollution of the air, the sea, rivers, lakes and great aquifers
- the destruction of rain forests, and many other habitats, with the terrible effect on dependent life forms
- desertification and soil loss
- the loss of species – animals, plants, birds, insects – and the huge reduction of essential bio-diversity on a planet that depends on it
- the hunting of some species to extinction
- the depletion of the ozone layer
- the increase of greenhouse gases,' and consequent threat of global warming and climate change, and the havoc it is already wreaking on some of the poorest communities on earth.

All this is a vast and interrelated catastrophe of loss and destruction, affecting the whole planet and all its human and non-human inhabitants. To be unconcerned about it is to be either desperately ignorant or irresponsibly callous.

In the past, Christians have instinctively been concerned about great and urgent issues in every generation, and rightly included them in their overall concept of mission calling and practice. These have included the evils of disease, ignorance, slavery, and many other forms of brutality and exploitation. Christians have taken up the cause of widows, orphans, refugees, prisoners, the insane, the hungry – and most recently, have swelled the numbers of those committed to 'making poverty history'.

Faced now with the horrific facts of the suffering of the earth itself, we must surely ask how God himself responds to such abuse of his creation, and seek to align our mission objectives to include what matters to him. If, as Jesus tells us, God cares about his creation to the level of knowing when a sparrow falls to earth, what kind of care is required of us by the level of our own knowledge? Granted that Jesus made that point in order to compare it with the even greater care God has for his own children. But it would be an utter distortion of Scripture to argue that because God cares for us *more than* for the sparrows, we need not care for sparrows *at all*, or that because we are of greater value than they are, they have no value at all.

However, our care for creation should not merely be a negative, prudential or preventive reaction to a growing problem. A much more positive reason for it is that:

*Creation care flows from love for the  
creator and obedience to his command*

‘Love the Lord your God’ is the first and greatest commandment. Now, in human experience, to love someone means that you care for what belongs to them. To trash someone else’s property is incompatible with any claim to love that other person. We have seen how emphatically the Bible affirms that the earth is God’s property, and more specifically, that it belongs to Christ, who made it, redeemed it and is heir to it. To take good care of the earth, for Christ’s sake, is surely a fundamental dimension of the calling on all God’s people to love him. It seems quite inexplicable to me that there are some Christians who claim to love and worship God, to be disciples of Jesus, and yet have no concern for the earth that bears his stamp of ownership. They do not care about the abuse of the earth, and indeed, by their wasteful and over-consumptive lifestyles, they contribute to it.

‘If you love me, keep my commandments,’ said Jesus, echoing as he so often did the practical ethical devotion of Deuteronomy. And the Lord’s commandments begin with the fundamental creation mandate to care for the earth. Obedience to that command is as much part of our human mission and duty as any of the other duties and responsibilities built into creation – such as the task of filling the earth, engaging in the rhythm of productive work and rest, and marriage.

Being Christian does not release us from being human. Nor does a distinctively Christian mission negate our human mission, for God holds us accountable as much for our humanity as for our Christianity. As *Christian human beings*, therefore, we are doubly bound to see active care for creation as a fundamental part of what it means to love and obey God.

*Creation care tests our motivation for mission*

Our ultimate starting point and finishing point in our biblical theology of mission must be the mission of God himself. What is ‘the whole counsel of God’? What is the overarching mission to which God has committed himself and the whole outworking of history? It is not only the salvation of human beings, but also the redemption of the whole creation. Our eschatological section above made this clear. God is in the business of establishing a new creation through the transformation and renewal of creation in a manner analogous to the resurrection of his Son, and as a habitation for the resurrection bodies of his redeemed people.

Holistic mission, then, is not truly holistic if it includes only human beings (even if it includes them holistically!), and excludes the rest of the creation for whose reconciliation Christ shed his blood (Col. 1:20). Those Christians who have responded to God’s call to serve him through serving his non-human creatures in ecological projects are engaged in a specialised form of mission that has its rightful place within the broad framework of all that God’s mission has as its goal. Their motivation flows from an

awareness of God's own heart for his creation and a desire to respond to that. It is certainly not the case that Christians involved in Creation care have no corresponding care for human needs. On the contrary, it often seems to my observation that Christian tenderness towards the non-human creation amplifies itself in concern for human needs.

*Creation care embodies a biblical balance of compassion and justice*

Compassion, because to care for God's creation is essentially an unselfish form of love, exercised for the sake of creatures who cannot thank or repay you. It is a form of truly biblical and godly altruism. In this respect, it reflects the same quality in the love of God – not only in the sense that God loves human beings in spite of our unloveable enmity towards him, but also in the wider sense that 'The Lord has compassion / is loving towards *all that he has made*' (Ps. 145:9, 13, 17). Again, Jesus could use God's loving care for birds and adornment of grasses and flowers as a model for his even greater love for his human children. If God cares with such minute compassion for his non-human creation, how much more should those who wish to emulate him? I have been particularly moved in witnessing the compassionate care that is un-self-consciously practised by A Rocha staff as they handle every bird in their ringing programme. It is a warm, caring and, in my opinion, genuinely Christlike, attitude towards these tiny specimens of God's creation.

Justice, because environmental action is a form of defending the weak against the strong, the defenceless against the powerful, the violated against the attacker, the voiceless against the stridency of the greedy. And these too are features of the character of God as expressed in his exercise of justice. Psalm 145 includes God's provision for all his creatures in its definition of his *righteousness* as well as his love (Ps. 145:13-17). In fact, it places God's care for creation in precise parallel with his liberating and vindicating acts of justice for his people – thus bringing the creational and redemptive traditions of the Old Testament together in beautiful harmony.

So it is not surprising, then, that when the Old Testament comes to define the marks of a righteous *person*, it does not stop at his practical concern for poor and needy *humans* (though that is, of course, the dominant note). It is true that 'The righteous care about justice for the poor' (Prov. 29:7). But the sage also makes the warm-hearted observation that 'a righteous man cares for the needs of his *animal*' (Prov. 12:10). Biblical mission is as holistic as biblical righteousness.

## Resources

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# ECOLOGICAL MISSION IN A GLOBALLY CONNECTED WORLD

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Climate extremes increasingly capture the attention of the human family, affecting every continent, destroying whole species of animals and threatening others, undermining the livelihood of many human communities, and threatening to raise sea levels and submerge many coastal plains around the world. These climate extremes, together with the continuing pollution of air and water and depletion of the earth's resources, herald the urgent need for the mission of environmental care to be a major part of Christian mission in the world. This is a mission that Christians share with peoples of other faiths, and it is a mission that extends beyond our fragile planet into the cosmos. This is a mission of the human family, and each part of that family has a part to play as it shares and enacts its unique faith tradition. For Christians, this tradition is one grounded in the creativity, incarnation and compassion of the Living God, who has created and is creating, and who calls people to help create a world of sustainable, just and peace-filled life.<sup>1</sup>

The missionary movement has long included agricultural and medical missionaries and people engaged in working with local communities to sustain and improve the quality of life. Historical documents are filled with inspiring accounts of communities and individual lives that were touched and empowered by missionary presence. The documents also tell devastating stories of missionaries' trampling on local cultures and contributing to the death of communities, individuals, ecosystems, relationships across religious traditions, and indigenous wisdom, often without conscious awareness of the consequences of their teaching and action. These histories are contested and actively discussed in the twenty-first century. The discourses are important if we are to critique the past,

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<sup>1</sup> One of the strongest examples of this case for Christian mission is found in the World Council of Churches' focus on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, summarised at: [http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/wcc\\_jpc](http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/wcc_jpc). This theme has interacted with the global mission movement, as described in many of the preparatory conferences and papers building towards Edinburgh 2010, some introduced at: [www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/transversal-topics/7-ecological-perspectives-in-mission.html](http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/transversal-topics/7-ecological-perspectives-in-mission.html). Further information can be found on the present work of the WCC in environmental justice at: [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/eco-justice](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/eco-justice); and: [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change) (all accessed 28th March 2015).

draw from its life-giving threads, repent of Christian action and complicity in life-destruction, and envision the future in new forms. This chapter does not focus on critical analysis of mission, though it is informed by it. The attention of this chapter is the inescapable reality that we live in an interconnected world that requires critical engagement and global collaboration in Earth care. We cannot close our eyes to the practices of Earth care that have lived for centuries across the globe; we cannot close our hearts to the theologies of sacrality that have grounded those practices; we cannot disrespect any part of the human family if we are to care for our planetary home. We need to draw upon the richness of ecologically wise theologies, ancient and contemporary, to enrich Christian beliefs and commitments, and to reshape mission.

Eco-theologies and practices are not only possible but they are already growing as missionary exchanges move *from* and *to* every continent.<sup>2</sup> The Christian church faces unprecedented opportunities to minister in a spirit of reverence – reverence for God’s creation, for human dignity, for the wisdom of local and regional cultures, and for the preciousness of every fragile life in the cosmos. This is not a time when people in one part of the world can create answers for those in another. This is a time when the global exchange of concerns and knowledge is urgent, and when the discernment of future directions and immediate action must be collaborative. The purpose of this chapter is to discern the potential of Christian mission in a global ecological civilisation. Four major actions are proposed: building partnerships, reconstructing theology, engaging evil and suffering, and reshaping mission as a ministry *with* the earth. These actions are important in any Christian vocation, and they are urgent challenges for Christian mission in the world.

### **Building Partnerships: Joining a Chorus of Concern**

The twenty-first century has been marked by increasing efforts of people to join hands in Earth care. Most recently, Pope Francis delivered his Encyclical on Care for our Common Home, *Laudato Si’* (*Praise Be to You*). The Encyclical opens with imagery from St Francis, comparing our earth home with ‘a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us’. The Pope goes on to say: ‘This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our

<sup>2</sup> The changing shape of Christian mission to move in many directions is well documented. One such description is found in Samuel Escobar, ‘Mission from Everywhere to Everyone: The Home Base in a New Century,’ in David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009), 185-299.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home*, 24th May 2015, 1: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (accessed 21st June 2015).

irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.’<sup>4</sup> In developing both his critique and his vision, Pope Francis draws on the wisdom of his Roman Catholic forebears, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, and on the ecumenical wisdom of Patriarch Bartholomew. He also focuses on the biblical witness and engages scientific discoveries. Pope Francis concludes that the ecological crisis cannot be resolved with anthropomorphism and the technocratic paradigm. Instead, he links ecological destruction with social and economic systems that perpetuate injustice and destruction in all of creation – human and non-human. Grounded in this analysis, the Pope proposes an ‘integral ecology,’ which includes: environmental, economic, and social ecology; cultural ecology; ecology of daily life; the principle of the common good; and justice between the generations.

Echoing similar themes, the World Council of Church’s Tenth Assembly meeting in Busan, Korea, invited the world into a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, recognising ecological concerns as part of that pilgrimage: ‘The pilgrimage takes place in a world that cries out for engagement by Christians and all people of goodwill. Whether in the arenas of ecology, economy, peace, or human dignity, Christians find local and global affronts to the gospel values of justice and peace.’<sup>5</sup> This holistic vision for life-giving ministry is one that has roots in the ecumenical movement, echoed dimly in Edinburgh 1910 and even more in Edinburgh 2010, and in the World Council of Churches’ public focus on justice, peace and ecological sustainability from 1970 onwards.

Based on its vision of an ecumenical Earth, the WCC challenges Christian individuals, denominations and churches around the world to work together to resist social and ecological destruction, and to create viable alternatives to corporate globalisation. In its ‘Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,’ the WCC described eco-justice and peacemaking work as having three dimensions: *via positiva* (celebrating gifts), *via negativa* (visiting wounds), and *via transformativa* (transforming injustices). The *via transformativa* is itself multifaceted, according to the WCC’s ‘Invitation’; it involves both personal and social transformation, which feed one another: ‘Being transformed ourselves, the pilgrimage may lead us to concrete actions of transformation.’<sup>6</sup> All three of the pathways towards justice and peace are important: *positiva* – building on gifts, *negativa* – mourning and analysing devastations, and *transformativa* – building towards tangible transformation. We need such a multifaceted approach to action in a world aching for justice, peace and ecological

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Central Committee (WCC), ‘An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace’: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace> (accessed 21st June 2015).

<sup>6</sup> WCC, ‘An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,’ 4.



sustainability. We need all three pathways if we are to rethink our ecological mission in a globally connected world.

These voices of Pope Francis and the World Council of Churches are echoed in many other venues. Global citizens increasingly raise concerns about the environment, and religion is part of the expanding public discourse. Even pop culture has turned its attention to the environment, as witnessed in a series of articles in *Rolling Stone*, raising issues of climate change.<sup>7</sup> More dramatically, the People's Climate March, a grassroots movement, filled the streets of New York City on 21st September 2014, and was the largest demonstration on climate change in history. Many religious groups were part of the more than 300,000 participants, making visible a public religious witness on ecology.

In addition, global organisations have been founded to attend to ecological care, often taking account of religion as a contributor to such care. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is one such organisation, founded in 1961 to contribute to ecological well-being. Now working in more than 100 countries and supported by almost five million people worldwide, its mission is 'to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth'.<sup>8</sup> The WWF not only does good ecological work, but it has often formed partnerships with religious leaders and communities. More recently, the WWF developed a programme to heighten such partnerships – Sacred Earth: Faiths for Conservation. This programme works with faith communities to honour the 'sacred value of Earth and its diversity' and to protect it.<sup>9</sup>

Continuing the public focus, the United Nations planned a new round of climate talks in Paris in December 2015, and Pope Francis addressed the United Nations in September 2015, in advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015, just as he addressed students in Manila, Philippines, in January 2015. In his presentation in Manila, he highlighted three ways in which Filipino students could make a contribution, rising to the challenge of integrity,

<sup>7</sup> Bill McKibben, 'Global Warming's Terrifying New Math,' in *Rolling Stone*, 19th July 2012: [www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719). See also McKibben, 'The Arctic Ice Crisis', in *Rolling Stone*, 16th August 2012: [www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-arctic-ice-crisis-20120816](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-arctic-ice-crisis-20120816); Jeff Goodell, 'Climate Change and the End of Australia,' in *Rolling Stone*, 3rd October 2011: [www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-change-and-the-end-of-australia-20111003](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-change-and-the-end-of-australia-20111003); Al Gore, 'Al Gore: Climate of Denial – Can Science and Truth Withstand the Merchants of Poison?,' in *Rolling Stone*, 22nd June 2011: [www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-of-denial-20110622](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-of-denial-20110622) (all accessed 28th March 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See World Wildlife Fund website: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/about> (accessed 28th March 2015).

<sup>9</sup> World Wildlife Fund, 'Sacred Earth: Faiths for Conservation': [www.worldwildlife.org/initiatives/sacred-earth-faiths-for-conservation](http://www.worldwildlife.org/initiatives/sacred-earth-faiths-for-conservation) (accessed 28th March 2015).

concern for the environment, and care for the poor.<sup>10</sup> In this and other addresses, the Pope consistently emphasised human responsibility for causing environmental damage and for reversing it; he was also clear that ecological care was a requirement of following Jesus Christ. He said to the young people in the Philippines:

You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ! ... We need to see, with the eyes of faith, the beauty of God's saving plan, the link between the natural environment and the dignity of the human person. Men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, and given dominion over creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.<sup>11</sup>

As we saw above, Pope Francis underscored similar themes in his Encyclical, *Laudata Si*.

This brief review of public ecological action and its religious voices represents a chorus of concern. The chorus is powerful, but it poses challenges for the future shape of Christian mission. How might we join that chorus in new ways and build on ecological mission efforts that are already flourishing? How might we build partnerships with people across the Christian tradition, with people in other faith traditions, and with those whose environmental care makes no reference to religion? Many missions and missionaries are leaders in such partnerships, and they will help show the way. What is needed now is to attune mission more fully, more boldly and more collaboratively with the world-changing harmonies of a growing chorus of Earth care.

### Reconstructing Theology:

#### Making Eco-Theological Meaning in a Planet Filled with Danger

If we are to be part of this global ecological chorus, we need to make eco-theological meaning in a planet filled with danger. Christians can best partner with others when we are simultaneously attuned to the devastations of our world and our theological heartbeat: listening to the groans of creation and the tones of tradition, critically engaging with those groans and traditions, and reshaping traditions in relation to global crises. This is the work of meaning-making, which enables human beings to interpret their world, thereby discerning the positive aspects of the world that can be enhanced and the destructive aspects that need to be transformed or

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, 'Meeting with Young People: Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,' on sports field of Santo Tomás University, Manila, 18th January 2015: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150118\\_srilanka-filippine-incontro-giovani.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150118_srilanka-filippine-incontro-giovani.html) (accessed 21st June 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, 'Meeting with Young People'.

eliminated.<sup>12</sup> Meaning questions are theological, and they also probe economics, ecological science, and socio-political relations. In this section, I focus largely on meaning questions in relation to ecological disaster. These questions always exist in a context of time and space, realities and relationships. This is why a simple cry about ecological devastation is not sufficient to diagnose ecological problems or to motivate strong responses. Meaning, like a tree, needs roots and limbs if it is to be attuned to the movements of God and if it is to motivate action and ever-expanding effort.

The very struggle to make meaning is worthwhile. It requires that we set our sights on a comprehensive picture of the planet and cosmos in relation to God. The call to Christian discipleship includes a call to make *eco-theological meaning: to analyse the nature and significance of every global reality in the light of God's active presence in that reality, the historical trajectory that has shaped the present situation, the total environmental and human context, and God's call to future possibilities*. To make eco-theological meaning in the face of environmental disaster is to recognise the importance of each planetary incident in God's creation and in God's intentions for creation. It is to take account of traditions of global concern, complex global and local realities, and future hopes.

When theological meaning is glibly offered without connecting with the complexities of the world, it can close minds rather than open them. Proclamations of doom are often short-lived in their effectiveness, and they are often counter-productive, evoking denials and defences that impede a more complex analysis of a given situation. Similarly, the rhetoric of 'either-or' is a problematic approach to ecological meaning-making. When someone argues that the ecological situation is the worst problem on the planet and dwarfs all other problems by comparison, the natural response is to agree with or to argue against the rhetorical 'either-or.' People either agree that the ecological disaster is the worst or only disaster, *or* they do not. The rhetoric invites such an evaluative response.

The either-or rhetoric is an abstraction rather than an ecological proposition that describes the natural world in relation to a web of economic, geological, socio-political, personal and interpersonal realities. The either-or rhetoric also suggests a limited range of responses to healing: to renounce evil *or* to argue against the accusation of evil. Such an approach is even more problematic on a global level. I propose instead a multifaceted response that engages with diverse voices to untangle and respond to ecological intricacies, which are economic, geological, socio-political, personal and interpersonal. To engage such complexity in Christian mission requires daring vision, a robust interpretation of global realities, and the ability to live with ambiguity.

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<sup>12</sup> Some ideas in this section appeared in a different form in Mary Elizabeth Moore, 'Making Ecological Meaning,' trans. Liu Lu, in *Journal Tangdu*, 4 (2014), 52-55 (in Mandarin). The earlier article has been considerably changed in this section, but duplication of some of the earlier ideas is done with permission.

### *Daring Vision*

In the face of global ecological disaster, the challenge to make ecological meaning is intensified. Such meaning-making begins with vision, grounded in the sacrality of God's creation. The power of a holistic vision is well exemplified by the centuries-old Jewish idea of *tikkun olam*, or the vision of 'repairing the world'. This vision of our Jewish neighbours – our partners in Earth care – can awaken us to the wisdom of another religious community and the significance of Christian mission that seeks *not* to convert peoples of other traditions but to learn from and with them, while joining together in care for God's broken creation.

*Tikkun olam* has been interpreted diversely over time. Some argue that the world is created good by a good God, but people have turned away from God. *Tikkun olam* is thus an effort to live by God's law and to establish the world as God intended it under God's sovereignty. This includes following all 613 Jewish laws in all aspects of daily life. Other people approach *tikkun olam* with a different diagnosis and vision, based on the premise that the world is broken, and human beings are called to help repair the brokenness – to work towards justice, peace, and harmony. Still others understand the world as diseased and filled with pain; thus, *tikkun olam* is an effort to heal the world's hurts. These diverse understandings are not incompatible with one another, but they are not the same. The perspective that one chooses, or the combination of perspectives, shapes one's actions. Many Orthodox Jewish communities focus on the first of these understandings and direct their lives towards obedience to God's law as an act of restoring right relations with God and the world. Many progressive Jewish communities focus on the second and third understandings and direct their lives towards justice, peace and healing.

With these diverse perspectives, one is not surprised to discover that many different actions are also associated with *tikkun olam*. Some Jewish people emphasise ritual *mitzvot*, or following the laws and commandments for daily living, which include instructions for how to wake in the morning, pray, dress, clean vegetables, wash one's hands, and so forth. This kind of routine is important for those who seek to restore the world under the sovereignty of God. In the language of Pierre Bourdieu, these practices form a *habitus*, or pattern of life. Indeed, these daily life practices are understood by those who practise them as ways to turn oneself and one's community to God. These very practices prepare individuals and communities to make godly moral decisions when confronted with major ethical choices.

In addition to ritual *mitzvot*, other actions are also associated with *tikkun olam* in the Jewish community and beyond. These include ethical *mitzvot*, or acts of kindness and service to others, which include acts of justice and advocacy for just relations with all creatures. Yet another response to the vision of *tikkun olam* is *religious observances*, such as the observance of *Shabbat*, which is itself understood as a foretaste of and

preparation for the Messianic Age. Finally, actions towards *tikkun olam* include *spiritual practices*, such as prayer and the wide range of religious rituals, including rituals of lament, healing, and hope for the world. This list suggests a rich array of responses, but also the dilemma of choosing the most important and effective responses if we are to participate in a vision of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. This tradition is edifying for Christians because it points to a world that is broken and separated from God; it also points to the possibility of people participating in reparative acts, thus engaging actively in God's healing work in this broken world. This is a daring vision!

### *Robust Interpretation of Local and Global Realities*

The complexity of world-repair intensifies when we consider the difficult task of interpreting the world without being limited by our own biases, experiences and values. Christian peoples are continually engaged in interpretation, wherever they live. They are faced with unique local situations, which are intricately connected with global realities of climate change and other major ecological threats. They are faced with interpreting the Gospel in relation to these realities, recognising that generalities are not sufficient because each situation is affected by local immediacies as well as larger global realities.<sup>13</sup> The stumbling-block for ecological thinking and ecological change is often found in human patterns that people hold tenaciously; yet we face an urgent need to change the very systems in which we live if we are to envision and live into new possibilities. What is needed now in the face of climate change is a completely new energy infrastructure.<sup>14</sup> We can only imagine such a totally new system if we are willing to analyse the realities in which we now live, the social limits of our imagination, and the vast untapped possibilities.

To explore this issue of interpretation, we turn to the social sciences. Just as Bourdieu's work on habitus is relevant to the practices of *tikkun olam*, so the concept of 'situatedness,' developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s, offers valuable insights as we work to interpret the global situation.

<sup>13</sup> One recent analysis of the intricacies of climate change and its religious challenges is found in David Ray Griffin, *Unprecedented: Can Civilization Survive the CO<sub>2</sub> Crisis?* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Lewis Gilbert, 'To Manage Earth in the Anthropocene, We Need to Focus on Systems Change', in *The Conversation*, 23rd March 2015: [http://theconversation.com/to-manage-earth-in-the-anthropocene-we-need-to-focus-on-systems-change-38452?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+March+23+2015&utm\\_content=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+March+23+2015+CID\\_9ec6a21a4a40140a9e1b4be20c288d27&utm\\_source=campaign\\_monitor\\_us&utm\\_term=To%20manage%20Earth%20in%20the%20Anthropocene%20we%20need%20to%20focus%20on%20systems%20change](http://theconversation.com/to-manage-earth-in-the-anthropocene-we-need-to-focus-on-systems-change-38452?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+March+23+2015&utm_content=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+March+23+2015+CID_9ec6a21a4a40140a9e1b4be20c288d27&utm_source=campaign_monitor_us&utm_term=To%20manage%20Earth%20in%20the%20Anthropocene%20we%20need%20to%20focus%20on%20systems%20change) (accessed 23rd March 2015).

Situatedness is the idea that an individual's or community's interpretation of 'reality' develops in a social situation and is shaped by it. Situatedness means that all concepts are shaped by the social and cultural realities in which people are embedded. Thus ecological diagnoses, theoretical interpretations and strategies for action are all situational. People engage in psychological mediation processes (sense-making) when they encounter an ecological problem as they develop diagnoses and actions or non-actions. These mediation processes are the place where education is needed to call attention to the mediation processes that one is already engaging, to hear the mediation processes of others from other contexts, and to rethink one's own mediations and conclusions.

This is a human work, and it is also a Christian work. It is a work of interpretation and discernment. My first eco-theological conversion came when I was asked, at the age of 12, to prepare a presentation for youth in my church on God's concern for the earth. My reading of Scripture side-by-side with science awakened me to the extraordinary relevance of God to Earth care. My ability to engage Christian theology with my ecological thinking was a turning point for my young self. We now need Christians around the world to explore God's relationship with the embedded situations in which we live so that we might be able to question our own sense-making, hear the sense-making of others, and open ourselves to God-shaped visions of system changes and ecological action.

### *Living with Ambiguity*

One further aspect of eco-theological meaning-making in an endangered planet is ambiguity. Given the fragility of the planet and the urgency of response, people often prefer unchanging principles of interpretation and unambiguous guidelines for human response. Unfortunately, the human community is continually faced with ambiguity. Human existence and our need to interact with each other and the natural world force ambiguity upon us. In facing a fragile planet, as in facing fragile human relationships, the challenge is not how to rid ourselves of ambiguity, but rather how to live with it. This is a concept that has gained quite a lot of traction in the world of ethnic and religious diversity, and the research in these areas is relevant to a world of ecological diversity and urgent needs. According to Adam Seligman and Robert Weller, people can learn to live well with ambiguity. The most customary approach to ambiguity is 'notations,' or rules to follow. Seligman and Weller recommend instead the fruitfulness of rituals (or formalised, repeated acts), and shared experience.<sup>15</sup>

These values underscore the importance of Christian mission that brings people together in the shared experience of addressing ecological realities.

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<sup>15</sup> Adam B. Seligman and Robert P. Weller, *Rethinking Pluralism: Ritual, Experience, and Ambiguity* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

Christians, together with people of other religious and non-religious traditions, need to be open to the ambiguities of our fragile planet and need to live with those ambiguities, even as we gather with others to find a way forward. Religious rituals provide a binding and sustaining power as people gather. For Christians, rituals rehearse and celebrate God's ongoing creation, God's expectations of human response, and the power of hope to enliven action. Gathering in shared work and in ritual opens people to accept and live with ambiguity. This openness, together with vision and honest interpretation of global realities, lie at the heart of ecological meaning-making. Meaning-making is fuelled by vision; it is grounded in robust interpretation of global realities; and it strengthens people to respond faithfully in the midst of ambiguity.

### Engaging Honestly with Evil and Suffering

Meaning-making helps to frame a way of life in the midst of global danger; it also raises questions of theodicy (that is, the relationship between God and evil and justice) and questions of healing (how does God, or how do we, heal a broken world?). The rich historical understandings of *tikkun olam*, together with human realities of situatedness and ambiguity, are important when we set out to make sense of evil and suffering. No theory is adequate to explain the depths of evil and suffering, or to guide human responses. The realities to which theoretical formulations respond always have a surplus of meaning, and they lend themselves to more than one interpretation, as well as to changing interpretations over time. One case study of a tragic historical moment can exemplify what I mean.

On 15th September 1963, four girls were killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. This act of white terrorism against an African American Church and the children of that church so horrified the citizenry of the US that some commentators have named this as a turning point and major influence in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the preceding years, the church had been a centre for much civil rights activity – meetings, training sessions for children, and worship gatherings. Some progress had been made towards racial justice in Birmingham by 1963, but a sad symbol of that progress was the decision by white supremacists to increase their terrorist tactics. The bombing of the church killed four children, and evoked terror and anger across the country. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr preached at the funeral three days later, on 18th September. He said:

These children – unoffending, innocent and beautiful – were the victims of one of the most vicious, heinous crimes ever perpetrated against humanity... Yet they died nobly... They have something to say to every Negro who passively accepts the evil system of segregation, and stands on the sidelines in the midst of a mighty struggle for justice... So they did not die in vain. God still has a way of wringing good out of evil. History has proven again and again that unmerited suffering is redemptive. The innocent blood of these



little girls may well serve as the redemptive force that will bring new light to this dark city. The holy Scripture says, 'A little child shall lead them.' The death of these little children may lead our whole Southland from the low road of man's humanity to man to the high road of peace and brotherhood.<sup>16</sup>

These words from King's eulogy of these young girls is an expression of pain, mixed with determination that these young deaths would awaken people to the evil of segregation and oppression and would contribute to social change. King argued that God 'has a way of wringing good out of evil' and that 'history has proven again and again that unmerited suffering is redemptive'. Within the situatedness of that service of worship in that time and place, these words are a critique of violence and an insistence that the death of these young girls would awaken people and would redeem the situation by confronting society with the horror of the 'low road.' Taken out of context, these same words by King could be used to over-simplify God's ability to wring 'good out of evil' and the value of unmerited suffering. The words could be interpreted as a glorification of suffering if they are disembodied from the wails of people who gathered for that funeral. The funeral oration might be read as an abstract theological tenet. It was not. It was a cry of pain – a cry of determination that these children's deaths would lead to some kind of transformation. Such cries of pain are needed as we face ecological devastation and the multitude of deaths that it perpetuates.

To engage honestly with evil is to engage honestly with suffering. Pamela Cooper-White's definition of suffering is helpful to this discussion because she connects suffering with consciousness and meaning-making. She says, 'Suffering is the meaning that we make, or attempt to make, of our pain.'<sup>17</sup> In her view, suffering includes the experience of pain, together with consciousness and a symbolisation that renders or articulates the pain. Suffering, in her view, requires that people witness pain so they can prepare themselves to interpret the pain and respond. Cooper-White concludes that the process 'promotes inner transformation, new life'.<sup>18</sup> In this view, suffering is not *necessary* to please God or appease human laws, but it is powerful in evoking strong questions and insights, and has potential for stirring new life.

In this discussion, Cooper-White recognises the dangers of theodicy as a way of thinking about the world, joining with others who call this a 'destructive discourse'. She argues that we should replace the effort to explain evil with the effort to resist it.<sup>19</sup> I agree – and I would expand on the

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr, 'Eulogy for the Martyred Children,' 15th September 1963, after bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, in *A Testament of Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 221–22.

<sup>17</sup> Cooper-White, 'Suffering,' in Bonnie Miller-McLemore (ed), *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Cooper-White, 'Suffering,' 29.

<sup>19</sup> Cooper-White, 'Suffering,' 28.



shapes of resistance. To resist the evil represented in environmental destruction is to discern and name evil, to interpret the causes and consequences, and to recognise the complexity and ambiguity, but not to stop with diagnosis or blame. We are required to resist that which destroys by building up that which sustains life. Practically speaking, that can take the form of divesting from fossil fuels so as to reinvest in alternative energy sources. It can take the form of planting trees to reverse the effects of desertification. It can take the form of resisting the take-over of more green space or farmland for new construction and parking lots. Resistance is a response that will serve the ecological health of a particular situation and the future well-being of the planet. This is no small task, but it speaks to the urgency of discerning what is taking place and what meaning the community can make for the sake of constructing and enacting the most just, compassionate and sustainable response.

### **Reshaping Mission as a Ministry of Hospitality with the Earth**

Evil and suffering are prominent features of our world, but they are not the first or last word in God's creation. God saw what God created and declared it good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). An ecological mission in a globally connected world begins and ends with gratitude for God's ongoing creation and God's promises for full life. An ecological mission invites people to participate in God's holy work in the world, and to participate with the rest of God's creation, recognising the fecundity of this precious planet on which we live. Christians are called to be in mission *with* the earth for the sake of planetary survival and well-being. I suggest that this kind of ecological action is a ministry of hospitality with the earth.

The early Christian mission often travelled by way of hospitality, or generosity towards others. One example is an early journey of Paul, in which he and his companions visited Philippi. The story recorded in Acts 16: 13-15 points to a surprising and counter-cultural act of hospitality offered and received:

On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptised, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.

This is one simple mission story among many in the New Testament, but it features several themes of hospitality that appear frequently in the biblical witness. First, people have gathered by a river (a place in the natural world) and they encounter a group of women who are strangers, who also love God. The men begin speaking, and Lydia in particular

listens, God opening her heart. She and her household are baptised, presumably in the river, and she invites Paul and his company to stay in her home. The most obvious display of hospitality here is among humans – Paul and his companions opening conversation with the women, the women’s listening, the act of baptism (representing a Divine act mediated by human hands), and the invitation into Lydia’s home, presumably to share food and lodging. The hospitality goes further than this, however, in that the gathering place itself is a river, a part of God’s creation, the baptism presumably takes place in the river, and the welcome into Lydia’s home will be marked by meals, sharing the fruits of the earth. Hospitality is offered *by the natural creation* (the very presence of the river) and *through the symbolic and tangible gifts of creation* (waters of baptism and food for the feast).

This understanding of hospitality connects with my earlier work on ministering with the earth.<sup>20</sup> Earth care is not merely acts of humans to care for the earth, but also acts of the earth to care for humans. This idea is developed with depth by Kapyia John Kaoma in *God’s Family, God’s Earth*.<sup>21</sup> *Ubuntu* is a Bantu concept (now spread throughout Africa) that most popularly describes qualities of hospitality, human kindness, generosity and compassion towards others, often with a focus on human communities and often with the goal of fostering human dignity and social harmony. For Christians, the very spirit of *ubuntu* is understood as arising from God as the source, with *NTU* associated with Divine Being. We see here a spirit of hospitality, arising from the Divine and reaching out to others with kindness and generosity, justice and compassion.

Kaoma has deepened this conversation, however, by tracing the close relationship between human and non-human beings in the Bantu languages. The Bantu term *umuntu* is a mix of *mu* (human) and *ntu* (being), which together mean ‘human being,’ even though *umuntu* has been popularly translated by westerners as ‘man’.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, and even more telling, *icintu* is a mix of *ici* (non-human) and *ntu* (being), which together mean ‘non-human being,’ though *icintu* has been translated by westerners as ‘thing’.<sup>23</sup> The term ‘thing’ suggests an inanimate object of an entirely different order from humans. However, Kaoma underscores the linguistic similarity of human and non-human being in the Bantu languages, and he draws upon others to develop the significance of *ntu* as ‘the vital force that holds the

<sup>20</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Ministering with the Earth* (St Louis, MO: Chalice, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Kapyia John Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth: African Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, 97.

universe together'.<sup>24</sup> He concludes that *ubuntu* is the ground of ecological interconnectedness and ethics.<sup>25</sup>

The Bantu concept of *ubuntu* is akin to the concept I developed in *Ministering with the Earth*, making a case that ecological theology and ethics is grounded in a deep and mutual relationship among all parts of God's creation, human and non-human. With this view, hospitality is an act of generously *sharing with and caring for others* – other human and non-human beings in God's creation. It is also an act of *receiving the gifts and care shared by others*. Much more profoundly, it is an act of *participating together* in the care of God's fragile, sacred cosmos.

This view suggests the urgent need for humans to open themselves to the wisdom and gifts of creation. The wisdom reflected in the groans of creation not only sends warning signals but it also reveals the causes of those groans, just as the wilting of a plant reveals its need for water or the yellowing of leaves reveals the need for less water or more nutrients. In the present world, increasing hurricanes and growing extremes of cold and heat, of floods and draught, reveal the consequences of climate change and its expanding threat. These occurrences cannot be interpreted in simplistic terms, but the relationships are clear. These climatological phenomena are teaching us something; thus, we need to study thoroughly the movements of the earth. We need to cultivate a hearty respect for what the earth has to teach and how the earth itself can participate in its healing, especially if human and non-human beings work together. The partnerships discussed early in this chapter are not just human partnerships. The practices of hospitality that marked the early Christian church are not just human practices. We are bound together in a community of hospitality that includes all of God's creation and that requires all of creation to contribute to a mission of generosity focused on repair of the world.

## Conclusion

In closing, I turn back to the issues with which this chapter began – climate change, pollution, destruction of habitats, and the desolation of the lands that the poorest of humans depend upon for life. To respond to such devastations, we need to join with human partners around the world in a mission of sustaining and regenerating life. We need also to reconstruct theology to embody daring vision, honest interpretation of our complex world, and openness to ambiguity. Further, we need to be honest in facing evil and suffering so as to see the ecological tragedies that abound, to lament, and then to resist evil and suffering with all our might. Ecological devastation is not a cause of endless moaning, blaming, and threatening the end of the world; it is a reality to be resisted with every fibre of our being,

<sup>24</sup> Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth*, 97.

<sup>25</sup> Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth*, 100-108.

building on everything that is hopeful and rejecting everything that threatens more destruction. Finally, we need to reshape our orientation to the world, engaging in a spirit of mutual hospitality or generosity with all of God's creation. Human beings are not the saviours of God's creation. We have been granted powers of knowing and of consciousness that give us potential to discern the sacred and vital gifts of every other part of God's creation, even those parts that are described as 'inanimate'. The earth is alive, and humans have the unique power to discern that aliveness, and to care for and with the whole of God's creation.

Christians are called to ground ourselves in the Spirit of God, which is the source of all life. From such grounding, we can develop our capacities to discern the sacredness of God's creation and to respect and protect the gifts that abound in our globally connected world. The consequences will be inspiring, empowering, and full of force. Centring on God's life-giving Spirit and God's sacred creation, we will become ever more determined to sustain and regenerate life in every corner of our planet Earth and far beyond. We will be devastated by evil and suffering, and we will not rest until we resist it. We will be inspired to build an ecological mission of loving life, building justice, and caring for all of God's creation.

### Resources

- David Ray Griffin, *Unprecedented: Can Civilization Survive the CO2 Crisis?* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2015).
- Kapya John Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: African Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2012).
- David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009).
- Mary Elizabeth Moore, 'Making Ecological Meaning,' trans. Liu Lu, in *Journal Tangdu*, 4 (2014), 52-55 (in Mandarin).
- Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Ministering with the Earth* (St Louis, MO: Chalice, 1998).
- Adam B. Seligman and Robert P. Weller, *Rethinking Pluralism: Ritual, Experience, and Ambiguity* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

## SUSTAINABILITY, EARTH CARE AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

Kwok Pui-lan

A young American man visited Sri Lanka, at that time called Ceylon, when he was nineteen-years old and had his consciousness profoundly changed. He recalled his encounter years later:

It was 1926, and I was in Ceylon. British colonial officials were making new roads in the jungles so that the crop of the great tea plantations could go to market more efficiently. In the red cuts slashed through the dark green vegetation I saw cones of earth left standing and asked what they were for. 'Those are the snakes' nests,' I was told. They were spared not because the workmen were afraid of snakes, but because of a feeling by the workers that the snake had a right to its house as long as it wanted to stay there. Ceylon's is a Hinayana Buddhist culture believing in metempsychosis, and any given snake may well be one's late great uncle. With all the noise and activity of road-building, the snake would soon decide to move to a more desirable neighbourhood. After that, the cone of earth would be removed. There was no particular hurry, and the officials let the diggers handle the digging in their own way.

Many of the officials seemed to be Scots, and it occurred to me that if the men with the shovels in their hands likewise had been Presbyterians, the snakes would have fared less well.<sup>1</sup>

Some forty years later, this man, Lynn White, Jr, would write the watershed essay in 1967 that unleashed the debates on religion and the environment. His essay, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,' published in *Science*, stimulated the study of environmental history and ecotheology.<sup>2</sup> His essay argues that the modern ecological crisis grows out of western technological and scientific advances made since the medieval period. These advances have occurred in a social and cultural context informed by the western Christian tradition. After comparing with Asian and indigenous religions, he asserts that western Christianity is 'the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'.<sup>3</sup> Such a religion gives humans licence to exploit nature, for within western Christian theology, 'nature has

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White, Jr, 'Continuing the Conversation,' in Ian G. Barbour (ed), *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes toward Nature and Technology* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1973), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn White, Jr, 'The Historical Roots,' in *Science* 155 (10th March 1967), 1203-207.

<sup>3</sup> White, 'The Historical Roots,' 1205.

no reason for existence save to serve [humans]’.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, western Christianity bears the burden of guilt for our environmental crisis.

Lynn White, Jr, Rachel Carson, James Lovelock, Wendell Berry and Rosemary Radford Ruether spearheaded the environmental debates in the 1960s and 1970s across many fields. The environmental movement became the precursor of the sustainability movement in the 1980s, which began to blossom in the 1990s. In the last two decades, ‘sustainability’ has become a buzz-word in academy, business, management, politics, energy, lifestyle, and even fashion and aesthetics. It is within such a sustainability revolution that I discuss its implications for Christian mission.

### Sustainability

According to Ulrich Grober, the word ‘sustainable’ appeared for the first time in its modern meaning in the report *The Limits to Growth* published in 1972.<sup>5</sup> The scientists and researchers who wrote the report investigated and collected data on five major trends: accelerating industrialisation, rapid population growth, widespread malnutrition, depletion of non-renewable resources, and the deteriorating environment. They argued that continuing industrialisation and population growth have pushed the global systems to their limit: the depletion of the earth’s non-renewable resources. The report concluded that there was a need ‘to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future. The state of global equilibrium could be designed so that the basic material needs of each person on earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realise his individual human potential’.<sup>6</sup>

The word ‘sustainability’ became prominent as a result of the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development of the United Nations, entitled *Our Common Future*. The report defines sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.<sup>7</sup> In 1992, the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro brought together heads of states or governments and representatives from non-governmental organisations. An important achievement was the agreement on the Climate Change Convention, which later led to the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that commit states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There was

<sup>4</sup> White, ‘The Historical Roots,’ 1207.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Grober, *Sustainability: A Cultural History* (trans. Rey Cunningham; Totnes, UK: Green Books, 2012), 155.

<sup>6</sup> Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report to the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (London: Earth Island, 1972), 29.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, ‘Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development,’ in UN Documents: [www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm](http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

also heightened consciousness concerning threats to bio-diversity and the destruction of ecosystems. The Rio Declaration consisted of twenty-seven principles to guide future development of the world. The first principle states, 'Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.'<sup>8</sup> The Rio Declaration pointed out that we can no longer think of environmental, economic and social development as isolated fields – they are interlinked.

After the Earth Summit at Rio, an Earth Charter was proposed and drafted as a civil society initiative for the purpose of developing global consensus on values and principles for a sustainable future. The Charter was launched in 2000 in The Hague, in the Netherlands, and has been endorsed by thousands of individuals and supported by many heads of states. The preamble says, '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. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.'<sup>9</sup>

Today, people usually talk about sustainability in terms of the 'Three Es': Ecology, Economy and Equity. 'Ecology' concerns the use and conservation of natural resources, environmental management, bio-diversity, climate change, pollution prevention, etc. 'Economy' deals with global economic systems and trends, profits, cost savings, economic growth, fair trade, workers' rights and development. 'Equity' concerns standards of living, resource allocation, environmental justice, and equal opportunity and access. Sustainability cannot be achieved without the balance of these 'Three Es'. A consumerist lifestyle that knows no limit, enthusiastically promoted by the neo-liberal market economy, will bring human beings and the earth to the precipice of disaster. We can no longer satisfy our insatiable desires without thinking about the consequences our actions have on the environment. Steven C. Rockefeller, a principal creator of the Earth Charter, says, 'Sustainability includes all the interrelated activities that promote the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.'<sup>10</sup>

To have a sustainable future, we human beings must change not only our production and consumption patterns, our social structures and systems, and our lifestyles and habits, but also our hearts and minds. John E. Carroll, a professor of environmental conservation, is adamant that true

<sup>8</sup> 'Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,' United Nations: [www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

<sup>9</sup> 'Earth Charter,' The Earth Charter Initiative: [www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Steven C. Rockefeller, 'The Earth Charter: Building a Global Culture of Peace,' in *The Ecozoic Reader* 2:1 (Fall 2001), 8.

sustainability 'requires a change in our fundamental values, it requires us to be fundamentally counter-cultural and revolutionary, at least as to the common culture and its evolution since the Second World War, if not earlier'.<sup>11</sup> As a professor of theology and someone who has been involved in the ecumenical discussions of religion and the environment, I want to discuss the implications of sustainability for Earth care and Christian mission.

### Sustainability and the Recycling of Christianity

Lynn White Jr's article has prompted many discussions among biblical scholars and theologians on creation, the Bible, and the relationship between God, human beings and the world.<sup>12</sup> Many scholars and pastors use the model of stewardship of creation, rather than human dominion over the natural world. Biblical scholars have re-examined important insights on creation and the environment from Genesis, the Psalms, and the Prophets, and rediscovered Jesus' relationship with the earth community.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, a group of scholars have looked at the Bible from the Earth's perspective and issued the Earth Bible Series.<sup>14</sup>

The ecological crisis and concerns about sustainability prompted the development of ecological theology, with representative figures such as John Cobb, Jr, Gordon Kaufman, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Heather Eaton, just to name a few. They question the presuppositions of the Enlightenment, the reductionist and atomistic understanding of the universe, and anthropocentrism in modern theology. I have also discussed the need for the recycling of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> 'Recycling' is not just a significant ecological theme, but is also anticipated by the religious themes of conversion (*metanoia* in Greek), and even resurrection. The idea of recycling of Christianity came from my friend, Irish theologian

<sup>11</sup> John E. Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Dieter T. Hessel (ed), *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), and Dieter R. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Gene McAfee, 'Ecology and Biblical Studies,' in *Theology for Earth Community*, 31-44; Richard J. Clifford, 'The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation,' in *Theological Studies* 46 (1985), 507-23; Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994); and Edward P. Echlin, 'Jesus and the Earth Community,' in *Ecotheology* 2 (1997), 31-47.

<sup>14</sup> See Norman C. Habel (ed), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2000) and other volumes in the series.

<sup>15</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, 'Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity,' in *Ecumenical Review* 44:3 (July 1992), 304-307.



and philosopher Anne Primavesi. When asked whether she is a Christian or not, she answers that she is a 'recycled Christian'.

Sustainability and what it entails require us to reflect on whether Christianity has promoted interrelatedness, mutuality, and eco-justice addressed in this volume. Many eco-conscious Christians are aware that an anthropocentric, hierarchical and patriarchal religious system is part of the problem, and not part of the solution. In much of traditional theology, the relationship between God and human beings and creation is imagined in a hierarchical way. The image that best describes such a relation is a triangle. Such an understanding of God and creation needs to go through a recycling process so that it can be re-used and re-appropriated for a sustainable future. A hierarchical model establishes a dualistic world-view separating mind from body, male from female, and humans from the non-human world. The worth of an individual or a natural object depends on one's position in the hierarchy instead of one's intrinsic value and worth.

An ecological model does not project God above everything else. God – human beings – creation are interdependent and interrelated, just like the three interconnected arrows of the sign for recycling. Brazilian eco-feminist theologian Ivone Gebara uses the concept of Trinity as the symbolic expression of interrelatedness, reciprocity, and communion of all life in a continuous and dynamic process of creativity. She imagines Trinity from concrete human experience. In the cosmos, Trinity manifests as the multiplicity and complexity of the stars and galaxies. On earth, it is shown in the unfolding processes of creation and the interrelatedness of all things. In human relationships, Trinity manifests itself in the mystery of the egalitarian I-Thou relationship. In every person, Trinity can be seen in the multiplicity of the person, who is part of the evolutionary process, and part of the earth and the cosmos.<sup>16</sup>

Modern Christian theology in the West has a tendency to place human beings at the centre of the universe. Leonardo Da Vinci's figure of Man captured this very well. The whole universe is seen as having been created for the benefit of human beings, who are to dominate over the fish, the birds, and every living thing upon the earth. Creation was condemned and cursed as a result of human sinfulness. Before us, however, many of the mystics had spoken of the integrated universe and of God's love for what God has created. Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century spoke of the world as the 'cosmic egg,' and she was famous for describing the greening power (*viriditas*) in all life. In the *Book of Divine Works*, she says:

I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive. The sun lives in its light, and the moon is enkindled, after its disappearance, once again by the light of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Eco-feminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 137-71.

sun so that the moon is again revived. The stars, too, give a clear light with their beaming.<sup>17</sup>

In our modern times, Thomas Berry also speaks of the close relationship between human beings and the environment:

There is no such thing as 'human community' without the earth and the soil, and the air and the water and all living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. There is, therefore, no separate human community. Humans are woven into this larger community. The larger community is the sacred community.<sup>18</sup>

Western anthropocentrism thinks of God in terms of images of human beings: God as king, father, judge, warrior, etc. God is the Lord of history, intervening in human events. Much of the classic liberation theology developed in Latin America portrays God as active in history. By contrast, Asian and indigenous peoples who are tied to the soil imagine the divine, the Dao, as living and embracing, but non-intrusive. They speak of the earth with respect and reverence as the mother who is sustaining and life-affirming. A shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism necessitates a change in our way of thinking about God and the *missio Dei*.

### Earth Care and Christian Mission

In 2010, 297 official delegates and hundreds of scholars from Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal and indigenous churches gathered at Edinburgh University to celebrate the centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference. Edinburgh 1910 was motivated by the missionary zeal of bringing the Christian Gospel to the non-Christian world. The mood of Edinburgh of 2010 was markedly different. Instead of confining itself to the North Atlantic, the Conference made an effort to include the Global South, recognising that the centre of gravity of Christianity had shifted south during the last century. There was greater gender awareness and consciousness of the diversity of cultures and traditions within world Christianity across different parts of the globe. God's mission was seen as worldwide and multi-directional, rooted in many local contexts and church life, and undertaken by a growing variety of organisations and groups. Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim also note that there was 'a deepening awareness of the process of globalisation, of the fragility of the earth which we share, and of the interpretation of religions and cultures as populations grow and move'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Fox (ed), *Hildegard of Bingen's Books of Divine Works, with Letters and Songs* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1987), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 43.

<sup>19</sup> 'Introduction,' in Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 1.

Edinburgh 2010 has paid attention to the environmental crisis and the ecological challenges we face today. The 'Common Call' from Edinburgh 2010 concludes with 'we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation'.<sup>20</sup> The study process set up before the conference included 'Ecological Perspectives on Mission' as one of the seven important transversal topics. In one of the contributions to the discussion on this topic, Kapya John Kaoma notes that Christian mission has often been conceived as spiritual transformation of individuals and new inter-human relations based on salvation brought by Jesus Christ. As such, Christian mission has been preoccupied with God's interaction with humanity. Concern for the environment has been rendered secondary or absent. Yet the environmental crisis challenges us to see God's missionary purpose as integrated with environmental concerns and responsibilities. He reminds us that 'the God who acts in Jesus Christ to bring salvation is the same triune God who is the creator of the heavens and the earth'.<sup>21</sup> This means that we need to radically expand our understanding of Christian mission – from an anthropocentric to a cosmological focus.

### *From Soul Care to Earth Care*

Christian mission that focuses on salvation of the soul is individualistic, disembodied, and will not be able to address the environmental crisis and sustainability. From a narrow focus on the salvation of human beings, we must extend our care and concern to the whole earth community. One of the leading Asian eco-feminist theologians is Aruna Gnanadasan from India. In *Listen to the Women! Listen to the Earth!* Gnanadasan describes the tradition of prudent care among the indigenous peoples of her country. Examples of prudent care include the designation of forestland as protected land where the ancestors live, the preservation of sacred groves and particular sacred trees, the restriction of the number of a given species that can be harvested, and the protection of a variety of plants and animals. The tradition of prudent care aims to provide living resources for the living and the dead, and for generations to come.

Gnanadasan points out that the earth was symbolised as the embodiment of feminine *shakthi*, which means energy and power. Female leaders of the grassroots movement have been voices of prudence, when they have fought to protect the sacred trees, and to save the Narmada River out of their care for the earth and for life. Gnanadasan offers the concept of 'brown grace,' which points to a God who is not separate from human beings, but who

<sup>20</sup> 'Edinburgh 2010 Common Call': [www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/Edinburgh\\_2010\\_Common\\_Call\\_with\\_explanation.pdf](http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/Edinburgh_2010_Common_Call_with_explanation.pdf) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, 'Rethinking Mission,' in Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Fresh Perspectives on Christian Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2010), 69.

works with us to transform the earth with grace. Her suggestion of 'brown grace' is meant to counteract the primacy given to 'red grace,' which emphasises sin, blood sacrifice and atonement accomplished by Jesus. Gnanadason's cosmological consciousness supplements liberation theology, as she writes:

God in India, from a liberation perspective, is in fact shaped by Indian cosmology, which affirms the interdependence of all forms of life, the dialectical harmony between humanity and the divine, between human beings and the earth and between the male and female principles.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, feminist theologian Carter Heyward has criticised the human-centredness of focusing on salvation of the soul through the redemption of Christ. This arrogant anthropocentrism has hindered human beings from reflecting on the ethics of killing other creatures and destroying the earth. She writes, 'The spiritual trivialization of creatures and creation is steeped in the longstanding Christian assumption that only human beings have souls – intrinsic spiritual value, a "meeting place" with the divine, a dimension of creaturely being that seeks and can receive salvation.'<sup>23</sup> But, as Paul says in Romans, the salvation of the children of God cannot be separated from the salvation of creation. The whole creation has been groaning in labour pains and longs for its freedom from bondage and for redemption (8:19-23).

As we fail to maintain right relationships with the rest of creation, Heyward argues, we also fail to make right relationships with one another and with God. Many of us regard the animals, earth and water as our possessions and we as their owners. We assume that humans have the right to dominate and do with them as we please because we alone are created in the image of God. She points to the violence human beings have inflicted on animals and the rest of creation because we often fail to respect their intrinsic values. Heyward challenges the notion that animals and the rest of creation reflect God's image no less than us. God does not love people more than fish and birds and cattle. She says, 'The Spirit of God does not discriminate in this way by choosing some creatures to love more and others less.'<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, Christian mission must bear witness to this all inclusive and embracing love of God. We are called to restore mutual relationships with the rest of creation and to resist systems of domination that ruin the earth community and destroy the natural habitat.

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<sup>22</sup> Aruna Gnanadason, *Listen to the Women! Listen to the Earth!* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), 100.

<sup>23</sup> Carter Heyward, *Keep Your Courage: A Radical Christian Feminists Speak* (London: SCM, 2010), 112.

<sup>24</sup> Heyward, *Keep Your Courage*, 112.

### *Eco-justice and Christian Mission*

As repeatedly noted in this volume, in the face of environmental degradation and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, care for the earth and the building of sustainable communities are essential parts of Christian mission. Our current way of life is not sustainable – the US with only 5% of the world's population consumes nearly 30% of the world's resources. Yet more than 2.5 billion people live on less than two US dollars a day. Many churches in the US have responded by urging their parishioners to adopt a simpler lifestyle: recycle, reduce energy consumption and carbon footprint, insulate their homes, create community gardens, grow vegetables, and eat local foods. Different denominations have ecological networks and programmes on Earth care and environmental advocacy. For example, the United Church of Christ congregations have pledged to consume less energy, plant trees in the US and abroad, and write letters on environmental concerns to law-makers and the news media.<sup>25</sup> The Episcopal Power and Light project is a national initiative that aims to reduce greenhouse emissions in order to address global warming. The project encourages participating churches to buy electricity from non-polluting, renewable sources, and to create emission-free churches and energy-conscious parishioners who will practise energy efficiency in their homes.<sup>26</sup>

While it is important for denominations and churches to reduce their carbon footprint and to educate their parishioners to consume less energy, it is also important for Christian mission to address economic justice and the macro-economic systems that privilege the rich, and create an unsustainable environment for all. The global protests that started from Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen and Jordan in 2011 had much to do with rising food prices as a result of water shortages and climate change in the region, as well as unjust social and economic policies.<sup>27</sup> The Occupy Movement that began in the fall of 2011 was part of worldwide protests against corporate greed, economic injustice, food insecurity and political disenfranchisement. The dichotomy between the 1% and the 99% has widened as the transnational capitalist élites amassed great wealth in the past several decades, while many people in the world struggle to survive at subsistence level. In the US, for example, the income of the top 1% of households gained 277% from 1979 to 2007, whereas the bottom fifth of

<sup>25</sup> Connie Larkman, 'UCC Churches Pledging Earth Care, Energy and Imagination during Mission 4/1 Initiative': [www.ucc.org/news/ucc-churches-pledging-earth.html](http://www.ucc.org/news/ucc-churches-pledging-earth.html) (accessed 3rd March 2014).

<sup>26</sup> 'Episcopal Power and Light': [http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/episcopal\\_power](http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/episcopal_power) (accessed 3rd March 2014).

<sup>27</sup> John Vidal, 'What Does the Arab World Do When Its Water Runs Out,' in *The Guardian*, 20th February 2011: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/feb/20/arab-nations-water-running-out](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/feb/20/arab-nations-water-running-out) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

households gained only 18%.<sup>28</sup> Even though churches may be involved in feeding the homeless and providing temporary relief for needy families, the question of class is seldom discussed for fear of inciting ‘class conflict’ or ‘class warfare’. For the churches to be prophetic, they have to address structural issues and the culture of poverty.

Economic globalisation and the drive for profits has wreaked havoc on the world’s ecosystems and destroyed natural habitats of people, affecting women and children disproportionately. The noted Indian environmental activist, Vandana Shiva, has said that women in the poor countries of the Global South have participated actively in the subsistence economy, trying hard to feed their families and children.<sup>29</sup> Feminist theologian Gabriele Dietrich, who has lived and worked among women in India for many years, writes that ecology is concerned with ‘setting ourselves in relationship with one another in the day-to-day survival struggles for water, a piece of land to dwell on, a patch of beach to dry the fish on, and the sea as a source of bounty. All this is mediated by women’s work, both in the household and in wider production processes.’<sup>30</sup>

Deforestation, the large-scale building of dams, biotechnology, pollution of land and water, and the patent of seeds, have all threatened the very livelihood of women living in poverty-stricken communities across the globe.

Edinburgh 2010 has paid attention to women’s issues and women’s roles in carrying out God’s mission. In many societies, women are still excluded in leadership and decision-making processes in their communities and churches. In order to develop a holistic understanding of mission and to build sustainable communities, women’s voices and visions must be included. Through contextual Bible studies, education and conscientisation, Christian women must be empowered to take part in the struggle for a transformed community, which embraces equality, reciprocity, interconnectedness and interdependence. From an eco-feminist perspective, this transformation must include the acknowledgment of the intrinsic connectedness between sexuality and spirituality, especially in women’s experiences as gendered and embodied beings.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the environmental crisis also disproportionately affects indigenous peoples and racial and ethnic communities. Indigenous peoples

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Incomes at the Top Rebounded in First Full Year of Recovery, New Analysis of Tax Data Shows,’ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 7th March 2012: [www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3697](http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3697) (accessed 3rd March 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Gabriele Dietrich, ‘The World as the Body of God: Feminist Perspectives on Ecology and Social Justice,’ in Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed), *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Balia and Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 247.

have lived closer to the land and have developed integral relationships with their environment. But as George E. Tinker, a member of the native American Osage nation in the US, has documented, the missionary conquest of the Americas attempted to change the attitudes, values and world-views of native peoples through cultural genocide.<sup>32</sup> Today, many native peoples live in poverty and suffer from depression and alcoholism because they are torn from their cultural and spiritual roots, have lost the ability to speak their native language, and feel alienated from the dominant culture. Tinker notes that while Christianity emphasises the time dimension, native cultures attach more importance to space and place. The destruction of native lands and environment affects native peoples not only physically but spiritually and emotionally as well. A genuine Christian mission to the native peoples must respect their cultures and support their struggles for land, sovereignty, and social and cultural empowerment.

In his poignant essay 'Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?' Black theologian James Cone points out, 'The logic that led to slavery and segregation in the Americas, colonisation and apartheid in Africa, and the rule of white supremacy throughout the world, is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature.'<sup>33</sup> It is, therefore, important to connect racism with the degradation of the earth in any discussion about the environment and sustainability. Cone notes that, since the 1990s, the leaders of African American churches have turned their attention to ecological issues. They have challenged environmental racism, such as toxic waste landfills in Black communities, and the concentration of hazardous waste facilities in Black and Hispanic communities. Cone notes that the leaders in the mainstream environmental movement are mostly middle and upper middle-class white people, who are often unprepared to listen to the concerns of Black people. He challenges white theologians and the wider church to pay as much attention to saving Black lives in the ghettos and prisons of America, as they are committed to saving the habitats of birds and other species.<sup>34</sup> Cone's challenge of environmental racism is also relevant in other parts of the world.

### *Ecological Solidarity and Inter-religious Collaboration*

Edinburgh 1910 was concerned about bringing the heathens and non-believers into the Christian fold. John R. Mott's best-known work, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, became a missionary

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<sup>32</sup> George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> James H. Cone, 'Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?' in Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen (eds), *Earth Habitat: Ecojustice and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Cone, 'Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?', 32.



slogan of the early twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> After the Second World War, many nations in Africa and Asia regained their political independence and searched for cultural autonomy. The missionary enterprise was criticised as participating in the colonial project and as a form of cultural imperialism. In the late 1960s, the World Council of Churches began to talk about dialogue with people of other faiths, and programmes were developed to cultivate mutual understanding. Since then, the field of inter-religious dialogue has grown, and more and more Christians recognise the need to live in harmonious relationships with their religious neighbours in an increasingly religiously pluralistic world.

Vatican II also adopted a more open attitude towards other religions. Pope Paul VI first identified four different models of inter-religious dialogue, which were later further developed by Catholic theologian Leonard Swidler. The most basic level is the dialogue of life, which is found through interactions with our neighbours, in our families, and in our workplace. The dialogue of action involves collaboration between members of different religious traditions to address particular problems or concerns in local communities. For example, there are interfaith coalitions for worker justice and immigration rights. The dialogue of spiritual experience involves shared ritual, worship, prayer, silence and retreat. Inter-religious spiritual experience deepens our understanding of other people's faith and provides opportunities to share images, symbols and rituals that are important in corporate worship and private devotions. The dialogue of understanding involves exchanges and conversations about beliefs, doctrine and theology. It broadens our knowledge of other traditions and helps us identify commonalities and differences in diverse religious traditions.<sup>36</sup>

Today, we must add ecological solidarity as a major theme for inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. Mary Evelyn Tucker, who has organised many conferences on ecology and religion, writes, 'The environmental crisis calls the religions of the world to respond by finding their voice within the larger Earth community. In so doing, the religions are entering their ecological phase and finding their planetary expression.'<sup>37</sup> This requires a deeper ecological awakening – Scriptural, symbolic, ritual and ethical – of the spiritual resources within one's own tradition as well as learning from others. Through creative transformation of traditional resources and adopting new ones, we can develop viable forms of religious life beneficial to humans and other species. Tucker notes that there is growing interest in the emerging dialogue of ecology and religion, and

<sup>35</sup> John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900).

<sup>36</sup> See the discussion in Maria Hornung, *Encountering Other Faiths: An Introduction to the Art of Interreligious Engagement* (Philadelphia, PA: Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, 2007), 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Evelyn Tucker, 'Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase,' in *Religion East and West* 2 (June 2002).



many grassroots environmental movements have been inspired by religion. Religions continue to shape many people's world-views and their values, and can be positive forces for change. Interfaith collaboration can break down social and religious barriers and provide the impetus for working across differences to promote personal and social transformation.

Christians can collaborate with people of other faiths in grassroots environmental movements. For example, the Zen Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh, has taught simplicity of life, 'interbeing,' and living harmoniously with nature for many years. His followers around the world have formed communities, and led workshops and retreats to promote compassion, mindfulness and healthy living. In Taiwan, under the leadership of Master Zhengyan, a Buddhist nun, a vibrant grassroots environmental movement has developed. Through recycling programmes, publications, community education and family activities, her Buddhist Compassion Relief *Ciji* Foundation raises people's awareness about environmental concerns and conservation of life. Christians in Taiwan, with Buddhist and other religious groups, and non-religious environmental protection organisations, have developed eco-rituals to draw people into activism and spiritual commitment. They have also worked together to push the government to preserve primal forests.<sup>38</sup> Christian churches can learn from these inter-religious grassroots efforts and form interfaith coalition in the process of building ecological solidarity.

### *Sustainability and Spirituality*

Lynn White, Jr, emphasises, 'We shall not cope with our ecological crisis until scores of millions of us learn to understand more clearly what our real values are, and determine to change our priorities.'<sup>39</sup> This means more than rethinking and reformulating our economic and political systems, finding new renewable energy, reducing consumption, and taking care of pollution. This requires us to examine our orientations in life and our relationship with God and others in a much deeper sense, and touches on the spiritual dimensions of our being. Sandra Schneiders defines spirituality as 'that dimension of the human subject in virtue of which the person is capable of self-transcending integration in relation to the Ultimate, whatever this Ultimate is for the person in question. In this sense, every human being has a capacity for spirituality or is a spiritual being'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Wai-Li Ho, 'Rice, Medicine, and Nature: Women's Environmental Activism and Interreligious Co-operation in Taiwan,' in Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Hi Kim, Kwok Pui-lan and Seung Ai Yang (eds), *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 231-251.

<sup>39</sup> White, 'Continuing the Conversation,' 56.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra Schneiders, 'Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,' in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1, 2 (Fall 1993), 11.

Today, many people, especially the younger generation, say that they are 'spiritual, but not religious'. This means that they are discontented and dissatisfied with the dogmas, rituals, and the rigid, hierarchal structures of organised religion, but they are concerned with the larger questions of the meaning of human life and humanity's place in the world. Ursula King, for example, seeks to explore spirituality and society in the new millennium. For her, spirituality 'also means to seek something greater outside and beyond the narrow confines of oneself, something or someone who transcends the narrow boundaries of our individual experience and makes us feel linked with a community of others, with a much larger web of life – in fact, the whole cosmos of which we are all a tiny part'.<sup>41</sup> Facing the alienation of mass society and the bombardment of advertisements and consumerism, many people long for a sense of belonging and connectedness and a place to call home.

It is important for Christian mission to explore and nurture a spirituality that promotes sustainability: a spirituality that balances immanence and transcendence, connects social justice with eco-justice, and unites human beings with the rest of creation. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a Christian Igorot woman from an indigenous tribe living in the mountains of northern Luzon in the Philippines, urges Christians to learn from those who practise earth-based spirituality. The Igorots believe that the universe is a living thing, and everything has a spirit. Their rituals and lifestyles reflect the integral relationship between the spirit and nature, and between human beings and the earth. She writes, 'The effort of oppressed and marginalized peoples to sustain their struggles to transform an increasingly dehumanized society is pushing us to reclaim this earth-based spirituality'.<sup>42</sup> As repeatedly noted in this volume, the global environmental crisis has also motivated Christians to pay attention to and learn from indigenous spiritualities and practices.

In the US, Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, founder of the Genesis Farm in New Jersey, has inspired many Dominican and other women's religious order-established communities to form a loose network called Sisters of the Earth. These communities are ecumenical in their nature and often interfaith in practice. They are committed to living lightly, to living sustainably, and to living within the principles of ecology.<sup>43</sup> She has promoted an ecological spirituality, based on the work of Thomas Berry, which emphasises the inherent spirituality of the universe, the role of the natural world as an insight to human beings to imagine and become like God, the centrality of community, the importance as well as the limitation

<sup>41</sup> Ursula King, 'Introduction: Spirituality, Society, and the New Millennium – Wasteland, Wilderness or New Vision?' in Ursula King and Tina Beattie (eds), *Spirituality and Society in the New Millennium* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, 'Reclaiming Earth-based Spirituality: Indigenous Women in the Cordillera,' in *Women Healing Earth*, 106.

<sup>43</sup> Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 54-93.

of religious traditions, the awareness of agriculture as a priestly activity, the importance of attuning to the cycles, seasons, weather and nature, and the eating of grains and vegetables instead of meat.<sup>44</sup> The development of spirituality is important to sustain our struggle for eco-justice and social equality in the long run, and to develop personal and communal resources to overcome frustration and despair.

### Conclusion

In September 2014, President Barack Obama gave a speech at the United Nations Climate Summit. He said that the 'urgent and growing threat of climate change' will 'define the contours of this century more dramatically than any other' issue.<sup>45</sup> He announced a plan to cut carbon pollution and urged world leaders and governments to take active steps to address the issue. He said, 'We cannot condemn our children and their children to a future that is beyond their capacity to repair – not when we have the means, the technological innovation and the scientific imagination to begin the work of repairing it right now.'<sup>46</sup> In *A New Climate for Theology*, Sallie McFague says that global warming makes it necessary for theologians to envision God and ourselves in new ways. She writes, 'Theology must deal with global warming because one of the basic marks of the church is its ecological catholicity, which must be lived out in a political context. In other words, Christian faith is concerned with a just and sustainable existence for all of God's creation.'<sup>47</sup> The Christian church must carry out its mission in the context of global warming and other ecological disasters and in the 'ecological turn' of theology. Earth care and Earth-keeping must be an integral part of God's mission in the twenty-first century. Through working for eco-justice and interfaith collaboration, Christian churches can develop a new spirituality for the flourishing and sustainability of all God's creation.

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<sup>44</sup> This is summarised by Carroll in *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 52-53, based on Sr Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP, 'To Know the Place for the First Time: Explorations in Thomas Berry's New Cosmology' (Sonoma, CA: Global Perspectives, 1991), a set of six audio-cassette tapes.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Hartfield and Leigh Ann Caldwell, 'Obama: Climate Change "Growing and Urgent Threat"', CNN Politics: [www.cnn.com/2014/09/23/politics/obama-un-climate-change](http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/23/politics/obama-un-climate-change) (accessed 20th January 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Hartfield and Caldwell, 'Obama: Climate Change'.

<sup>47</sup> Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 3.

### Resources

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# SCIENCE AND RELIGION MISSIONARY EARTH-KEEPING: OUR ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Rodney L Petersen

## Introduction

To live in a time of incredible opportunity but also in days marked by challenge is our lot. The opportunity is a world made malleable to human ingenuity and spirit. The challenge is a world marked by fear and ignorance. It is a time for science and religion to work together, to be jointly involved in Missionary Earth-keeping. Both bear upon our ecological responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

The consensus within the scientific community with respect to our ecological challenge is that of a planet at risk: global climate change, ozone depletion, withering ecosystems, habitats and species, the degradation of water, and toxic pollution – but also one of new sources of energy and opportunities for human equity. The religious community, while divided, increasingly finds itself in agreement with this consensus as it brings to bear questions of value, perspective and meaning to the table.<sup>2</sup>

The scientific community, particularly those in the earth and environmental sciences, are working to understand accurately our current ecological conditions. Our challenge is to take seriously the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).<sup>3</sup> It is to craft policy with the best of human ingenuity and to continue work following the Lima Climate Change Conference held in Peru which commits all countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions with agreements to be reached in Paris at the end of 2015.

Religious communities struggle to find meaning in these scientific studies and work. Some resort to different religions' end-of-time or apocalyptic scenarios, while others seek to find deeper patterns of value

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'missionary Earth-keeping' reaches back to a book of that title edited by professor of Earth Sciences (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and president of the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists, Calvin B. DeWitt et al (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993); see, more recently, *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Resources, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> This chapter draws upon the author's book, *Earth at Risk: An Environmental Dialogue between Religion and Science*, co-edited with Donald B. Conroy (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> <http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5> (accessed 10th February 2015).

<sup>3</sup> <http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5> (accessed 10th February 2015).

and perspective. Over the past fifty years, many Christian churches, denominations, along with the World Council of Churches, have taken prophetic positions in support of environmental responsibility. The Evangelical Climate Initiative came out in 2006, declaring that climate change was real, was human-induced and would impact especially the poorest and most vulnerable in the world. Divided perspectives on the meaning discerned in the ecological landscape are found in other religions as well.

Many religious traditions are coming to the realisation that ecological sensitivity is fully in keeping with their beliefs, and that such beliefs mandate care and concern for our world and the species that reside in it. The film by Marty Ostrow, *Renewal: Stories from America's Religious-Environmental Movement*,<sup>4</sup> amply illustrates the imperative found in most religions for responsible caretaking of the planet. Inspired by the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, the film presents Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Jewish, Muslim and native American perspectives. We might call this Missionary Earth-keeping.<sup>5</sup> It challenges inherited interpretations of religious understanding as entities such as The Center for the Story of the Universe are working to inspire a scientific and religious community to transcend individual, human and geopolitical boundaries.

The environmental battleground is really about its effects upon humanity in relation to the web of life. A negative assessment is confirmed by a growing number of studies on the relationship between ecological degradation and regional violence.<sup>6</sup> That the scientific enterprise and a life of faith have much in common is the premise of this chapter on ecological responsibility. While science and faith may differ in method and substance, each requires the other and mandates a missionary consciousness, whether derivative of one discipline or the other.

By missionary consciousness I mean to imply human intention towards the enhancement of individual and social life as shaped by understanding, knowledge and emotion. This consciousness and the activity it elicits arises from a deep grounding in some transcendent truth which, it is understood and felt, is incumbent on human well-being. It is the contention of this chapter that the sphere for this activity is history, whether approached through the lens of religion or science. Ecological responsibility fits into this historical framework. Missionary Earth-keeping is a facet of the

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<sup>4</sup> [www.renewalproject.net](http://www.renewalproject.net) (accessed 10th February 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Marthinus Daneel gives such mission a specific focus for African Independent Churches (AICs) in his study, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Mohamed Suliman, 'The Rationality and Irrationality of Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,' in Mohamed Suliman (ed), *Ecology, Politics, and Violent Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 25-44.

creation mandate.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, such concern for the earth's ecosystems and web of life is deeply embedded in a scientific ethic.

The case for Missionary Earth-keeping arises from three overlapping challenges. First, the ecological issue encompasses all of us and poses a challenge to community. It merits a response that comes from a deep sense of purpose, or mission. Second, the ecological challenge calls for holistic thinking. It requires the integration of the sciences, how our world comes together, with religion, the meaning and value placed upon things as we know them. Third, through historical perspective rather than determinacy, we can find a matrix for holistic thinking and grounds for Missionary Earth-keeping. History is the 'gate' for increased traffic between science and religion, and holds out a role for each of the religions to understand one another, if not always being in agreement.

### A Universal Challenge

The ecological issue encompasses all of us. It poses a challenge to community. It merits a response that comes from a deep sense of purpose, or mission. The fact that the term 'Missionary Earth-keeping' is appropriate for both the scientific disciplines and from religious understanding is the argument of this chapter. Science without religion loses its ethical guide and narrative. Religion without science lacks the substance and contextual resources with which to understand the world. While science, as *wissenschaft*, is understood as knowledge, religion encompasses our fundamental world-view. This synthetic approach to the environment especially draws us to a discussion of Earth's carrying capacity and the over-consumption of its resources.<sup>8</sup> Theology is challenged as never before

<sup>7</sup> Calvin B. DeWitt, 'Contemporary Missiology and the Biosphere,' in Daniel Jeyaraj, Robert Pazmino and Rodney Petersen (eds), *The Antioch Agenda: Essays on the Restorative Church in Honor of Orlando E. Costas* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 305-28.

<sup>8</sup> A number of valuable studies have been funded in the areas of consumption, population and the environment by such foundations as The Pew Charitable Trusts and its Global Stewardship Initiative, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Among studies available, see 'The Ethics of Consumption,' Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy (School of Public Health, University of Maryland). Occasional papers and bulletins from other groups have proliferated in recent years, the range of which includes The Union of Concerned Scientists, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, the Office of Policy Planning and Education, US Environmental Protection, and various agencies attached to the United Nations family of organisations. For an example of interfaith discussion on pertinent issues, see Azizah al-Hibri, Daniel Maguire and James B. Martin-Schramm, *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Population*

by the concept of a 'full Earth' and the question of global sustainability. The inability to find a technological 'fix' for these and other factors draws science into dialogue with economics, politics and the religious attitudes which shape our conception of the world and the legitimacy of its institutions and social arrangements. Any mission endeavour needs to come from both directions.<sup>9</sup>

Concern about how little has been done to change our course towards ecological disaster marks the past twenty years.<sup>10</sup> Ethnologist Timothy C. Weiskel asks the troubling question that at just the time when there is renewed interest in the study of macro-historical processes, we fail to deal with the movement of history into a new era. A part of the interest in general historical trends and the ability to study these with new accuracy is an understanding of human cultures in the full context of their socio-ecological evolution. Weiskel cites five of these: climate history and human affairs, the origins and ecological impact of urbanisation, paleopathology and the natural history of disease, the historical ecology of colonialism, and the decline of ancient civilisations. After surveying the data that each of these fields produces, he concludes that our system of public belief is in need of radical revision if we are to survive as a species.<sup>11</sup>

The need for such revision is shared by climate change activists. With apocalyptic thinking from the left at times hardly different from the religious right, these activists prod the US and the global community on with a sense of missionary zeal to greater engagement. Scottish ethicist Michael Northcutt argues that human survival may be threatened, and before too long.<sup>12</sup> Among churches, the United Church of Christ (UCC) helped to bring to birth the movement which we now call the

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*Issues* (Washington, DC: The Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health, and Ethics, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Ian Barbour, 'Technology and Theology,' in *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 16, 1-2 (1996), 4-7. See additional issues of this journal which draws, in relation to each other, issues of technology and justice. See John B. Cobb, Jr, *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior of the USA, and the atmospheric scientist Michael McElroy, Harvard University, both offered sustained appeals for a deeper conversation between science and religion towards a deepened sense of ecological responsibility at the conference, 'Consumption, Population, and the Environment: Religion and Science Envision Equity for an Altered Creation,' sponsored by The Boston Theological Institute with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), 9th-11th November 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy C. Weiskel, 'Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Community,' in *The Schweitzer/Quinnipiac Journal*, 1: 2 (Fall/Winter 1994-1995), 44-54.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Northcutt, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).



environmental justice movement in 1987 when the UCC Commission for Racial Justice published its legendary study, *Toxic Waste and Race*.

Indeed, Ben Chavis and Charles Lee even coined the terms 'environmental racism' and 'environmental justice'. Almost from that moment, we have been asked why the church is involved in environmental racism. The answer is found in the book of Genesis. If we believe that God created the earth, then we must do everything we can to ensure that the earth, and all of its inhabitants, are protected.<sup>13</sup>

The array of factual data ends with questions of value. Bio-chemist Charles J. Puccia documents troubling issues of eco-justice embedded in the environmental debate. Physicist Ian Hutchinson points to different concerns relating to patterns of population ethics and over-consumption. In this light, Timothy C. Weiskel asks why, if we are aware of the crisis, are we unable to act more consistently and forthrightly? The ecological predicament draws attention to a division between facts and values in our culture as no other single issue does, one can argue, because of its holistic nature.<sup>14</sup>

### Holistic Thinking

The ecological challenge calls for holistic thinking that is missional in scope. The need for integrated thinking on a world-view that encompasses the best knowledge of the human community has been championed by an increasing number of persons.<sup>15</sup> A divide that once stood between the descriptive language of religion and of science is not what it once was. Like the polar ice-caps which we now acknowledge are diminishing, a thaw is occurring between the practitioners of these languages. Some years ago chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi began to show us one way to begin to bring the sciences into conversation with religion.<sup>16</sup> Despite their

<sup>13</sup> [http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy\\_url/421/almost-everything-you-need-to-know-about-environmental-justice-english-version.pdf?1418423801](http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/421/almost-everything-you-need-to-know-about-environmental-justice-english-version.pdf?1418423801) (accessed 10th February 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy C. Weiskel, 'Denying the Evidence: Science and the Human Prospect', chap. 4, in Conroy and Petersen, *Earth at Risk*, 107-31. C.P. Snow argued that one of the salient problems of our age is non-communication between the 'literary' culture and the 'scientific' culture, and that their fracture constitutes a grave social threat. See his *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look-An Expanded Version of the Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 557.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World* (New York: Penguin Plume Books, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Polanyi argues for a holistic approach to knowledge, understood tacitly or unknown, by looking simply at component parts, in *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), and *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1967). Parallel and additional

own scepticism in different directions, both astrophysicist Stephen Hawking and astronomer Robert Jastrow<sup>17</sup> have pointed to one another through recent developments in astrophysics.<sup>18</sup> Such discoveries as the Big Bang and contemporary debate over the nature of evolution have driven physicist Freeman Dyson to ask whether the universe knew we were coming.<sup>19</sup> Another physicist, Paul Davies, writes that science has advanced to the point where formerly religious questions now can be seriously tackled by scientists.<sup>20</sup>

While a thaw may be occurring in the face of pressing ecological issues, the question still remains about how these two languages are to relate to each other.<sup>21</sup> Ian Barbour suggests categories of conflict and independence which give way to dialogue and, perhaps, integration.<sup>22</sup> Preferring 'contact' and 'confirmation' to Barbour's latter two modes of interaction, dialogue and integration, theologian John F. Haught helpfully develops his typology in relation to a number of different scientific disciplines and issues. Arguing for 'consonance,' in a strong or weak sense whereby science and theology, if not in harmony, at least mark out a common domain of questions, Ted Peters argues that this perspective alone allows both science and theology to carry out a cross-disciplinary conversation within a common world of meaning.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, seeking a consonant voice in

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perspectives on the construction of reality is seen in Michael A. Arbib and Mary B. Hesse, *The Construction of Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Jastrow writes that although many astronomers would have preferred it otherwise, the big bang theory appears to support the biblical doctrine of creation, in *God and the Astronomers* (New York: Norton, 1992), 116. On theories of consonance, see Gerald L. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang* (New York: Bantam, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Theorising on the basis of the big bang, Stephen Hawking writes that while the universe might not be eternal, so also it might not have a clear temporal beginning, in *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 140-41.

<sup>19</sup> Freeman Dyson, *Infinite in All Directions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 298.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983); and *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> For example, a new openness to science is seen in Roman Catholicism. Since the Second Vatican Council, natural sciences were declared to be free from ecclesiastical authority, calling them autonomous disciplines. See the message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger and George V. Coyne, *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science in The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991* (Vol. I: San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1990), 3-30.

<sup>23</sup> Peters sees four 'dead ends' in the science and religion dialogue: (1) scientism (sometimes called secular humanism) which argues that science provides all the knowledge we need to know (2) ecclesiastical author-

ecology is a pressing issue today. The typologies of such people as Barbour, Haught or Peters help to map out the terrain.<sup>24</sup>

It is often clear enough today why science is important to religion. In fact, for some like physicist James Gleick, 'God's turf' now belongs 'not to the theologian, but to the scientist'.<sup>25</sup> A scientific explanation for events is so plausible that religion fails to provide the coherence which was once thought to be its function. For scientists like Carl Sagan, the effort to get the religious community involved with ecology has been to marshal only its moral energy but even here questions emerge for many about whether religion can provide an adequate basis for an ecological ethics.<sup>26</sup> Like a diffident lover, religious communities have been of two minds with respect to such wooing. For some, it is the world of dualistic (Cartesian) science, already wed to technology and market expansion which is the problem. This scientism has foisted upon the world a domineering anthropomorphism often blind to issues of eco-justice. The recovery of a non-dualistic religious vision is what is required. Others have come to the table but are unsure how their religious identity engages ecology, whether as signs of transcendence (symbolic instrumentalism) or as symbols embedded in religious forms of life (linguistic pragmatism).

Although there were always voices questioning the relationship between science and a narrowing mechanistic positivism, European and Anglo-American societies grew to accept its division of facts from values,

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itarianism, (3) scientific creationism, and (4) a 'two-language' theory whereby it is argued that science speaks with an objective and public language while religion speaks with an existential and personal language. He offers helpful criticism on each of these positions in Peters (ed), *Cosmos As Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 13-19. In his opinion, the dialogue between science and theology requires a deepening understanding of the theological implications of scientific knowledge around four themes: (1) a recognition that the world of nature is dynamic and changing, (2) the need for a doctrine of continuing creation (*creatio continua*) to complement the traditional idea of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), (3) the interpretation of Scripture in the light of current scientific knowledge, and (4) a sense of wonder and speculation about the place of humanity in the cosmos or God's creation.

<sup>24</sup> For further examples, see the work dedicated to the Society of Ordained Scientists by biochemist Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming-Natural and Divine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); also helpful is Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (New York: Random House, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> James Gleick, writing in the 4th January 1987 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, as cited in Ted Peters (ed), *Cosmos as Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 12.

<sup>26</sup> John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (New York: Scribner's, 1974), 184. Passmore argues that we will fail to deal adequately with our ecology so long as we believe we will be delivered from the effects of environmental degradation.

increasingly practised from the Enlightenment into the modern period. Writing with David Burne's epistemological scepticism in mind, Immanuel Kant's work and legacy was to put empirical knowledge on a firmer footing, but to the detriment of religious understanding, which was never satisfactory to Kant.<sup>27</sup> Although the 'real' God escapes knowledge, as Kant defines God in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781),<sup>28</sup> the idea of God is valuable for speculative thought in at least three ways: (1) the concept of God helps to distinguish between appearances and things-in-themselves; (2) it helps explain the mystery of intuition; and (3) it promotes scientific enquiry in that confidence in the intelligibility and unity of the world is assumed. While each of these three areas now has fallen subject to hermeneutical and cultural debate,<sup>29</sup> the criticism of those faulting science for fostering a spirit of detachment contributing to a collapse of European values appears tame today.

Besides, the wall of separation that once stood between the world of facts and that of values is being chipped away. Ethical questions are being framed by such new sciences as socio-biology, genetics, and the discoveries of astrophysics. The need to draw science more fully into the ethical and conceptual work of theology was underscored by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Philip Potter, in a keynote address at the Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future in 1979 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.<sup>30</sup> The emergence of fields like 'science studies,'

<sup>27</sup> Following the writing of *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant wrote his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) in which he discerned a 'felt' need for religion which results from a moral law. This moral functionalism became the basis for a moral theology of use in the world of values if not in that of facts. In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Kant admits no supernatural revelation but equates Christian theology with the religion of practical reason. A modern restatement of this might be seen in the systematic theology of Gordon Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), criticised for its 'residual Cartesianism'.

<sup>28</sup> On the basis of knowledge, defined by Kant in the *a priori* categories of understanding (reason), together with empirical data (experience), metaphysics is shown not to be a genuine science, and arguments for God's existence speculative.

<sup>29</sup> Concern for the rationality of science in the light of its current detractors can be seen in the Conference 'The Flight from Science and Reason,' sponsored by The New York Academy of Sciences, 31st May-2nd June 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Drawing upon ecumenical reflection back to the origins of the Life and Work Movement (Stockholm, 1925), Potter stresses the importance of the right use of technology in 'Science and Technology: Why Are the Churches Concerned?' in Roger L. Shinn (ed), *Faith and Science in an Unjust World: Report of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future* (Vol. I; Geneva: WCC, 1980), 21-29. An earlier expression of this concern is addressed in C.F. von Weizsacker, *The Relevance of Science: Creation and Cosmogony - Gifford Lectures, 1959-1960* (London: Collins,

grounding the 'language' of the sciences in a discipline like anthropology, has focused the attention of science on its embeddedness in larger cultural questions which involve religious understanding and practice.<sup>31</sup>

### History as a Matrix for Science and Religion

History rather than determinacy provides the matrix for holistic thinking. Such thinking takes up Weiskel's point about the importance of macro-history. History is the 'gate' for increased traffic for the dialogue between science and religion. Historical thinking holds out a role for each. This perspective reaches back to classic Roman Catholic and Thomist thinking, and to Reformed theology seen in the two oldest chairs at Harvard College, the Hollis Professorship of Divinity and that of Mathematics.

The ecological crisis pushes us to big history and to such larger perspectives. The language of facticity needs values, and a coherent ethic for the environment requires all the information that the sciences can muster. That such a dialogue is possible is the result of many startling discoveries about the nature of our world in the twentieth century. It also comes out of a different intellectual climate in the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge since the Second World War and mid-twentieth century.<sup>32</sup>

Wolfhart Pannenberg is one of a number of theologians who draws these issues together in the search for hypothetic consonance in the description of reality.<sup>33</sup> His theology is an example of how additional perspectives on the Seoul (Korea) World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly's affirmation 'Creation as Beloved of God' are opened up through a dialogue between science and religion.<sup>34</sup>

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1964). Von Weizsacker writes, 'Anyone neglecting to further his theoretical understanding of our complex world as much as he can, will in the long run do more harm than good in his practical efforts,' 9.

<sup>31</sup> John Horgan, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age* (Totnes, UK: Helix Books/Addison-Wesley, 1996); and compare Gerald Holton, *Science and Anti-Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Philosophers of meaning such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas have underscored the notion that all experience of meaning participates in the widest context of meaning. Pannenberg develops this point by arguing that God is the all-determining reality and is the hypothesis which explains most adequately the whole experience of reality.

<sup>33</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg and Ted Peters, *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). For further examples, see also Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Toulmin describes different paradigms through which Christian theology has worked in history in its effort to understand nature and its larger cosmology, in Frank T. Birtel (ed), 'Religion and the Idea of Nature,' in

Pannenberg finds the sciences drawn into a larger framework of intelligibility through the reflective discipline of theology.<sup>35</sup> He writes that increasing attention needs to be given to the relationship between natural laws and the contingency of individual events. Arguing in a way that parallels Polanyi's idea of tacit knowledge, Pannenberg finds that scientific formulas, in whichever discipline they may be developed, ignore their contexts. This leads to the mistaken conclusion that the actual course of events is determined by the laws of nature, whereas contingency gets ignored. Nature, Pannenberg argues, ought to be understood as historical and natural laws as the uniformities abstracted from contingent events.<sup>36</sup>

History rather than determinacy provides the 'gate' for increased traffic between science and religion, notes theologian Ted Peters, adding that this is a space in which both theologians and practitioners of the new sciences are at home. The very existence of the world, its conservation and its governance, are all aspects of this history. To talk about the contingent existence of the world is to raise the question of a creation in time, an idea which resonates with Christian theology (*creatio ex nihilo*). The word 'creation' implies derivation and attendant issues of value: Is purpose given or embedded in nature? Debate over the environment begins here.<sup>37</sup>

Uniform laws, as discerned in the flow of contingent events, raise the question of conservation, continuing signs of a Creator maintaining

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*Religion, Science, and Public Policy* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 67-78. In North America the following centres and foundation are among those helping to deepen the science-religion dialogue: The Templeton Foundation, The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (Berkeley), The Chicago Center for Religion and Science, The Center for Theological Inquiry, The Faith and Science Exchange (Boston Theological Institute), and The Institute for Religion in an Age of Science.

<sup>35</sup> In making his case for theology as a science in dialogue with natural sciences, Pannenberg offers a careful analysis of the ten *wissenschaften* and *geisteswissenschaften* in *Theology and the Philosophy* (trans. F. McDonagh; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 72, and more fully in his *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991). See also the early work of David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), and Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Society, 1958).

<sup>36</sup> See Pannenberg, 'God and Nature,' in Pannenberg and Peters, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, 50-71.

<sup>37</sup> Peters writes, 'To the theologian, the enduring forms of natural right along with single events appear as the contingent product of the activity of a free God.' See his introductory essay in *Toward a Theology of Nature*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 65-94. An understanding of critical realism as a place where a philosophy of science and theology might meet is given by W. van Huysteen in *Theology and the Justification of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), chap. 9; and in Banner, *The Justification of Science and the Rationality of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

regularity and predictability. Here Pannenberg's theology might stress the beloved aspect of the WCC Seoul Affirmation. Whether this is warranted or not draws theology into dialogue with the philosophy of science, concerning the extent to which reality can be personified. As theology pushes the question of a personal God, physicists like Freeman Dyson and Paul Davies find themselves driven to speculate about the implications of an anthropic principle, given the evolution of the universe as we know it. Such 'personalism,' a conclusion consonant with the two languages of science and theology, might offer renewed energy for scientific discovery and the stewardship of earth's resources.<sup>38</sup>

Care for creation involves governance. It evokes the question of how the Creator, and perhaps humanity as well, participate in the management of nature. Pannenberg implies by the providential activity wherein God aims to accomplish God's tasks, not a *telos* or entelechy, but that nature itself is to find its own fulfillment.<sup>39</sup> This idea relates to the point raised earlier by the Australian biologist Charles Birch who, drawing from Alfred North Whitehead, finds in process theology the conceptual tools for a theology of nature. However, governance may also imply resistance.

The idea of resistance reminds us that in Christian theology creation is not an extension or emanation of God. It is an object of God's love, free to depart from or participate in God's purposes.<sup>40</sup> The arena for this drama is history. If history is the 'gate' through which science and religion meet, we are drawn into an evolving drama which includes conversation with all peoples of living faith. This is ecological missionary activity. It mandates the best of our science and religious understanding by persons of all faith perspectives. The fact that the environment is so challenged may be an

<sup>38</sup> Davies writes that the success of mathematics in describing nature points to a deep link between the human mind and the organisation of the world, in *The Mind of God*, 140-60; For what is meant by 'God,' see Alister Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 1. See also John Barrow and Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), and compare John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation* (London: SPCK, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Ted Peters, whom I am following here, contrasts this with the medieval (Thomas Aquinas) purpose of the *visio Dei* whereby God in God's self is goal, or with scholastic Protestantism which finds the praise of God as the chief end of creation. Both ideas proximate concepts of divine narcissism in Peters' view, in *Toward a Theology of Nature*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Many different ways have been developed to express this. Perhaps the most graphic is the idea of 'the Omega Point,' as developed by Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Other models of God's interaction with the world are presented in Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 135-83; for preaching, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 41-71.



engine towards a deeper understanding of human community arising in this historical era. It can elicit profound compassion for all we are losing.

### The Ecological Challenge

The ecological challenge is pushing public revelation synchronous with the mandate for Creation care in special revelation. The missional message from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (May 2011) of the World Council of Churches respecting Peace with the Earth is that:

The environmental crisis is profoundly an ethical and spiritual crisis of humanity. Recognizing the damage human activity has done to the Earth, we reaffirm our commitment to the integrity of creation and the daily lifestyle it demands. Our concern for the Earth and our concern for humanity go hand in hand. Natural resources and common goods such as water must be shared in a just and sustainable manner. We join global civil society in urging governments to reconstruct radically all our economic activities towards the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy.<sup>41</sup>

Human failure to foster Earth care is as much a social disease as other areas of injustice. As disciples discover the courage to be the body of Christ and ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’ (Col. 1:9) in the world, they also become, as environmental researcher Calvin DeWitt challenges, ‘stewards of the earth’ (Gen. 2:15). This phrase reaches back to Benedictine monastic life, epitomised in the phrase ‘prayer and work’ (*ora et labor*).

Creation care is our oldest challenge. Creation, too, is recipient of God’s mission as the whole cosmos looks for liberation to be what it was meant to be (Rom. 8:18-21). Personal and social salvations are aspects of a deeper ecological healing that is required of us and of our world. DeWitt draws attention to the interplay between the Biosphere and Missiology as he places importance upon putting our contemporary scientific understanding of the world into interactive relationship with missiology.<sup>42</sup> This is what the just peacemaking practice of Just and Sustainable economic development is pointing to for all creation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See the *Just Peace Companion* (Geneva: WCC, 2011); *The Message of the Convocation*:

[www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.htm](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.htm) (accessed 20th March 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Calvin DeWitt, ‘Contemporary Missiology and the Biosphere,’ in Daniel Jeyaraj, Robert W. Pazmiño and Rodney Petersen (eds), *Antioch Agenda: Essays on the Restorative Church in Honor of Orlando E. Costas* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 305-28.

<sup>43</sup> See the study of the World Council of Churches, ‘Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation’ (JPIC), and reflection on the term ‘creation,’ in Conroy and Petersen, *Earth at Risk*.



### Resources

- Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science, The Gifford Lectures, 1989-1991* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1990).
- Marthinus Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).
- Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Resources, 2011).
- John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995).
- Michael Northcutt, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

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# THE *IMAGO DEI* AND THE *MISSIO DEI*: CARING FOR CREATION IN THE FACE OF AFRICAN POVERTY

Hermann Mvula

## Introduction

The recurring and mounting problems of soil, air and water pollution, environmental degradation, land grabbing, landlessness and deforestation are all issues of Christian mission.<sup>1</sup> As humans, and as Christians in particular, we need to heed what Reformed theologians call ‘the Cultural Mandate’<sup>2</sup> – that is, our responsibility to God’s creation. The Creator expects us to respond positively to this mandate because it is our mission on Earth. But how can we uphold this mandate in the face of life-threatening poverty, which affects the majority of the Earth’s population?

Poverty has been a long-time life-threatening phenomenon. Although there is no single agreed definition of poverty, it signifies insufficiency of means to meet basic human needs.<sup>3</sup> In *Walking with the Poor*, Bryant Myers defines poverty as ‘the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support’.<sup>4</sup> Since poverty is associated with the lack of financial resources, Myers argues that it leads to chronic inadequacy of various basic needs such as nutrition, rest, warmth and bodily care. But Myers also argues that ‘poverty constitutes lack of access to social power or to be socially and economically disempowered’.<sup>5</sup>

Despite governments’ and non-governmental organisations’ attempts to address poverty, little has changed – as evidenced by millions of people suffering chronic deprivation. Recent estimates show that nearly half the world’s population lives on less than a dollar a day. Africa is the world’s second largest continent, and despite being rich in natural resources, the continent lags behind all other continents in human development. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, more than 218 million people live in extreme

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<sup>1</sup> On the issue of physical problems on the planet Earth, see George B. Johnson, *Essentials of the Living World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough discussion on the cultural/creation mandate, see Erickson Millard, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 510.

<sup>3</sup> See Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Manila: OMF Literature, 2006), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 66.

poverty.<sup>6</sup> Africa's poverty is accompanied by ecological degradation, which is threatening the future of the continent. Amidst poverty and ecological degradation, the number of Christians continues to grow – with missiologists concluding that the centre of gravity for Christianity is now in Africa.

However, ecological problems are not limited to Africa. Across the globe, economic disparities between the rich and the poor are rising sharply. Fewer people are becoming increasingly wealthy, while a disproportionately large population is becoming even poorer.<sup>7</sup> This situation raises one important question – how can the poor, apparently the majority of the earth's population, help to heal the Earth? Put missiologically, do the poor have anything at all to contribute to caring for God's creation? If Christian mission is human response to God's mission, then all God's people – rich and poor, are invited to participate in the mission of Earth care.

This chapter discusses the missiological implications of Earth care in the face of poverty, beginning with the concept of the *imago Dei*, followed by the theological and ethical foundations for Earth care. It then explores the issue of loving and caring for creation in the midst of poverty, and concludes with general remarks on Earth care.

### The Nature of the Image of God in Humanity

This chapter advances the hypothesis that the Christian mission of Earth care is based on the proper understanding of what constitutes the *imago Dei* in humanity. This is because God bestowed on humanity certain capabilities and obligations, and among them, Earth care. Arguably, the *imago Dei* enables all humans, regardless of their economic status – poor or rich – to be faithful stewards of God's creation.

The nature of the image of God in humanity has implication for the theology of Earth care. The Genesis creation accounts allude to this theological truth. In both these creation accounts, the history of the universe begins with God. Genesis 1, for example, reveals that God spoke creation into being. Then God created humans, male and female, in God's own image and told them to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1: 24-26). Genesis 2, however, moves beyond this argument since human beings are more than simply living beings – they have a divine mission 'to work the earth and take care of it' (Gen. 2:15).

As repeatedly noted in this volume, these first two chapters of the book of Genesis establish the requirements for Christian ecological mission in

<sup>6</sup> See Report of the Commission for Africa (2005), 101. Social Development and Poverty in Nigeria: [www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/resources/downloads/wp\\_Nigeria/wp\\_Nigeria\\_socdev.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/wp_Nigeria/wp_Nigeria_socdev.pdf) (accessed 8th September 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 65. See also Suzanne Williams and Adelina Mwau, *The Oxford Gender Training Manual* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1994).

the world. As divine images, humans are responsible stewards, gardeners and servants of God's creation. Arguably, the call to reproduction and fruitfulness should be understood from the Creator's intent, who expects us to care for and love nature as God's sacred garden.

Against this backdrop, it is necessary to understand what constitutes the image of God in humanity. Throughout Church history, theologians have attempted to define the meaning of the *imago Dei*. Apart from differentiating 'likeness' from the 'image,' scholars argued that the *imago Dei* was a divine gift added to the basic human nature. Whereas the likeness consisted of the moral qualities of God, so they maintain, the *imago Dei* consisted of the natural attributes of God.<sup>8</sup>

Specifically, in medieval scholasticism, for example, the *imago Dei* was understood to be humanity's natural resemblance to God, the power of reason, and will. During the Reformation, however, Martin Luther argued that *the image and the likeness* of God in Genesis 1:26 did not have separate referents. Rather, this was simply an instance of the common Hebrew practice of parallelism. The phrases 'in our image' and 'after our likeness,' Luther argues, are 'saying the same thing. The only difference is the terminology. Consequently, there is no distinction between image and likeness either before or after the Fall'.<sup>9</sup> Millard Erickson, however, identifies three distinct ways of understanding the *imago Dei* – the substantive, the relational and the functional view.<sup>10</sup>

The substantive view, so Millard argues, 'has been dominant during most of the history of Christian theology'.<sup>11</sup> He writes:

The common element in the several varieties of this [substantive] view is that the image of God in humans is identified as some definite characteristic of quality within the make-up of the human. Some have considered the image of God to be an aspect of our physical or bodily make-up. The more common substantive views of the image of God isolate it in terms of some psychological or spiritual quality in human nature.<sup>12</sup>

This view emphasises reason as the unique feature in humans which distinguishes them from other creatures. According to this view, humanity 'is classified biologically as *homo sapiens*, i.e. the thinking being'.<sup>13</sup> This is because *reason* distinguishes humans from non-human creatures.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the Relational View according to Millard does not ordinarily ask 'what man is, or what sort of a nature he may have'. Rather, the image of God is found in relationships. Humanity is said to be in the image or to

<sup>8</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 498ff.

<sup>9</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 498.

<sup>10</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 501.

<sup>11</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 498.

<sup>12</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 499.

<sup>13</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 499. Also David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 58-69.

<sup>14</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 499. See also Cairns, *The Image of God*, 58-69.

display the image of God when the person is in a particular relationship. According to this view, 'the relationship is the image' of God.<sup>15</sup> Theologians like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth were among some of the modern theologians to advocate this view.<sup>16</sup>

H. Ray Dunning also supports this relational perspective. In his book *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective*,<sup>17</sup> Dunning defines the *imago Dei* as humanity in relationship to God, humanity in relationship to others, humanity in relationship to the Earth, and finally, humanity's relationship to self. Concerning humans' relationship to the Earth, Dunning argues:

The responsible oversight of the environment is part of God's creative intention for the human race. Much attention has been given to this, especially since the 1960s, because of evidence that exploiting the earth for our own gratification is resulting in environmental deterioration that, if not checked, will eventually cause the annihilation of life on the earth. These concerns militate against a type of other-worldly spirituality that is so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly use. Seen in terms of the holistic vision of biblical theology, recycling non-renewable resources is being just as spiritual as attending a prayer meeting, although of course not a substitute.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, our ability to hold various relationships with self, others, the natural world and the Creator constitutes the *imago Dei*. According to Kaoma, Africans were always aware of their relationship to the Supreme Being, to other human beings, the ancestors, and the natural world. To be human means to be in active relationship with all life forces of the universe. This view is akin to what Kapya Kaoma calls 'the ethics of interconnectedness' or *ubuntu*.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the Functional View of the *imago Dei* has had a long history, and has recently resurfaced in scholarly debates.<sup>20</sup> According to Millard,

This is the idea that the image is not something present in the make-up of man, nor is it the experiencing of relationship with God or with fellow man. Rather, the image consists in something man *does*. It is a function which man performs, the most frequently mentioned being the exercise of dominion over creation. In the functional view, little attention is given to the content of the image of God.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 502.

<sup>16</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 502-503.

<sup>17</sup> H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 508.

<sup>21</sup> Millard, *Christian Theology*, 508; see also G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 70.

Herein, much attention is given to the function of humanity on Earth. This argument seems to find support in Genesis 1:26: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,' which is immediately followed by 'and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'. Psalm 8:5-6 is another passage employed to support this view: 'You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.'

Biblical scholars are generally agreed that Psalm 8 is largely dependent on Genesis 1.<sup>22</sup> Apart from the catalogue of creatures in Psalm 8:7-8 (beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fish of the sea), verse 5 points to the statement in Genesis 1 that humans are God's 'image bearer'. Sigmund Mowinckel pushes this point further when he argues that the godlikeness of human beings in Psalm 8 'consists above all in power over all the other things, in honour and glory compared to them'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Norman Snaith writes, 'Biblically speaking, the phrase "image of God" has nothing to do with morals or any sort of ideals; it refers only to man's dominion of the world and everything that is in it. It says nothing about the nature of God, but everything concerning the *function* of man.'<sup>24</sup>

This view is extensively explored by Leonard Verduin's in *Somewhat Less than God: The Biblical View of Man*. Verduin writes:

the idea of 'dominion-having' stands out as the central feature. That man is a creature meant for 'dominion-having' and that as such he is in the image of his Maker – this is the burden of the creation account in the book of Genesis, the Book of Origins. It is the central point the writer of this account wanted to make.<sup>25</sup>

While this interpretation can be taken as sanctioning the exploitation of creation, John Oswalt concludes that, whereas humans 'are understood to be the very highest order of God's creation,' they were meant 'to be lords and ladies of creation, *functioning in obedient partnership with God*. Humans have real freedom to make genuine choices, and they are held accountable for the effects of their choices'.<sup>26</sup> It is only as God's image and in radical obedience to God's Word that human beings can exercise

<sup>22</sup> For example, Norman Snaith, 'The Image of God,' in *Expository Times* 86, 1 (October 1974), 24. Quoted in Millard, *Christian Theology*, 508.

<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Vol. I) (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Snaith, *The Image of God*, 24. While I like Snaith's articulation, I do not agree with him when he says that this quality does not have any *moral* or *ethical* connotation.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 27.

<sup>26</sup> John Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 10-16. Italics mine.

divinely legitimate rule. As various essays in this volume reveal, humans were meant to be *responsible masters* of the world and not *irresponsible monsters* of the Earth.

Walther Eichrodt seems to support this very view. Commenting on Genesis 1:26-28, Eichrodt argues, 'The Hebrew terms *kavash* and *radah* carry the meaning that man was to exercise a rule over the whole of creation similar to the rule which in later times the Hebrew kings were expected to exercise over their people. The kings were not to rule for their own sake, but for the welfare of the subjects.'<sup>27</sup> Eichrodt continues, 'It was God's will, then, that man tend and rule creation in such a way that it would come to realise its full potential; man was not to exploit it for his own purposes.'<sup>28</sup>

### Theological Implication of the *Imago Dei*

What are the implications of these views on human relationships with the entire created order? While these views emphasise one over the other, there is a need to hold them together. The *imago Dei* is not limited to substantive, relational and functional roles, but it includes all the above.

By holding them together, we can deduce that the essence of the image of God involves human knowledge, relationship and responsibilities to God, one another, and the created order. Hence, caring for the Earth is not optional but mandatory for all God's people. By creating humans in God's own image, the Creator transferred divine nature and abilities to humans to carry out certain responsibilities in the world on God's behalf. Humans were to rule over other earthly creatures as God's representatives – imitating God's justice, love and care for whole creation, or what has come to be known as eco-justice.<sup>29</sup>

Besides, the *imago Dei* in humanity implies that humans were created as moral beings with ethical obligations to undertake on Earth. Humans are to exercise their God-given mental and intellectual abilities to care for God's Earth. This means that the Genesis creation accounts should be the basis for all that we do when it comes to how we function and relate as God's sacred beings – created to take care of God's Earth.

Many African cultures share this perspective. The natural world is a gift from God and the ancestors. For instance, writing from an African perspective, Assohoto Barnabe argues that 'Genesis 1:26c, 28b is our mission on earth, which was not a heavy burden but a gift from God. Human beings were to occupy and enjoy, not fear creation. This mission indicates that the first way in which all of us can glorify and serve God is

<sup>27</sup> See Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Vol. I; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961), 92.

<sup>28</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 92.

<sup>29</sup> See also Norman Faramelli in this volume.

by caring for his creation'.<sup>30</sup> If Creation care is another way of serving and glorifying God, then how we related to Earth can be instructive for Christian mission. Africans always understood their role on Earth as that of trustees whose existence depended on respecting the natural world as the abode of sacred beings. By relating to the earth with respect, Africans served the Supreme Being and other spiritual forces resident in nature.

But is the image of God limited to humanity? While it is tempting to limit God's image to the human species, the sacralisation of the natural world suggests that the *imago Dei* extends to the entire created order. If the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Ps. 19:1), and 'the whole earth is full of his glory,' then God's image is equally reflected in Creation. This means that the threefold nature of the *imago Dei* includes the ecological view, which links humans to the Earth community.

### Theological Foundations of Caring for God's Creation

The missiology of Earth care is not a human idea or invention – it is God's initiative. In addition to being created from the dust of the Earth (*adamah*), Genesis 2:15 defines human duty to Creation: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden *to tend and keep it*'. While the two accounts seem contradictory as to humanity's role on Earth, clearly, these biblical accounts pronounce what Kaoma calls 'the first *missio* of Earth care'. Kaoma writes, 'The missiological, ethical and theological task of Earth-keeping was first pronounced in the creation accounts when God invited us to take part in the *missio* of Earth care.'<sup>31</sup>

The theological motif of this biblical foundation is that God owns everything, and biblical witness testifies to this very truth: 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters' (Psalm 24:1-2). Psalm 89: 11 says, 'The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded *the world and all* that is in it.' Psalm 50: 9-12 reads:

I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for *every animal of the forest is mine*, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the *creatures of the field are mine*. If I were hungry I would not tell you, *for the whole world is mine, and all that is in it*.

God is the sole Creator, Sustainer, Possessor and the ultimate Benefactor of the whole Universe and everything therein. The Christian Bible equally

<sup>30</sup> Assohoto Barnabe, 'Genesis,' in Tokunboh Adeyemo, Solomon Andria, Kwame Bediako, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Yusufu Turaki (eds), *Africa Bible Commentary: A One Volume Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, 'Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission: Joys, Issues and Challenges,' in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (November 2014), 112-227, 126.



testifies to this theological truth. The apostle Paul, for example, affirms God's ownership of everything in 1 Corinthians 10:25-26 when he says, 'For the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.'

The narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 provide two complementary aspects of Creation in relation to God and humans. On the one hand, God as Creator is Lord and ultimate owner of all created things. On the other, God has given the earth to humans as God's trustees on Earth. As Christopher Wright asserts, partially, 'the implied purpose of making humans in his image was so that humans would be capable of being entrusted with dominion over the rest of the created order'.<sup>32</sup>

Within the context of Divine ownership of Creation, the conferred dominion over the earth is subordinate to God's dominion – departing from it is sinful. As humans – rich or poor – we are created to care for all Creation. So, although we may claim to have authority over God's Creation, we have the mandated responsibility of guarding God's Earth against deterioration.

### The Ethical Foundation for Earth Care

The destruction of the Earth hurt the poor the most. In recent decades, the world has witnessed serious environmental issues: pollution, land degradation, habitat destruction and climate change, among many others. But most of these issues are human-made; hence they can be reversed if there is global human will. As Richard Schaefer argues, the global North's exploitation of the Global South –

... only intensifies the destruction of natural resources in poorer regions of the world. From a conflict perspective, less affluent nations are being forced to exploit their mineral deposits, forests, and fisheries in order to meet their debt obligations. The poor turn to the only means of survival available to them: they plow mountain slopes, burn plots in tropical forests, and overgraze grasslands.<sup>33</sup>

On the scope of devastation of the natural environment, Schaefer cites Brazil which exemplifies this interplay between economic troubles and environmental destruction. Quoting the *National Geographic*, Schaefer writes:

Each year more than 5.7 million acres of forest are cleared for crops and livestock. The elimination of the rain forest affects worldwide weather patterns, heightening the gradual warming of the earth. These socio-economic

<sup>32</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God: the Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 68.

<sup>33</sup> Richard T. Schaefer, *Sociology: A Brief Introduction* (sixth edition) (New York: MacGraw Hill, 2006), 381.

patterns, with harmful environmental consequences are evident not only in Latin America but in many regions of Africa and Asia.<sup>34</sup>

However, the ecological crisis knows no economic status. Riley Dunlap, for example, suggests three basic functions of the natural world – it provides the resources essential for life; it serves as a waste repository; and finally, it ‘houses’ all living species.<sup>35</sup> By destroying the Earth, therefore, we are killing ourselves, and ultimately all life on planet Earth. This begs the question: Who is to blame for the mounting environmental crisis between the poverty-stricken global South populations, and the affluent, materialistic, industrialised global North? The answer is simple – we all bear some responsibility and we all have a part to play in healing the Earth.

As God’s image-bearers, we all have the responsibility to act justly towards God’s Creation. William Gibson writes: ‘Justice to human beings is inseparable from right relationships with and within the natural order. Eco-justice includes social and economic justice and by combining it with ecological awareness and appreciation, profoundly affects the way it is to be achieved. Eco-justice means justice to all of God’s creation.’<sup>36</sup> Regardless, humanity can only ‘subdue nature,’ so Francis Bacon notes, ‘by submitting to it’.<sup>37</sup> This submission calls for the recognition of the natural rights of all Creation.

Moreover, both the Hebrew and Christian biblical traditions explicitly address the value of Creation. Geisler asserts, ‘the destruction of nature is an offence to God because He is the One who ordained the laws for the good of the entire creation.’<sup>38</sup> He adds,

If man destroys himself from the environment, the environment will remain in one form or another. Men were made to be keepers of the earth. If man mismanages this world long enough, he will destroy himself but the world will remain. Ultimately, the sin is not really against the world; it is against persons who would live in it and against God who made the world both as the revelation of Himself and for the good of man.<sup>39</sup>

This is another reason why we should take seriously the mission of Earth care – our moral responsibility to one another and to future generations – ‘we do not inherit this world from our parents, we borrow it from our

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<sup>34</sup> Schaefer, *Sociology*, 318. See also Richard T. Schaefer, *Sociology Matters* (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2013), 294. See also ‘A World Transformed,’ in *National Geographic* (September 2002).

<sup>35</sup> See Riley E. Dunlap, William Michelson and Glenn Stalker, *Environmental Sociology: An Introduction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 1-32.

<sup>36</sup> Gibson E. William, *Eco-Justice – The Unfinished Journey* (New York, State University of New York Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Norman Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 256-57.

<sup>39</sup> Geisler, *Ethics*, 259.

children'. As Geisler warns, the extermination of all life on planet Earth 'will occur unless the course is reversed'.<sup>40</sup>

No doubt Creation care involves making hard choices and answering hard questions. We have the responsibility of meeting the needs of the poor here on Earth – but not at the expense of the Earth's well-being. In Schaefer's words, 'government policy-makers and environmentalists [and all humanity] must determine how they can fulfil human societies' pressing needs, while at the same time preserving the environment as a source of resources, a waste repository, and our home'.<sup>41</sup> In other words, *we keep the Earth, the Earth keeps us; we mess up the Earth, the Earth messes us up*. If we cut down trees unnecessarily, we invite soil erosion, floods, droughts and desertification. If we do not conserve water, we will not only kill other biota but also ourselves – our lives depend on water. This means that embedded within the ethical/moral foundations of caring for the Earth are consequential reasons.

### Loving Creation in the Midst of Poverty

One of the critical questions is: Is Africa's poverty the reason for destroying the earth? Implied in the above discussions is the argument that humans are capable of caring for creation despite their poor status – for this is a divine mandate embedded in each one of us. In missiological terms, the church of God is invited to participate in God's mission on Earth. The invitation is not just to rich Christians, but to the poor as well. Although involuntary poverty may compromise one's judgment, the church has many moral, theological and spiritual reasons for inviting all God's people to participate in the *missio* of Earth care.

For example, at the time when Christianity in Africa is rapidly growing, the African continent is losing forests at an alarming rate. In Zambia and Malawi, millions of poor urban dwellers depend on charcoal for their cooking and heating needs. This charcoal is produced by cutting down hundreds of thousands of indigenous trees that take many years to grow. Sadly, areas which were once heavily forested are quickly becoming bare. This practice is mainly done by poor people who fell trees for a living. In Africa as elsewhere, poverty follows environmental destruction, and environmental degradation follows poverty.

In addition to charcoal burning, some areas of Zambia still engage in the *Chitemene* form of agriculture – also known as 'shifting cultivation'. Traditionally, this method involved pruning small branches from mature trees. Kaoma explains:

<sup>40</sup> Geisler, *Ethics*, 257. Italics mine. See also Carl H. Reidel, 'Christianity and the Environmental Crisis,' in *Christianity Today* XV (15, 23rd April 1971), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Schaefer, *Sociology*, 358.

The Bemba people practiced the *chitemene* system of agriculture – the form of farming whereby tree branches are cut and later burnt (the ashes act as fertilizer). While this system has been blamed for deforestation, in traditional life, Bembas never cut down trees. The community knew that trees take a long time to grow, so they practiced the system known as *ukusaila*, whereby men would climb trees and only prune small branches – small enough to be carried. The gathering of these branches is known as *ukusenda ifibula* (literally: carrying leaves) as opposed to *ukusenda ifimuti* (carrying trees). In most cases, new branches would grow back within two to three years before they can be cut again.<sup>42</sup>

Today, people do not prune trees, but cut down massive hectares of trees – exposing the land to soil erosion and deforestation. Because rural communities depend on the land, land degradation intensifies poverty. It is within this context that the church is invited to participate in the *missio Dei*. So how can the church help avert this life-threatening crisis?

Regardless of their economic situation, Christians in Africa ought to use their numerical strength to care for God's creation. To start with, there is a need to seriously inculcate an Earth-caring ethos or spirituality in all believers. The church ought to encourage Earth-healing activities such as reforestation and land reclamation. As Geisler notes, humanity 'wants much of nature but is not willing to put a little back into it. Men cut down forests but often leave wastelands behind them'.<sup>43</sup> To address this shortsightedness, we need to be 'earthtenders'. By participating in Earth-healing initiatives, the poor can become Earthtenders – after all, they are close to the Earth.

Another area which has to be looked at critically is population growth and its impact on agriculture and the environment. Due to population explosion in most African countries and exploitation, land has become a scarce commodity. People are forced to settle on hillsides and mountainsides, as well as farming in those areas – areas which were traditionally reserved for natural vegetation or exotic forestation. This scenario is most visible in Malawi, especially Zomba, Blantyre, Ntcheu and Dedza districts. As elsewhere, population growth has accelerated high poverty levels in Malawi and negatively impacted the natural environment.

The church should engage African governments on issues of poverty alleviation and population control. It is not enough for governments to confiscate or prohibit charcoal production: governments must endeavour to provide alternatives. For instance, governments can encourage the planting of trees that mature in five to fifteen years which can be used for firewood. Governments must also commit to provide cheap electricity to the poor as well as employment to both young and older people who depend on charcoal production for their livelihoods. Eco-justice demands that

<sup>42</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, *The Creator's Symphony. African Christianity, the Plight of Earth and the Poor* (Dorpspruit, RSA: Cluster Publications, 2015), 116.

<sup>43</sup> Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues*, 254-55. Parentheses added.

governments in partnership with religious leaders tackle the root causes of the mounting ecological crisis rather than its symptoms.

### Concluding Remarks

The cultural mandate implies moral responsibility for the good of the whole creation. Because God invites us to the mission of Earth care, we all have an ethical role to play in this world. Despite human-promoted ownership of the Earth, creation belongs to God. As God's creatures, made in God's image, caring for the Earth is our divinely-sanctioned missionary duty. Despite our economic status, we are to keep, preserve and protect God's creation.

If we care for the natural world, we shall reap and enjoy the blessings that God has provided through the Earth. If we do not, however, we and future generations of life will suffer the wrath of the natural world! As participants in God's mission, we must acknowledge God's ownership of all things – inanimate and animate, visible and invisible on one hand, and our duty to care for the whole creation on the other.

Finally, we are God's *image-bearers*, regardless of our economic status; hence we should mirror God the Creator in loving and caring for Creation. Human life and well-being depend on the flourishing of other life-supporting ecosystems that God ordained. To love and serve nature is a divine commission to humanity on Earth – we can do no less.

### Resources

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- Kapya J. Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series Publications, 2013).
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# OUR GOD IS GREEN: A BIBLICAL MISSION THEOLOGY OF EARTH CARE

Tim Carriker

The theology of Earth care can easily be misconstrued as peripheral to Christian theology and mission. Judging by the studies in systematic or dogmatic theology, enquiries dedicated to Earth care are, at most, sparse. In fact, this is one of the greatest challenges of developing a theology and, to some extent, the Christian mission of Earth care.<sup>1</sup> Yet, once studied from the ecological perspective, the Bible provides all the theological insights necessary for Earth care. In this chapter, I explore the key biblical insights that speak to Earth care and their theological significance. As other scholars have shown in this volume, amidst the ecological crisis, we need to re-read the Bible from the Earth's perspective. Since the Bible is generally held as the foundation of mission, it is critical that we examine what this sacred document has to say about Earth care.

It is tempting to read the Bible from the anthropocentric perspective. For instance, based on a reading of the Scriptures in canonical sequence, it is possible to focus only on God's people vis-à-vis their relation to God and to the wider human society, and on God's intention to bring about redemption and justice to human society. Such a reading, however, is misleading. The wider context of the biblical narrative, one can safely argue, is God's overarching intention to redeem all creation that was emphatically declared 'very good'.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from showing the source of Creation, biblical stories of creation and the new creation dominate not only the beginning<sup>3</sup> and end<sup>4</sup> of this mega-story of God's grand plan, but are highlighted abundantly in the middle<sup>5</sup> and repeated throughout<sup>6</sup> the Bible. Rivers, mountains, trees, animals, land and rain are among the many ecological themes that the Bible addresses. To some extent, the God of the Bible is the Green God – who

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<sup>1</sup> See Kirsteen Kim, 'Mission in the Twenty-First Century,' in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010. Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford, Regnum, 2011), 353-54.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:12, 21, 25, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Many psalms, including 24:1; 50:10-11; 93; 96:11-12; 104; 145:10; 148:1-13; 150:6.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 40-45; Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-20.

creates and recreates the Earth and all its inhabitants. Sadly, God's overarching concern for Creation is not sufficiently accounted for in much systematic theology. Whenever the natural world is addressed, it is usually within the context of human beings. As evidence mounts on the human destruction of Creation, this is beginning to change. Scholars of various Christian traditions are seeking to arrest the current ecological crisis, which threatens the Earth and life as a whole.<sup>7</sup> This chapter seeks to contribute to the biblical theology of Creation – thereby contributing to the emerging dialogue on Christianity and Creation.

The theological basis of this contribution springs from the theological conviction that God, the Creator of all that exists, has unconditional love for the world (Ps. 145:9). It is not surprising that we humans tend to think of our own population when we read of God's love for the 'all the world' or even the 'whole Creation'.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the Bible frequently and explicitly makes it clear that God's unbreakable covenant is not only with Noah's descendants, but also with all life on Earth (Gen. 9). Besides, the eschatological picture painted of the new Creation in the book of Revelation is fully inhabited with representatives not only from every tribe, nation and people, but with the animal and plant 'worlds' as well.<sup>9</sup>

The popular eschatological view of Paradise as a heavenly realm inhabited exclusively by angelic beings and far removed from the Earth is not remotely related to the biblical understanding of the new Creation that comes *down* from heaven and finds expression here on earth.<sup>10</sup> From the biblical perspective, the heavens and Earth meet in God, who is their source and whose glory they reflect. For instance, God's new Creation, just like the 'first' Creation, will be the work of God's own hands. This observation does not suggest that human beings have no role in God's grand plan for Creation – they do. From the *beginning* to the *very end*, human beings are expected to live in nature, to guard nature and to ensure that the natural world is a safe home to all God's creatures.

Because planet Earth is home to all God's living creatures, God entrusted the human race with the care for Creation (Gen. 1:26 and 2:15, 19). This first mandate is given to all humankind, regardless of religious affiliation or economic status, as Hermann Mvula argues in this volume.

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<sup>7</sup> See Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the paradigm shift in the ministry of Paul Yonggi Cho and the largest church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church, reported by Lee Young-Hoon, in his 'Christian Spirituality and the Diakonic Mission of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,' in Kim and Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010*, 96-97.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 5:13; Ephesians 1:10; Isaiah 11:6-9 and 34:16-17. See also the statement by Kapyia John Kaoma, in 'Missio Dei or Missio Creatoris Dei? Witnessing To Christ in the Face of the Current Ecological Crisis,' in Kim and Anderson (eds), *Edinburgh 2010*, 297.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 21:2-8.

The Christian Scriptures attest to the special role for the people of God on Earth. Reformed theology calls this task the ‘cultural mandate,’ that is, a mandate to produce human civilisation. The better name for this mandate should be the ‘creation mandate’ since it points to human duty to ensure the flourishing of all creatures – human and non-human. Of particular interest are the theological and missional implications of the ‘mandate’ on Christian responsibility and action for Earth care.

Besides the location of this ‘mandate’ at the *beginning* and *closing* of Scripture, God’s concern for creation and human responsibility to Creation are also highlighted in the *middle* of the biblical narrative of salvation. Although God’s concern for Creation is often underestimated or neglected, a careful reading of the Bible, even those apocalyptic passages usually judged as pessimistic, reveals God’s unwavering love for the Earth as well as an optimistic end for the same. It includes a conviction that history moves in the direction of the new heaven and the new earth – recreated by God. Just as God cares for Creation in the book of Genesis, the same can be said for the interconnectedness of the eschatological redemption of humanity and Earth in Roman 8:18-25 and Revelation 21:1-4. If the thesis of ecological interconnectedness is varied, then the task before us is not that of blowing the whistle on ecological degradation, but of developing an adequate epistemology of Earth care as an overarching salvific plot of Scriptural revelation. It is to this plot that we now turn.

### **From the Beginning – Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15**

In order to develop a biblical theology of Creation, it is important to address the biblical source of Creation. Unlike other ancient Near East religions that attributed divinity to certain elements of the created order, Genesis attributes everything that exists to God. It is God who created the heaven, the Earth and the galaxies. And just as the sun, the moon and the stars are not divine but the product of God’s creative love, so are humans and non-humans. It is to this story that Genesis 1 and 2 point – God is the Creator of all that exists. In God’s own mission of creation, humanity is invited into God’s grand plan for this world – to provide ethical protection of God’s Earth. As we shall see below, it is from this perspective that Genesis 1:26-28 ought to be understood. If the cosmos reveals divine glory and the Creator is present in Creation, then God never abandoned the Earth to humanity. The doctrine of dominion does not sanction abusing that which God created – rather it must be understood as an invitation to Earth care (Gen. 2:15).

Besides, the book of Genesis presents two distinct but related accounts of the creation. While Genesis 2:4-25 is understood as the second account of creation, it is not sequential but parallel to Genesis 1:1-2:3. As such,



these two accounts ought to interpret one another.<sup>11</sup> The role of humankind expounded in Genesis 2 clarifies and advances the role of humanity in the preceding account.

In Genesis 1 and 2, God is the subject of nearly every verb. We read especially: 'God created,' 'God made'; 'God said' or 'God called'; and 'God blessed' or 'God saw... it was good' – and, of course, 'very good'. The narratives highlight not only God's uniqueness, initiative and sovereignty over the whole process of creation, but also the essential ethical and aesthetic characteristics of creation itself. This is in stark contrast to other neighbouring ancient Near East cosmogonies (Babylonia, Egypt and Canaan), where creation occurs in the midst of bloody battles between deities. In the biblical story, the Creator's sovereign word is the source of Creation. And since the book of Genesis was written after the Exodus, the implied backdrop of these creation accounts is God's power to recreate. Thus, creation accounts have implications for liberation and justice, a point explored by Karl Barth.<sup>12</sup>

The bias towards modern historiography and science can easily lead to missing the original intention of the writers of these narratives. When taken within their original contexts, for instance, the thematic organisation of the creation accounts comes to the fore. The first creation account is set out in a clear chronology – Days 1 to 7. Yet, strict chronology is evidently not the concern of the writer. Rather, the 'seven' serves as a means of organising the theme stated in Genesis 1:1, the Creation by God of the heavens and the earth.

The story is organised in two pairs of three, with the seventh day as the conclusion of the act of creation. On the first three days, God creates the three primary *realms* of existence: light and darkness, waters above and below, and the land and seas. On the second pair of three days, God creates in a parallel manner the *regents* that will govern the realms created in the first three days. On the fourth day, God created the sun and moon and the stars to *rule* (*māshal*, 1:16, 18) that which was created on the first day. On the fifth day, God created creatures for the realms of sky and seas that were created on the second day.<sup>13</sup> On the sixth day, God created creatures to populate the land, which were created on the fourth day. It was on the sixth day that God created human beings to *rule* (*rādāh*, vv 26, 28) over all the other realms brought into being. Finally, on the seventh day, God 'rested,' a common ancient metaphor for royal governance (sitting on a throne).

<sup>11</sup> Other important creation accounts include Job 9:34-42; Psalms 8; 19; 33; 65; 104; 139; 147-48; Proverbs 8:22-31; Isaiah 41-50; John 1:1-14; Romans 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:3-13; 1 Corinthians 15: 23-28; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7; 5:17; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4; 4:1-11; Revelation 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> See especially *Church Dogmatics* (III/4; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 32-46, and also the discussion by Juan Stam, in 'Creación, ética y Problemática Contemporánea' in *Teología y Cultura*, Year 1 (August 2004), 21-33.

<sup>13</sup> The verb 'to fly' (*uf*) also carries connotations of dominance.

Besides, in the first Creation account, each of the living ‘rulers’ is created ‘according to their kind’ or ‘kinds’ (*min*, in 1:11-12, 21, 24-25), which seems to suggest their respective functions (birds fly, fish swim, etc.). The apparent exception is humankind. Instead of the phrase ‘according to their kind,’ the expression used is, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’ (1:26, NRSV). If taken as following previous expressions of ‘according to their kind,’ then the phrase ‘according to our likeness’ suggests the peculiar proximity of humanity to the Creator.<sup>14</sup>

These preliminary comments bring us to the focus of our concern: a theology of (human) Earth care. We begin by exploring Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15:

And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’ (Genesis 1:26-28, NRSV).<sup>15</sup>

Although verse 28 is sometimes used to justify the exploitation of the natural world, Genesis 2 reverses the order: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (Gen. 2:15, NRSV). The language of the second creation account helps to clarify the language of the first. The task of ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue’ (*kābaš* and *rādā* in Genesis 1) is not to be understood as abusive exploitation. The task is rather ‘to keep’ Creation (Genesis 2, literally, ‘to serve,’ from the Hebrew ‘*abad*’) – that is, to preserve Creation’s well-being (the essential goodness of Creation in 1:31).

In these accounts, the destiny and well-being of Creation is intricately linked with ours. In Genesis 1, the role of humankind, both male and female (1:27) is to govern non-human creatures (1:28). In Genesis 2, we learn that such governance requires the detailed knowledge and consequential taxonomy of all creatures (2:19-20). In Genesis 1,

<sup>14</sup> The expression used in the second creation account makes a similar point: ‘then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being’ (2:7 NRSV).

<sup>15</sup> Different from the blessing bestowed on other creatures (verse 22), God delegates power to humankind for the care of the earth, which is repeated to Noah and his family after the Flood (Gen. 9:1, 7).

humankind's zeal and responsibility for the environment are borne. In Genesis 2, however, 'science' in the basic sense of taxonomy is born – not merely in terms of knowledge, but also of responsible care.<sup>16</sup> When taken together, then, Genesis 1 and 2 clarify what is implied by having 'dominion' (*rādā*) over Creation. By virtue of being created in the image (*tselem*) and likeness (*démut*) of God, humans are expected to care for God's very good Creation. This governing or serving role follows that of the Creator.

From Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, 19-20, we can deduce three areas of responsibility and administration – social and familial (be fruitful, fill and name), economic and ecological (subdue, cultivate, keep), and governance ('have dominion'). These responsibilities are obligations for which human beings were created. Throughout the biblical narrative, these obligations are expanded and deepened – humans have responsibility of caring not just for their own race but for that of the whole created order. As various chapters have already argued, the responsibility of Earth care is for all human beings, and not merely for great conquerors or environmentalists. But since Earth care is intrinsically connected with all social concerns, Earthkeepers are equally brothers' and sisters' keepers. As Marina da Silva, Brazilian Senator and then Minister of Environment, argued, the ecological crisis ought to be understood as the 'socio-environmental' issue.

But how does this understanding square with the doctrine of dominion? Two words particularly describe the role of humanity on Earth – *kābaš* (subdue) and *rādā* (have dominion). It is important to realise that the word *kābaš* is also used in Micah 7:19 to refer to God's compassionate action to 'tread our iniquities under foot' (NRSV).<sup>17</sup> Similarly, *rādā* is used to describe the dominion of the messianic king (Ps. 72:8; 110:2),<sup>18</sup> a model of divinely just rule (Ps. 49:14, 'the upright shall rule over them in the morning,' ESV). Against Lynn White's argument in *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, I submit that these are not terms of violence but of *compassionate governance*.

Humankind ought to follow the model of the Supreme King who rules with compassion, goodness, love, protection, generosity and kindness (Psalm 104; Matthew 6:26). In Christian circles, the ultimate model of governance and service is Christ himself – who 'made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:7). Therefore, the good governance of Genesis 1:28 and the human service to Creation of Genesis 2:15 are both our original purpose, and our final destiny. To some extent, our mission is not complete if it does not include human responsibility to Creation. In other words, the creation

<sup>16</sup> Classification and labelling are the first steps in nearly every area of science.

<sup>17</sup> Compare the usage of the Greek terms *tagma* and *hypotassō* in 1 Corinthians 15:25-28.

<sup>18</sup> Compare *basileuō* in 1 Corinthians 15:25.

accounts speak to humanity's 'first mandate' of Earth care. That is, it is the human task (cultural mandate) to care for *all* of Creation which, of course, includes our human society.<sup>19</sup>

The mission and ministry of Earth care and human care are inseparably related. Care for the well-being of the environment and care for human society must be computed together. In fact, 'the biblical meaning of righteousness has much to do with relationships. The Hebrew *sedāqā* means to "be just or righteous" in character and conduct... in conformity with covenantal obligations'.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, to be sent by God or to participate in God's redemptive mission is to be sent into our material world. The development of 'culture' as a means of expressing relationships among human beings is part of God's initial plan for creation. God intended that humans relate justly with creation. If anything, injustice to the Earth is also injustice to other creatures on Earth – including humanity.

Unfortunately, humanity has failed to keep this mandate due to disobedience. Theologically, sin ruined humankind's role as caretaker of God's creation. Human beings were meant to be God's stewards of creation – and not independent regents, as some misinterpretations of Genesis 1:28 suggest. By virtue of being humans, we are servants of the Creator, invited to tend God's earth. The owner of Creation cares for this world, so participants in God's mission should do no less.

The Bible testifies to how human failure to uphold God's commandments has ruined relationships between humanity, God, and the environment (God's earth and other creatures). But with human failure emerges the need for repair and restoration or redemption. The God who acts in history and in the world is the God who saves and restores. Despite human disobedience in Genesis 3, God promises, in verse 15, the restoration of creation. The restoration of creation is further developed in Genesis 6:18-22. In this text, while the promise to restore the fallen and debased world is a divine action, it also involves human participation (Gen. 6:9). The *ultimate aim* of the mission of God, in which God's people are invited to participate, is the re-creation of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21; Gen. 12:3).

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<sup>19</sup> The Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, distinguished between four 'mandates' in the creation accounts: for work, for the formation of families, for government and for the church. Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Reformed theologian, spoke of two: the cultural mandate and the redemptive mandate. Both anticipate, beyond the reading of Genesis, the missionary role of the church. In this case, we may speak of an initial social-environmental mandate or mission in Genesis. Only afterwards, especially with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12.1-3, and repeated abundantly through the rest of Genesis, is it possible to refer to a more specific redemptive mandate to 'bless all the families of the Earth'.

<sup>20</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams: Democracy, the Oppressed, and the Church in Africa (The Case of Zambia)* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), 172.

The very identity of humankind is wrapped up in the mandate of caring for God's environment. This care is not merely for self-benefit, but an expression of human obedience to God. At the heart of being 'human' is the task of Earth care; and at the heart of being God's people is the redemption of all creation. In addition, the prophetic vision of *shalom* is both about justice but also, more positively, about the holistic flourishing of all living creatures. The prophet Isaiah, for example, spoke of such a world where justice and *shalom* are established and the 'the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea' (Is. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). In the restored community, the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid (Is. 11).

In the Christian Bible, the book of Revelation also announces this eschatological reality. The writer speaks of the restored Creation in line with Isaiah's prophecy – 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away'. In the restored Earth, there will be no more tears, 'death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Rev. 21:1-4, quoting Is. 65:17). Inasmuch as God demands our fellowship, the Creator also demands that all creatures, big and small, reflect divine glory here on Earth. Thus, our restoration is equally the earth's restoration.

### **To the Very End – Creation is Groaning in Labour Pains – Romans 8:18-25**

The overwhelming environmental crisis can stop us from working for the restoration of God's Earth. But regardless of human sinfulness and of its damaging impacts upon the Earth, God has never abandoned the Earth. As the story of the Flood shows, human sinfulness did not annul God's love for Creation. In fact, the task of Earth care is repeated to Noah and his descendants once the Flood subsides (Gen. 9:1-17). Through God's people and especially through the church, God invites us to participate in the mission of restoration and redemption of the beloved Earth.

The New Testament views the redemption of humanity as linked with that of Creation. As Paul noted:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the Creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole Creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the Creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:18-25, NRSV).

Just as the two Genesis creation accounts require a special focus to firmly establish the nature of the directive given to humanity, the Pauline new creation accounts are important to establish the fulfilment of the mandate as it pertains to the church. The passage cited above is one of the most mysterious as well as important biblical passages for Christian engagement with social and environmental issues. This passage is at the centre of the most careful theological and consciously biblically-rooted discourses of the apostle Paul. In this passage, Paul links the salvation of humanity with that of all Creation.

Let us first place Romans 8:18-25 within its wider context before addressing some of the more obvious details of the passage itself. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, at least partly, as a theological explanation for the inclusion of Gentile believers in the church. He did so in order to gain the support of the Roman churches for his intended missionary trip to Spain after delivering the offering to believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:22-29). His theological defence focuses on the nature and means of salvation for Jewish and Gentile believers in Romans 1-8 and then for the Jews and the Gentile nations as collective groups in Romans 9-11. Before moving on to the larger issues of the salvation of Jews and Gentile nations in Romans 9-11, Paul, in Romans 8:18-25 puts that plan of God for humanity within the even wider context of God's plan for Creation (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16, 1 Cor. 15:23-28). Finally, although Romans is deeply theological throughout, the final chapters also turn to more 'practical' matters, such as the unity of believers and a recapitulation of Paul's own missionary career.

Within that framework, Paul uses Scripture heavily, both through specific quotations and allusions (more so than in all his other letters combined) and through the analogy of well-known biblical characters. Surprisingly, in a letter much concerned about the Law, Moses is only sparsely referred to (5:14; 9:15; 10:5, 19). Greater still are the analogies of Abraham (chapter 4) and Adam (chapters 5-8). These analogies reinforce the theological affirmations that Paul puts forth in the initial three chapters of the letter. Our more narrow context, then, has to do with Adam who is explicitly identified in chapter 5, implicitly but clearly in the analogy in chapter 6, implicitly (but not always recognised) referred to in chapter 7, and accordingly, in chapter 8 as well. And in keeping with the wider previous context, Adam and his progeny are referred to in Romans 8:20-21. Echoes are to be heard of Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 3:14-19 (see also Ps. 107:33-34; Is. 24:5-13).<sup>21</sup> The hope of Creation in Romans 8, then, is the hope of the release from the effects of the Fall of humankind ('Adam').

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<sup>21</sup> According to N.T. Wright (*Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), the 'revealing of the children of God' in Romans 8 includes allusions to the Genesis 1 cultural / creational mandate. Humanity's dominion was spoiled by sin (Genesis 3) but Christ's redemption allows the new 'sons of Adam' (i.e. the Church) to re-establish godly dominion towards Creation.

One of the most obvious features of this passage is Paul's reference to Creation simply as 'Creation' (*ktisis*) and not as 'new Creation' (*kainē ktisis*) as he does elsewhere (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). In Romans 8, Paul is speaking about the future of *Creation* and the discourse clearly refers to *this* material world and to its eventual redemption (*apolytrōsis*). In Paul's own view, there is no exchange of the present world for *another* world, but rather the 'redemption' or renewal of *this* world.

The interpretation of Romans 8:18-25 must follow through the logic Paul presents in the first part of this chapter. That means that 'the glory about to be revealed' in verse 18 must refer specifically to the hope of the bodily resurrection mentioned in verse 11 – the restoration of the human body created from earth (*adamah*). Our physical bodies, of course, are part of Creation itself and so the resurrection of the body is considered as the part of the first fruits of Creation (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Similarly, the 'revealing of the children of God' (*apokalypsis tōn uiōn tou theou*) in verse 19 also must refer to the bodily resurrection of believers (vv 10-11). That naturally is of great interest (*apokaradokia*) to all of Creation that experiences resurrection, albeit partially, through the resurrection of the bodies of believers. At least, that is the essential logic of this passage without pushing it too far.

That future hope is contrasted with the current situation in verse 20, a situation of 'futility' (*mataiotēs*), also referring to 'emptiness,' 'without direction or purpose,' and 'frustration' (compare Ephesians 4:17; 2 Peter 2:18). Further understanding of the current situation is explored in the following verse: 'bondage to decay' (*douleia tēs phthoras*), the first term being clear enough and the second referring to 'perishableness,' 'destruction,' 'corruption,' 'depravity' or, in more scientific language, 'entropy'. The hope of Creation is for freedom or liberty from this situation of emptiness and decay, while that freedom is further explicated positively as hope in the 'glory' of the 'children of God'.

A couple of preliminary conclusions come to mind. First, the end of Creation is redemption, not destruction in terms of annihilation. This has tremendous consequences for Christian Earth care. It means that, as Christians participate in God's own mission to bless all the families of the earth, through evangelisation and myriad other ministries, so do they participate in God's mission of redemption for the entire cosmos. Whereas God's aim and glory will be demonstrated by resurrected representatives from every language, tribe and race, so too will Creation participate in the final consummation of salvation.

Second, a strong hint of the nature of Christian Earth care is given in Romans 8:18-25 – human solidarity with the suffering of Creation through mutual 'groaning'. Surely that minimally involves intensively flagging and putting forth before governments, industries, educational institutions and individuals the diverse environmental and socio-environmental challenges the world faces today? N.T. Wright's view of Romans 8 is acute:



The whole creation is waiting in eager longing – not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but *for God's children to be revealed*: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made.<sup>22</sup>

Paul refers to the current situation of Creation. The 'current,' for Paul in Romans 8, refers to the time following the Fall, not simply the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That, too, is elucidating, for it connects the earth's decay, not merely with the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, but more specifically with the fallen tendencies of humankind towards the oppressive exploitation of the environment. This also means that the ultimate arrest of that decay is intimately wrapped up in the missionary task of the church.

### Conclusion

What follows, then, is that the hope of the church is not an other-worldly or extra-historical hope. A missiology that takes seriously God's creative and redemptive role, who acts within human history, will also emphasise the task of the church within time and space that is still under God's construction. Christians are not called to abandon this world, but to labor intentionally for the ultimate redemption of God's sacred Creation. A wider and more biblical view of our mission includes not only the myriad ministries to our human neighbours, but also integrates the entire cosmos.

The eschatology of Christian mission is engaged in God's project for the world that he himself created and remains the sole object of God's redemption. Eschatology is not marginal to an adequate theology of Earth care. For it will determine either the optimistic or the pessimistic character of the mission of the church, leading either to Spirit-led engagement in human time and space, or to a passive and socially and environmentally alienated hope in a heavenly future.

How, then, are we to proceed? One manner is to promote this type of theological and biblical discourse on the mission of Earth care. It was through theological and biblical discourse in myriad conferences and publications that the ecumenical and evangelical movements have accepted that the mission of God's people includes the urgent proclamation of the Good News and the demonstration of God's justice and compassion. Now the same effort must be expended to interpret the mission of God for the ultimate redemption of all Creation (Rev. 21; Rom. 8:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:23-28; Col. 1:20; Eph. 1.9-10).

Besides, the significance of Earth care to current missiological discussion needs to be highlighted. Mission organisations need to put projects of Earth care onto their agendas among their priorities for ministry.

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<sup>22</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 213.



Currently, Christian environmental organisations and publications are too easily viewed as peripheral to the mission of God. The intent of this reflection is to push us in another direction and place Earth care squarely within the agenda of biblical missiology and theology.

The theology of Creation needs to be effectively communicated to local churches and their various ministries. Apart from learning from African Earthkeepers addressed in this volume, in Brazil, A Rocha Brazil has designed three programmes for socio-environmental education: for local churches, theological seminaries, and for Christian environmental ministries. The former is a series of four Bible Studies available for small group discussion or Sunday school classes. The second is a three-day course that brings ecological issues before prospective ministers. The third is an educational programme geared towards various ministries located in northern and north-eastern Brazil, reported as case studies in this same volume.

Finally, the end of the Biblical narrative describes a new heaven and a new earth firmly planted on Earth (Rev. 21:1-2), and intensely populated with diverse ethnic groups, plants and animals from the same planet. This is the grand goal of the *missio Dei* in which all God's people are invited to take part – we are Earthkeepers and servants of the God of the mission. Caring for Creation is essential to our Christian calling, vocation and mission.

### Resources

- Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Recovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).
- Boff Leonardo, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).
- Kapya John Kaoma, 'Missio Dei or missio Creatoris Dei? Witnessing To Christ in the Face of the Current Ecological Crisis' in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds). *Edinburgh 2010. Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series; Oxford, Regnum: 2011).
- Juan Stam, *As Boas novas da Criação. Teologia Bblica, meio Ambiente e Missão* (Rio de Janeiro: Novos Diálogos, 2012).
- Sarah Tillett (ed), *Caring for Creation. Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2005).

# MISSION AS PRIESTLY MEDIATION FOR THE LAND: A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN MISSION

Lubunga W'Ehusha

Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land (2 Kings 17:27)

## Introduction

This chapter reads 1 Kings 17:24-28 to discuss the mediation of God's missionaries in addressing our ecological problems. Although many traditional religions can relate to this text, the chapter focuses on challenging African Christians, particularly church leaders, theologians and those under training in Bible schools and seminaries, to be sensitive to the ecological needs of the continent. It is obvious that Christianity would be irrelevant to the African context if it showed indifference towards environmental problems, especially when all life is in peril.

This chapter argues that responding to the alarming ecological situation is not an option but part and parcel of the *missio Dei*, as other authors in this volume have rightly argued. It is, therefore, misleading to view Christian mission as sending people to convert natives; rather, it is an invitation to take seriously God's Earth as the locus of the *missio Dei*. So how can African Christianity enhance people's participation in Earth care?

To address this question, the chapter explores the African traditional belief system, and the understanding of the land. It then examines the general context of the Book of Kings, provides a brief exegesis of 2 Kings 17:24-29, explores the parallels between the context of ancient Israel and African world-views, and finally proposes the missional priestly role of African theologians and Christians to the land.

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## Traditional African Belief Systems

Many African traditional societies sought the mediation of religious and tribal leaders whenever a national disaster, illness or natural calamities struck their communities. In her book, *The Gods of the Xhosa*, Janet Hodgson records an episode in which the Xhosa sought the intervention of their deities and spirits during the prolonged drought of the 1800s. When local rainmakers failed, a missionary called Van der Kemp was asked to

pray to his God.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after his prayers, abundant rain fell, which led local people to acknowledge the supremacy of Van der Kemp's God, for his concern with the welfare of the land and its inhabitants. This story illustrates the world-view which many African societies still share.

The roots of African traditional cosmogony lie deep in myths and rituals that have refused to die despite constant interactions with western civilisations and religions. Hodgson asserts that the Xhosa myths of origin reflect a 'cosmic oneness' in which 'nature, man [sic] and the Unseen are inseparably involved in one another in a total community'.<sup>2</sup> They believe that the first man and woman, together with their animals, emerged from a cavern or a hole in their place of origin, known as *Eluhlangeni* or *umhlanga*, located in west or central Africa.

The sacred relationship that links humans with nature is an underlying point of many African creation myths.<sup>3</sup> Edward Kanyike, for example, is even more explicit in defining the role of nature in African cosmologies. He writes, 'Nature is not a thing to use. It is a partner or ally, and a mother with whom one can even dialogue.'<sup>4</sup> Although nature can be hostile to humanity since the natural world hosts dangerous species (animals, insects and plants) and bad spirits, humans are still to relate to the natural world sympathetically. People are called to live in harmony with nature by following the rules/taboo set by divinities and ancestors. As we shall see, there are similarities between traditional African cosmogony and the biblical accounts of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2. When humans disturb the harmony of the universe, it is believed that all life on Earth is threatened. In African cosmologies, only those who had access to the Supreme Being, ancestors or to other deities were called on to repair or restore this harmony through rituals and offerings.

### The Traditional African Attitude towards Land

Africans held the land as a sacred trust, which defines the community and life as a whole. Traditionally, Africans considered land as a gift or a sacred trust from the ancestors and the Supreme Being. Existentially, the life of the community was intertwined with the land. Land defined human identity, security, dignity, economy and life as a whole. Moreover, the land constituted the link between the dead and the living, between past and

<sup>1</sup> Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa: A Study of the Origins and Development of the Traditional Concepts of the Supreme Being* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982), 76.

<sup>2</sup> Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Daryll Forde (ed), *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Values of African Peoples* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Edward Kanyike, *The Principle of Participation in African Cosmology and Anthropology* (Balaka, Malawi: Montfort Media, 2004), 41.

future generations. For Africans, therefore, the land was the people, and the people were the land.

Among the Bantu people, for example, the umbilical cord of the child is buried on the ancestral lands as a sign of one's earthliness – an African is the child of the soil – as well as one's link to the world of ancestors and the Supreme Being. In addition, rituals associated with the dead are meant to unite an African with the ancestors who are the guardians of the land. Since the land belongs to the ancestors who watch, protect and provide for the living, humans are required to use the land wisely as a sacred trust. As Kanyike observes, certain taboos and customs controlled over-grazing, over-exploitation of forests, over-fishing and over-hunting, and also protected against the extinction of certain animals and plants species.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Elelwani Farisani observes that since the land belonged to the ancestors, it was to be used for communal interests – and no one, including the chief, had the right to take the land as private property.

There are striking parallels between the African understanding of land and its taboos and how Walter Brueggemann defines the relationship that binds Israel to the Promised Land.<sup>6</sup> He argues that the land of Canaan was 'a gift from Yahweh and binds Israel in new ways to the giver'. But this gift, Brueggemann argues, can become a temptation if Israel forgets to 'recall a time before the gift' or ceases to remember the owner and turns to other gods. He concludes, 'the Torah exists so that Israel will not forget whose land it is and how it was given to us. Only the landed are tempted to forget.'<sup>7</sup>

This biblical understanding of the land is similar to the African ontology. Apart from defining human identity, land belonged to the ancestors and the Supreme Being. For this reason, the dispossession of African land by colonisers was a serious blow to the entire world-view of the indigenous populations. As a result of this, Africans were cut off from their communities, their divinities, ancestors, animals and trees, and also impoverished and humiliated. Moreover, one of the consequences of dispossessing people of their land is poverty – poverty follows landlessness.

The God of the poor is generally the God of the landless – whose sacred rights to the land is robbed or violated by the powerful. Because all God's people are of sacred worth to the Creator and heirs to God's land, they all have equal claim to the land. However, through humanly created injustices, the majority of the people of God were robbed of their land. This situation led many Old Testament prophets to denounce such injustices and to warn of the impending expulsion from Yahweh's land. Arguably, it is from this perspective that liberation theology should be understood.

<sup>5</sup> Kanyike, *The Principle of Participation*, 41-42.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 47.

<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land*, 61.

According to Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, 'liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor'.<sup>8</sup> The poor here encompassed several categories of people who suffered from all kinds of injustice and oppression. Although liberation theology was primarily designed to fight against the poverty of the masses in South America, it can be applied to address the dispossession of land from Africans by colonial regimes, and now, post-colonial regimes that have condemned masses into extreme poverty. In South Africa and many African countries, for example, the issue of landlessness was at the heart of the liberation movement.<sup>9</sup> Thus political liberation should have gone hand-in-hand with land restitution/re-distribution.

### The Context of the Book of Kings

The book of Kings continues the story of the Israelite monarchy that starts in the book of Samuel. Its overall message is the failure of different monarchs of Israel to abide by God's laws in order to secure their place in the Promised Land. In 2 Kings, the downfall of the kingdom is played out in two dramatic acts. The first episode ends with the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the deportation of the Israelites away from their territory by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17). The second episode culminates in the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, together with the deportation of Judean citizens to Babylon (2 Kings 25).

This deportation was primarily due to human failure to uphold Yahweh's Deuteronomic laws. Gina Hens-Plazza writes, 'The laws of Deuteronomy serve as the template by which kings and their deeds are constantly assessed.'<sup>10</sup> The link between the Deuteronomic law and the book of Kings, however, was deeper than just a template. Many scholars believe that Deuteronomy, or parts of it, and the historical books (Joshua–Kings) are the works of a Deuteronomist historian or school of Deuteronomist editors.<sup>11</sup> The reason behind this hypothesis is that the history of Israel was built upon the covenant with YHWH, which entailed blessings and curses.

While the exile was a curse, restoration (blessing) was possible if Israel returned to Yahweh in repentance. Therefore, the covenantal faith of Israel

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<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Burns & Oates, 1987), 3. Boff expands the idea of liberation in, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> See Ernst Conradie, D.E. de Villiers and J. Kinghorn (eds), *Church and Land* (Stellenbosch, RSA: The Stellenbosch Economic Project, 1992); M. de Klerk (ed), *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa* (Cape Town: IDASA, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentary) (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987).

created an existential tension in which the people of God existed as they struggled to keep the Law and commandments of Yahweh. The motif of blessing-curse in Deuteronomy 28 is defined in relation with what the people experienced as they swung from one extremity to the other. They were blessed when they obeyed Yahweh, and in return the land provided abundant goods for the people. But they were cursed when they disobeyed Yahweh, and in return the land refused to yield its abundance – while Israel's disobedience finally led to their expulsion from the Promised Land as God had originally warned them through the prophets.

### **Analysis of the Text of 2 Kings 17:24-29**

Chapter 17 records the end of the reign of Hoshea, the last king of the Northern Kingdom. It also narrates the deportation of the people of Israel and the importation of foreign settlers. This chapter, unlike others in the book of Kings, gives a short record of the life and deeds of King Hoshea (17:1-6). It also focuses on the people of Israel and the cause of their rejection. The writer attributes their downfall to apostasy or forsaking Yahweh's covenant (17:7-23). The chapter notes that the Northern monarchs did not depart from the idolatry introduced by Jeroboam I (17:21-22), which contaminated the kingdom of Judah (17:19). Hence, God promised to punish both kingdoms for their disobedience. The last section of the chapter (17:33-44) underscores the state of syncretism that had prevailed in Samaria until the time when the book was written. This negative portrayal of the sin of Samaria may be considered as the prelude to the hostility between the Samaritans and other Jews observed up until the time of Jesus (John 4).

### **Exegesis of 2 Kings 17:24-28 (NRSV)**

<sup>24</sup> The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities.

<sup>25</sup> When they first settled there, they did not worship the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them.<sup>26</sup> So the king of Assyria was told, 'The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.'<sup>27</sup> Then the king of Assyria commanded, 'Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land.'<sup>28</sup> So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship the LORD.

This text is chosen because of its emphasis on the land in connection with God. In the light of the global ecological crisis, this text is both informative and crucial for understanding the predicament God's people

face today. Let us start with a brief verse-by-verse exegesis of 2 Kings 17:24-28 before drawing some applications to current ecological concerns.

In verse 24 the writer gives a list of displaced people resettled in Samaria. The accurate location of some of the cities mentioned in this verse cannot be determined today. However, they are all within the territory under Assyrian control. Historical evidence exists that shows that it was the Assyrians' custom to displace conquered people and settle them in foreign lands in order to deter any revolt or ambition to overthrow the king. The interchange of land ownership between Israel and the new settlers is underlined in the text when Samaria became populated by people from other parts of the Assyrian empire: 'They took possession of Samaria and settled in its cities' (17:23-24).

Verse 25 specifies that at the beginning the settlers did not show any interest in worshipping Yahweh because they had their own gods (vv 30-31). The Hebrew root *yr* translated here and by other versions as 'worship' actually means 'to fear'. The question is: Why should they fear the god of a conquered nation when the fall of the city or the nation in the ancient Near East implied the defeat of its god(s)?

The writer, however, shows that Yahweh was still the God of the land. The arrogance of the settlers was punished – lions started killing them because of their refusal to acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty over Samaria. James A. Montgomery argues that the settlers were naïve and superstitious in believing that the plague of lions was God's punishment. He suggests that when the Assyrians deported the original inhabitants, the land was left empty – thus, allowing lions to proliferate and become a threat to human lives.<sup>12</sup> But as C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch contend, 'The motif of marauding lions in verses 25-26 found in some earlier prophetic stories, signals here that the Lord retains sovereignty over the land'.<sup>13</sup> While many contemporary scholars would deny God's involvement in the threat posed by lions in Samaria, people in traditional societies such as in Africa and in the ancient Near East were able to read the signs of divine anger through specific natural phenomena.<sup>14</sup> They knew how to distinguish between the natural intrusion of a lion in a village, and extensive and calamitous occurrences which they attributed to divine intervention. Moreover, for the writer of 2 Kings, such an occurrence was not a coincidence, as he reports a similar incident in 2:23-24, when bears devoured forty-two children who had jeered at the prophet Elisha.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Montgomery and Henry Snyder Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 473.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. Keil and E. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Vol. III; Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1975), 423.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Cameron Mitchell, *African Primal Religions* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1977). See also John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970).

It is important to note that in the report given to the Assyrian king, the name 'Yahweh' is not mentioned; but only described as 'the god of the land'. By repeating the expression 'the god of the land' three times in verses 26-27, the writer wants to draw attention to a number of realities: first, in spite of the Assyrian defeat of the Israelites, Yahweh did not lose sovereignty over the land of Canaan (Hebrew *eret*).<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, this message was interpreted differently by various actors in the narrative. To the King of Assyria, the message was to challenge his authority over the land of Canaan. He might have subdued the people of Israel, but not their God – YHWH; the owner of the land is still present and must be respected. The King of Assyria responded by sending a priest to teach the settlers the manner in which Yahweh should be worshipped. Thus, he acknowledges Yahweh's sovereignty over that territory.

Second, to the new inhabitants the message showed that Samaria was not abandoned territory. They had to count on and obey Yahweh and not their own gods, if they were to live in safety and peace in the land.

Third, to the exiles, however, it is a mixed message. On the one hand, it gives hope that Yahweh is still in control of the Promised Land; therefore, their fate is not yet over. On the other hand, they are saddened to realise that their own God had allowed the Assyrians to uproot them from their homeland. By sending the priest to the settlers, God had expanded his mission to the settlers – they must worship the owner of the land. Regardless, Yahweh remains the ultimate owner of the land with the right to keep or remove its inhabitants.

Verses 26 and 27 add that, besides the lack of the fear for Yahweh, the settlers did not know 'the law/rules (*mispat*) of the god of the land'. In the context of this chapter, it is important to discuss this expression briefly. It is used twice to emphasise the fact that life in the land of Canaan is regulated by rules set by Yahweh. The settlers are said to lack knowledge of the manner or ways in which people should behave in Yahweh's land. Thus, a teacher was sought to instruct them about the appropriate conduct that would allow them to enjoy the benefit of their new home, just as its exiled inhabitants once did. Unlike the Israelites, who were cast out of the land because they knew the law but had knowingly disobeyed it, the settlers are not threatened with expulsion from the land. On the contrary, they are encouraged to learn from a priest in order to live peacefully with nature.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Land (*eret*) in this verse designates the country of Canaan, which includes Samaria. In other instances *eret* is translated as the 'whole earth,' e.g. in the creation account (Gen. 1:1). For more discussion on the meaning and use of *eret*, read Ottosson, 'Eretz' in Johannes Bitterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds), *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Vol. I; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 388-405.

<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew text in verse 27 has a mixture of singular and plural pronouns. This could lead to envisaging that more than one priest was sent to teach the settlers how



The text ends with the statement that the King of Assyria yielded to the demand and the priests from the exiles of Israel were sent back and lived in Bethel. Eventually, it seems the teaching bore fruit – the plague of lions is no longer mentioned in subsequent texts. In spite of keeping their gods, settlers started practising Yahweh's rules and statutes in Samaria. As Robert Dentan writes, the settlers 'became in an external and superficial sense servants of the God of Israel'.<sup>17</sup> Arguably, their obedience to priestly teaching was sufficient to avert the plague of lions and help them to settle peacefully in the land.

It should be noted that, in the Old Testament, the teaching of the *Torah* is the task of priests and not prophets. Without engaging in speculations as to why a priest became successful among the settlers, but not with Israel, one of the reasons why Samaria fell is because the priests did not do their job. Matthew Henry's commentary suggests that a prophet would have done better, because the syncretism addressed in the chapter is due to the failure of the priests to teach true worship to the people of God before the exile.<sup>18</sup> Regardless, it is my contention that those entrusted with divine knowledge have a priestly role (as opposed to the prophetic voice) of teaching others about Yahweh's ecological demands, and in the context of this chapter, the integrity of Creation.

Given the pertinence of the message the writer wanted to stress by using the expression 'the god of the land,' it is understandable that it is repeated several times in this short text. Hanz-Piazza, following Matthew Henry, considers the use of 'the god of the land' as the settlers' attempt to portray Yahweh as any other local or regional god, worshipped in the empire – forgetting that Yahweh ruled over the entire universe.<sup>19</sup> It seems, however, that the writer purposely chose this expression to describe Yahweh. This repeated expression, 'the god of the land,' seems to answer the Assyrians' enquiry – 'Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?' (2 Kgs 18:33). To the author, the answer is obvious – Yahweh can do it!

Besides, the author anticipated the acknowledgement of the supremacy of the God of Israel over other gods in the region. For example, Naaman, a Syrian commander healed by the prophet Elisha confessed thus: 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel' (2 Kgs 5:15). The confession of the supremacy of the God of Israel over other gods is significant since it is from a Syrian commander, who by that time had

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to behave in Samaria. It is probable that one priest was not enough to carry out this huge task alone.

<sup>17</sup> R.C. Dentan, *Kings and Chronicles* (The Layman's Bible Commentary; London: SCM Press, 1964), 109.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Hens-Piazza speaks of a theological misunderstanding because Yahweh is not a god of a limited land: *1-2 Kings*, 353.

subdued Israel. In short, the expression ‘the god of the land’ may not be commonly used for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, but the reality it expresses remains undeniable – not only Canaan is God’s inheritance (*nahalah*), but the entire universe. The Psalmist acknowledges this God as the Creator of the Earth and everything in it (Psalms 8 and 24). Importantly, God has assigned a priestly mission that embraces the entire Creation to those who know how to worship him.

### Missiological Perspective of the Text

As discussed earlier, when the settlers lived in ignorance of the God of the land, nature hit back. They experienced what the Earth Bible Project calls ‘the principle of resistance,’<sup>20</sup> as lions resisted the newcomers’ wish to live peacefully until they had learned the laws that governed the land. The Deuteronomic laws, upon which the enjoyment of the Promised Land was founded, were broken by the Israelites, which led to the destruction of Samaria first, followed later by Judah. The outspoken prophet Hosea, a contemporary of the last king of the Northern Kingdom with whom he shares the same name, denounces the sins that caused the deportation of the Israelites. The recurrent motif of Deuteronomy 28, that disobedience brings a curse, is clearly stated in 2 Kings 17:24-28. The rules, commandments and statutes of Yahweh were disobeyed, resulting in the exile of the people.

The prophet Hosea is more specific in his analysis of the cause of the destruction of Israelite kingdoms. Disobedience of the law is, according to Hosea, failure to carry out Yahweh’s mission by those entrusted with the task. Chapter 4 of the book of Hosea points to the root cause of the disaster. He builds his argument by announcing a court charge, judgment, and accusation (*riv*) against the people of the land. First, he observes that, ‘There is no truth, faithfulness (*emet*), no kindness, steadfast love (*hesed*) and knowledge (*yadah*) of God in the land (*eretz*)’ (4:1). The lack of knowledge affects the entire Creation as explained in this passage: ‘The land mourns and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying’ (Hos. 4:3). Hosea describes an ecological crisis that caused the downfall of Israel. Who shall appear in court to answer to those charges? To answer this question, the prophet Hosea points the finger at the principal accused, ‘But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest’ (Hos. 4:4). For Hosea the priests are responsible for the disaster that has caused the ecological crisis.

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<sup>20</sup> The six hermeneutical principles of the Earth Bible Project are: (1) the principles of intrinsic worth, (2) the principle of interconnectedness, (3) the principle of voice, (4) the principle of purpose, (5) the principle of mutual custodianship, and (6) the principle of resistance. See Norman C. Habel, ‘The Earth Bible Project,’ SBL Forum Archive: [www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=291](http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=291) (accessed 13th May 2013).

Although prophets (probably false prophets) and kings were associated with the priests, priests were the primary accused because they failed to carry out their priestly mission of teaching the Law (*Torah*). Hosea argues, 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I will also ignore your children' (4:6). Hosea pursues his argument that the more the priests increase, the more they sin. For this reason, Hosea prophesied, the priests and all the people of Israel will be punished (4:9). Yahweh will send them away from his own land – 'Ephraim will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria' (9:3).

This background is critical to understanding the events of 2 Kings 17. The Kingdom of Israel crumbled because of its failure to carry out God's mission. Arguably, the removal from the land is a consequence of the failure to participate in the mission of God. Christian mission, in this chapter, is considered in its broader sense as the *missio Dei*, as outlined in David Bosch's book, *Transforming Mission*. Bosch writes, 'Our mission has to be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character.'<sup>21</sup>

When life is threatened, it is only God's mission that can restore *shalom* in the land. To some extent, the text examined in this chapter may be interpreted as a renewal of God's mission. While the priests originally failed to participate in God's mission, they are now sent back to perform the priestly task of teaching Yahweh's principles to new settlers of Samaria. This is what I mean by 'priestly mission'.

In the face of the life-threatening ecological catastrophe, the church in God's mission ought to take this priestly mission seriously. In line with Kapya J. Kaoma, 'the missional church should take ecological liberation and reconciliation as the expression of holistic *mission Dei*'.<sup>22</sup> Holistic mission acknowledges the connectedness of the entire Creation. It means any sin committed among humans will consequently affect the land and other creatures, and vice versa. As for the banishment of the Kingdom of Israel, the prophet Amos underscores the sin of idolatry and social injustice. It is important to realise that in the Bible, social justice carries ecological overtones. Hosea, for example, sees the sin of Israel in a holistic manner – it embraces the natural world. Hosea writes, 'The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary; on them I will pour out my wrath like water' (5:10).

It is clear that the people of Judah had discarded the Deuteronomic law (Deut. 19:14; 27:17) that puts a curse on whosoever removes the landmark of his/her neighbour to grab the land. Land issues in many countries, both developed and developing, are similar. Those who have political and

<sup>21</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 524.

<sup>22</sup> Kaoma, 'Missio Dei or Missio Creatoris Dei,' 296-308.

economic power remove landmarks to dispossess the poor and the vulnerable of their land. The book of Chronicles confirms the priestly interpretation of captivity as a time for the land to enjoy the Sabbath it has been deprived of by the Israelites (2 Chr. 36:21; Lev. 25:2; 26:34-35; Ex. 23:10-11). These two examples are just a token of how the priestly mission should have the entire Creation at heart, because punishment does not come only for abusing other humans, but for abusing God's Creation also. Is there any encouragement we can get from this analysis?

### **Christian Mission as Priestly Mediation for the Land of Africa**

Africa is a continent on the move, as the wind of globalisation is affecting and blending traditions and cultures. However, the world-view and cosmology of the majority of Africans, especially at the grassroots level, will take time to be changed. They strongly believe in the integrity of Creation, affirming that in order for humans to enjoy peace with nature, they ought to live according to rules laid down by the spiritual world. It is also believed that ill-treating nature will anger the divinities and bring calamities. Therefore, traditional and religious leaders have a priestly mission to ensure the harmony of Creation.

Consequently, it is the duty of the living elders and traditional priests to teach their communities rules that regulate the relationships between divinities, nature and humans, which are often established as taboos. However, when people offend the divinities by breaking nature-related taboos, they seek priestly mediation through prayers and rituals offered to the divinities and ancestors in order to restore the life and the harmony of the natural world.<sup>23</sup> The practice may differ from one community to another, but in many African traditional societies, spirit mediums are in charge of averting calamities or appeasing the offended divinities – thus, they exercise a priestly role in their communities.

Generally, when the integrity of Creation is affirmed by many writers, they emphasise the prophetic role over the priestly response to the mounting ecological crisis. I have argued elsewhere that priesthood and priestly writings have such a negative connotation in the interpretation of many theologians; hence, scholars avoid using the term in self-theologising and self-ethicising.<sup>24</sup> In their book *Constants in Context*, Bevans and Schroeder have highlighted the concept of the integrity of Creation as part of Christian mission in a way that is close to African world-views. They acknowledge that any sin committed by humans will affect not only other humans, but also the Earth and all Earth's creatures. But they consider the quest to protect the integrity of Creation as a prophetic dialogue. In their

<sup>23</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 1970.

<sup>24</sup> See Lubunga W'Ehusha, 'Redeeming the Priestly Role of Theology,' in *Old Testament Essay* 27, 1 (2014), 302-17.

words, 'It is certainly clear that the prophetic dimension of mission is paramount here, and committing oneself to justice, peace and ecological integrity demands prophetic action individually, communally and institutionally'.<sup>25</sup>

The complexity of ecological problems surely requires inter-disciplinary dialogue, since it touches various areas of study. Dialogue can also imply inter-community conversation, as people of various social status and religious traditions learn and exchange views on issues of common interest. The prophetic role, however, does not explain all the ecological actions and practices employed to address every life-threatening ecological problem. The scientists' appeal to religious leaders in *Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion* in the early 1990s, during the Global Forum in Moscow, is quite clear:

As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred. At the same time, a much wider and deeper understanding of science and technology is needed. If we do not understand the problem, it is unlikely we will be able to fix it. Thus, there is a vital role for religion and science. We know that the well-being of our planetary environment is already a source of profound concern in your councils and congregations. We hope this Appeal will encourage a spirit of common cause and joint action to help preserve the Earth.<sup>26</sup>

This statement makes it clear that scientists are not the only answer to the ecological crisis; religious leaders have a critical role to play. Although not all religious leaders may be experts in the environmental sciences, they have a role to play in fostering in their adherents the sacredness of nature. There might be overlap between prophetic and priestly roles; there is, nevertheless, a striking difference between the two. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, as well as in many African traditional communities, there are prophets who also exercise priestly duties, or priests who prophesy. For instance, in the Hebrew Bible, Samuel was a priest and a prophet, while in the Gospel of John it is recorded that Caiaphas, the High Priest, prophesied (John 11:49-52).

Nonetheless, prophecy and priesthood remain two distinct offices. Prophecy in Africa as well as in the Bible is mainly a ministry of word. As a spokesperson of the divinity, the person who utters prophecy informs or warns people on behalf of the Supreme Being. But priesthood is a practical

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Contexts: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 377.

<sup>26</sup> 271 religious leaders from 83 countries responded to the call sent by scientists to participate in the Global Forum in Moscow: 'Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion': [http://earthrenewal.org/Open\\_letter\\_to\\_the\\_religious\\_.htm](http://earthrenewal.org/Open_letter_to_the_religious_.htm) (accessed 15th October 2014).

ministry dealing with teaching, performing rituals and offerings. A priest stands as a knowledgeable person who is the custodian of the mysteries of the divinities. This knowledge enables him or her to restore broken relationships between humans, other creatures and the supernatural world. Ecological mission should go beyond prophetic denunciations of policies and ideologies that harm the planet, but invite all people – and Christians in particular – in practical acts of mitigating and arresting mounting environmental problems.

An outstanding example of priestly engagement in addressing environmental problems in Africa is illustrated by the earthkeeping movement in Zimbabwe discussed at the beginning of this volume.<sup>27</sup> Another example of waging war for the environment, in this case by planting trees, is the Green Belt movement in Kenya, founded by the late Wangari Maathai in 1977.<sup>28</sup> The major focus of the movement is the planting of trees, and tens of millions of trees have been planted in the country. Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Prize in 2004 for her commitment to holistic liberation. This is in line with the entire eco-feminist movement discussed by Tellessyn Z. Grenfell-Lee and Kwok Pui-lan in this volume. Eco-feminists argue that the liberation of women ought to go hand-in-hand with the liberation of nature. But as already noted, environmental sciences alone cannot produce moral and ethical commitments needed to address the ecological crisis – priestly ecological mission has a role to play.

### Conclusion

The participation of those who have knowledge of God's words in addressing the ecological crisis is critical – the Earth belongs to God. The reading of 2 Kings 17:24-28 revealed that people have to be taught divine principles that govern the harmony of Creation. Failure to teach people brings a curse on the land and its inhabitants. Theologians in Africa whose world-view is closer to that found in 2 Kings 17:24-28 should take the integrity of Creation as the heart of Christian mission. Only then will Christianity, especially in Africa, make meaningful contributions to the resolution of life-threatening environmental problems confronting us – landlessness, habitat destruction, species extinction and pollution, among many others that threaten the future of the continent and the world as a whole.

<sup>27</sup> Marthinus Daneel fully documents African Earth care ministries in a number of books – see Chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> For Wangari Maathai's Green Belt movement, see *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and Experience* (New York: Lantern Books, 2003).

### Resources

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- Jeffrey B. Peires, 'The Central Beliefs of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing,' in *Journal of Africa History* 28 (1987), 43-63.
- Peet J. Van Dyk, 'Eco-Theology and Losing the Sacred,' in *Old Testament Essays* 23/3 (2010), 822-33.
- Gunther Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays* (Dorpspruit, RSA: Cluster Publications, 2007). (Read 'Plant and Animal Rights – An Absurd Idea or Ecological Necessity. Perspectives from the Hebrew Torah', 157-71).
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# THE EARTH IN THE MISSION OF THE INCARNATE GOD

Kapya J Kaoma

‘Daddy, are we going to die? Is the snow going to bury us?’ My five-year-old son Takudzwa asked this question in February 2015, following the historic snowstorms and blizzards that pounded New England in the US. The blizzards brought the city of Boston to a complete standstill. I assured my son that everything would soon be back to normal. ‘Spring is coming,’ I insisted. It then occurred to me that I had lied to my son – unless we change, things will not be normal any more. And if Takudzwa is troubled by the snow, hundreds of millions of children are threatened by, and victims of climate-related disasters – heat waves, storms, floods, landslides, soil erosion and droughts, among many other environmental disasters.

All these disasters are indicative of the environmental predicament we all face. We must stop, pause, and ask, ‘What kind of Earth are we going to leave to future generations?’ As Christians, we are also obliged to ask, ‘What is God saying to us as the covenanted and Sacred Creation goes to waste? And can Christian mission as the *missio Dei* (*missio Creatoris Dei*) – the mission of the Creator God help avert the ecological crisis?’<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging the seriousness of the life-threatening ecological crisis, this chapter explores a paradigm of ecological missiology, proposes a Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestor, advocates a new way of relating, and concludes with practical suggestions on Creation care.

## **The *Missio Creatoris Dei* as Christian Mission**

The claim that we are killing the Earth suggests that the physical Earth will die. No, we humans will die. This is because with or without human life, planet Earth will continue to exist. We may claim to be intelligent and next to God, but our life and that of supporting planetary ecosystems depend on the Earth’s well-being. Today, the theological choice is not whether Christianity is ecologically sensitive or not, but what can be done to avert this life-threatening catastrophe.

Across the globe, human departure from God’s purposes in Creation has increased environmentally related disasters. Such disasters are not limited

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<sup>1</sup> Kapya John Kaoma, ‘Missio Dei or Missio Creatoris Dei: Witnessing to Christ in the Face of the Occurring Ecological Crisis,’ in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds), *Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 296-303.



to Asia or South and North America – floods and landslides are increasingly common in Africa. Since 2000, Southern Africa has experienced many natural disasters – from Cyclone Eline in 2001 to the 2014-15 floods that affected Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. Apart from killing hundreds of people, these floods also destroyed roads and bridges, and displaced hundreds of thousands. They also polluted drinking water – leading to many deaths.

Most of these disasters are caused by humankind. Human-induced climate change is affecting wind patterns over the oceans – thus contributing to these disasters. In Africa, however, the sad effects of these disasters are compounded by poverty, soil erosion and siltation caused primarily by the felling of trees and the clearing of land for cash crops. As Marthinus L. Daneel asserts, ‘So-called agro-economic progress is in fact killing the Earth’.<sup>2</sup> Since the death of the Earth follows that of the poor, in almost all these cases, the biggest victims are those who exist at the margins of society.

Daneel employs the ‘war’ metaphor to explain human responses to the ecological crises that confront us. Just as Africa waged the war of liberation against colonialism, we are engaged in another fight – the war to protect the Creation from human exploitation and carelessness. While Rosemary R. Ruether rightly identifies war as among the four horses of world destruction,<sup>3</sup> the liberation of the Earth and her natural goods won’t happen without a fight – it is a risky and costly mission. And just as African nationalists’ and Civil Rights defenders’ demands for political rights and human dignity were met with brutal violence then, things are not that different today. The late Nigerian Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, hanged by the Nigerian military government for protesting against the destruction and pollution of Ogoniland in 1995, the killing of thousands of the Amazon’s defenders in Brazil, the surge in the killing of environmental rights defenders across the globe,<sup>4</sup> and the imprisonment of Tim DeChristopher in the US,<sup>5</sup> illustrate the cost of liberating the Earth. But as

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<sup>2</sup> Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Eco-feminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Global Witness, ‘How Many More? 2014’s deadly environment: the killing and intimidation of environmental and land activists, with a spotlight on Honduras,’ in *Global Witness*, report, 20th April 2015: <https://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/environmental-activists/how-many-more> (accessed 20th May 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Tim DeChristopher was a student at the University of Utah who in 2008 opposed the ‘federal auction of oil and gas drilling rights to prime Utah wilderness. He served time in prison for his action but saved the wilderness’. DeChristopher outbid every bidder – knowing too well that he had no intention of paying for it. Jeannette Catsoulis, ‘Sudden Impulse, and a Warrior Is Born: “Bidder 70,” a Documentary About Tim DeChristopher,’ in *The New York Times*, 16th May 2013:

the Civil Rights Movement and freedom fighters sacralised their struggles by appealing to spiritual powers, the liberation of the Earth must be planted in the *missio Creatoris Dei* – the mission of the Creator God.<sup>6</sup>

Here, it is important to point out that the concept of *missio Dei* seems to emphasise humanity (*imago Dei*) over non-human beings in the application of Christian mission. The *missio Creatoris Dei*, however, presents God as the Creator who identifies with, relates to, and shares the divine essence with all Creation. From this perspective, the mission of the Creator suggests that God is already present in people's cultural and socio-ecological contexts. While the term 'missionary' evokes images of Europeans serving in non-western countries,<sup>7</sup> the mission of the Creator God 'is multi-directional, and all God's people are missionaries regardless of their race or geographical location'.<sup>8</sup> Christian discipleship is, then, the Creator's invitation to humanity to participate in the *missio Creatoris Dei*.

The concept of *missio Creatoris Dei* also suggests the entire cosmos as God's mission field – hence, it knows no geographical, national or continental boundaries. Aptly stated, Christian mission is 'without borders – for the living God invites all people to participate in mission'.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, amidst the life-threatening ecological crisis, missiology needs to shift from an anthropocentric to an ecological missiology. This shift is critical to the mission of Creation care.

### Ecological Missiology – Paradigm Shift in Christian Mission

Since the realisation of the ensuing ecological crisis, Christian scholars and mission practitioners have explored various tools to aid the transformation of human attitudes towards the natural world. While scholars are mostly agreed that how we relate to the Earth is a spiritual-theological issue, this conviction has yet to become part of the people's daily spirituality and action. In this regard, we need a new paradigm in the formation and nurturing of ecologically conscious Christians.

The biblical understanding of mission is fundamental and foundational to this new paradigm. This is because the entire biblical story is an account of the *missio Dei* (*missio Creatoris Dei*) in creation history. As David Bosch and Christopher Wright independently demonstrate, the entire Bible

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<sup>6</sup> Kaoma, 'Missio Dei or missio Creatoris Dei,' 296-303.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Kapyia John Kaoma, 'Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission: Joys, Issues and Challenges,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (November 2014), 112-28, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Kaoma, 'Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission,' 121.

is the story of the mission of God.<sup>10</sup> Understood from an ecological perspective, for example, the Creation narratives in Genesis illustrate the *mission of the Creator* in which Adam and Eve were invited to participate. It is to this mission that all God's people are invited – they have the duty of bearing witness to God's love for all Creation. For Christians, however, this mission was specifically revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who invited and commanded us to witness to and participate in the *missio Creatoris Dei* (Matt. 28:19-20).

It is tempting to view the church and the mission of God as two separate entities – they are not. The *missio Creatoris Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae* – thus the church exists only to participate in the mission of the Creator. In short, the church is a community of missionaries sent to bear witness to God's activities in this world. Moreover, the *missio Creatoris Dei* is at the heart of the church's life, and by its very nature, the church is an institution brought into being to witness to the mission of the Creator God in this world. Its God-given identity as the body of Christ further suggests that the *missio Creatoris Dei* precedes the church; the church exists as an extension of Jesus' selfless obedience to, and participation in, the mission of God, the Creator.

Consequently, the mission of the church is to live out, and to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ on Earth. For this reason, the church's mission is grounded in Christology (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21). As Bosch rightly observes, 'the biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies'<sup>11</sup> is critical to Christian mission. Similarly, Wright states that '[Christian] mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation. Our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God'.<sup>12</sup> This understanding ought to inform all areas of Christian witness.

But how does this paradigm square with the popular theology of 'resident aliens'? And why should I care for the world which is set to end in flames during the battle of Armageddon? (Rev. 16:16). The answer is, the Creation belongs to God – 'Heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it' (Deut. 10:14).<sup>13</sup> Again, 'Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all' (1 Chr. 29:11).

<sup>10</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); Wright, *The Mission of God*. See also Wes Howard-Brook, 'Come Out My People!': *God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22-23. (Italics are his.)

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are from the NIV.

From this perspective, we may claim to be pilgrims on Earth, but the Creation is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1-2). For this reason, the Cosmos is encircled with divine presence – heaven is God's throne and the Earth is God's footstool (Is. 66:1-2; Matt. 5:34-35); thus 'the whole earth is full of [the Creator's] glory' (Is. 6:3). The Incarnation points to these theological and biblical insights.

### **The Missionary Incarnate God: Jesus as the Ecological Ancestor**

Our understanding of Jesus affects our conception and application of the mission of the Creator. Elsewhere, I advance the Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestor. As the divine origin of all life, Jesus is both the ecological ancestor to every species, and the abundant life that the Creation seeks. From an African perspective, for instance, as 'the firstborn over all creation' (Col. 1:15), Jesus is our brother ancestor. However, he is also the brother ancestor to every biota in creation history.<sup>14</sup> The Gospel of John assents to this ecological ancestorship:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind (John 1:1-4).

In John 1:14, the writer makes another significant claim: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' – again pointing to the earthly dimension of Jesus. Unlike the Gnostics who perceived the flesh (*sarx*) as evil, John alerts us to the fact that Jesus took on the complexities of the *sarx*; hence through the Incarnation, God became earth (*adamah*). Just as humanity was formed from *adamah*, it is through the Incarnate Word that Creation was made – thus nothing exists without the Incarnate Word. In other words, Jesus' life-blood and DNA exist in every biokind – suggesting that every creature shares his divine essence.

In chapter 3, John declares God's love for the world. But this declaration comes after Jesus compares himself with another creature – the snake:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:14-17).

Generally, this statement has been understood anthropocentrically. However, the Greek word employed for the 'world' refers to the entire cosmos and not only to humanity. God's love is cosmic in expression –

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion on the concept of Jesus as an ecological ancestor, see Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth*, 175-81; Kaoma, *The Creator's Symphony*, 54-57.

God loves the entire Creation – humans, non-humans and the physical world. It is this Cosmos that the Creator loves and Jesus redeemed to the glory of the Triune God.

The Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestor can also address the theory of evolution. According to this argument, all life came from a single source in the sea – something explained by the presence of water in all fauna and flora. Apart from sharing genetic links with all Creatures, Hans Schwarz observes that comparative anatomy for most biota suggests and confirms the interconnectedness of all living beings or in the context of this chapter, a common ecological ancestor.<sup>15</sup>

Schwarz further argues that ‘the biblical symbols relating to nature as well as its picturesque language exemplify the illustrative character of nature for God’s revelation’.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, despite human relatedness to all biota, we humans who, as Ruether rightly argues, ‘are latecomers to the earth, a very recent product of its evolutionary life,’ have self-promoted ourselves ‘over against all that is non-human, and thereby constructed our concept of nature as both non-human and non-divine’.<sup>17</sup> We have sacred natural rights to life, so we believe, but non-humans do not!

Until the advent of western missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, most indigenous cultures attached sacredness to the natural world. Among Africans, the natural world was/is not non-divine, but the abode of the Divine, spirits and the ancestors. Unlike the world-views influenced by the Enlightenment that perceive the natural world solely in instrumental terms, in non-western and biblical cosmologies, the natural world is not evil or dead; it is fundamentally the arena, medium and locus of Divine activities. Theologically therefore, God is not absent from the Earth – the Creator is actively involved in, and with, the Cosmos.

The concept of panentheism (as opposed to pantheism, the belief that everything is God) can illuminate God’s relationship with the Creation as well as direct human attitudes towards the natural world and one another.<sup>18</sup> Panentheism, Leonardo Boff explains, upholds the distinction between God and Creation while maintaining an active interconnectedness between the two: ‘Not everything is God, but God is present in everything... God flows through all things. And then, vice versa, everything is in God.’<sup>19</sup>

Besides, central to the Hebrew Scriptures is the belief that the Creator God created the Earth, the oceans, and the heavens and all that is in them – thus all life is dependent on the Creator. This conviction is further developed in the Christian Bible when the gospel writers associate Jesus

<sup>15</sup> Kaoma, *The Creator’s Symphony*, 54-57.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 108-109. See also Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Kaoma, *God’s Family, God’s Earth*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (trans. John Cumming; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 51.

with God the Creator. For instance, Jesus is the source of the Creation as well as the water of life (John 4:10), and the LIFE (John 14:6)! The psalmist speaks to this very point – all creatures depend on God for their daily needs and when the Creator withdraws life from them, ‘they die and return to their dust’ (Ps. 104:25-30). In the New Testament, this conviction is dramatised in the cursing of the fig tree and its immediate death (Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:12-25).

In addition, the Incarnation does not benefit only humanity but the entire created order. It is not by coincidence that Jesus Christ is born in the manger surrounded by animals, dies on the tree, and is buried in earth (*adamah*). To some extent, these acts were meant to redirect us to the Garden of Eden, the tree of life that Adam and Eve violated, and to the earth from which humanity was formed. Whereas Adam and Eve’s disobedience led to life-denying results, Jesus gives life to all his descendants – humans and non-humans alike.

The genealogies of Jesus Christ attest to his ecological ancestorship as well. Although Matthew links Jesus to Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1), Jesus identified himself as above David – for ‘David himself calls him “Lord”’ (Matt. 22:45; Mark 12:37; Luke 20:44). As for Abraham, ‘Before Abraham was even born, I Am!’ (John 8:58). No doubt Abraham remains the symbol of human obedience to the mission of God, but he is not the ancestor of all Creation. The Gospel of Luke, however, traces the genealogy of Jesus beyond Abraham – Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 3:38; cf. Mark 1; John 1:1-3). From this perspective, Jesus is the ancestor of Adam and Abraham as well as the ancestor of all life on Earth.

The linkage between Jesus and Creation is illustrated in how the gospel writers understood his death. As the ancestor of all Creation, when Jesus breathed his last on the cross, ‘darkness filled the whole Earth’ as it did in the beginning when ‘the earth was formless and empty’ and ‘the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters’ (Gen. 1:2). As water ‘watered the whole face of the Earth,’ so, on the cross, water flowed from his body onto the earth – the *adamah* from which humanity was originally created. In addition, the resurrection is accompanied by an earthquake (Matt. 28:2), again suggesting Jesus’ involvement with the Cosmos. Therefore, the whole Creation is a beneficiary of the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and ultimately the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. The Ascension, for example, is not only about Jesus taking humanity into the Godhead, but also the whole created order. As the Episcopal Church collect for Ascension Day states, ‘Our Savior Jesus Christ ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things’.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, God’s care and love for Creation is reflected in Jesus’ own teachings. ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?’, Jesus asked. ‘Yet not

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<sup>20</sup> Ascension Day, Revised Common Lectionary: [www.lectionarypage.net/YearB\\_RCL/Easter/BAscension\\_RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Easter/BAscension_RCL.html) (accessed 20th January 2015).

one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care' (Matt. 10:29). Here, Jesus suggests that although sparrows are of little value to humanity, they possess sacred worth and they are not 'outside' the Creator's love and concern – when one falls to the ground, God feels it. Besides, the Creator cares for the birds and flowers of the field (Matt. 6:26-32). Admittedly, these texts seem to endorse God's unwavering care for humanity, yet they equally point to the intrinsic value and the missionary agency or role of the natural world in the mission of the Creator God – by observing the natural world, we can learn to appreciate God's love, care and generosity to us as well as to every creature big and small. Again, if God cares for sparrows and flowers, what should be our attitude towards them?

Furthermore, even the prophet Isaiah proclaimed God's grand mission as the restoration of the Earth (to its pre-Fall condition) in which all creatures will live in sacred *shalom*. Since political, social, economic and ecological exploitation have no place in God's eschatological community, every creature will have equal access to Mother Earth's goods as well as sacred rights to life (Is. 11:6-9; cf. Is. 65:25). St Paul concurs with Isaiah's eschatological picture when he notes that the fulness of time will involve 'the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth' (Eph. 1:10). Against this background, human-induced climate disasters, extinctions, ecological degradation, landlessness, poverty and the uneven distribution of natural goods are sinful acts that deserve prophetic rage and responses.

But why should nature suffer the consequences of the Fall? Does this suggest that God is not fair? This may seem to be the case. When understood from the concept of ecological interconnectedness and the African belief in shared blame (when one member commits a crime, the entire clan is guilty), it makes sense. If creation is interconnected, it follows that the death of one species affects the whole. Since humans are part of the Creation, by virtue of this ecological interconnectedness, their disobedience affects other creatures – forcing the whole Creation to groan for redemption (Rom. 8:19-22). Writing to the Colossians, Paul expands the cosmic redemption brought about by the death of Jesus, 'For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col. 1:19-20). In order for Christianity to reorient itself to this theology of cosmic love and redemption, we need a new epistemology of relating.

### **A New Epistemology – Towards an Ecological Missiology**

As the crisis deepens, missiology needs ecological hermeneutics. This is because the question of environmental mission is profoundly about God's love for the whole Creation. While many factors blind us from seeing God



in Creation, ecological missiology invites us to reconnect with nature. Whereas theologies influenced by the Enlightenment value the natural world instrumentally, ecological missiology challenges us to reclaim and honour our ecological relatedness with the entire created order.

It is important to remember that the Great Commission is not only about preaching the gospel; it also involves teaching people to be God's missionaries after the pattern of the Incarnate God (Matt. 28:18-20). John Stott rightly objects to an understanding of the *missio Dei* that speaks to the socio-economic and political issues at the expense of evangelism,<sup>21</sup> a complaint still heard, especially in evangelical circles. Since 1984, Anglicans have addressed this concern by understanding the mission of God as encompassing five marks:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by loving service

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>22</sup>

Understandably, colonial missionary activities that planted Christianity in non-western nations can lead us to dismiss evangelism as a critical element of the mission of God. But as this volume shows, ecologically understood and applied, the *missio Dei* can enhance Christian social witness and evangelism. For example, despite their strong differences in beliefs, African Initiated Churches (AIC) and African Traditionalists in rural Zimbabwe have found common ground in tree-planting initiatives. They both interpret tree-planting ministry from their common conviction that the Earth belongs to *Mwari* (God).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, despite doctrinal differences between Christian denominations – AICs, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and mainline Protestant churches – Christians have found common ground in Creation care. It is therefore suggestive that Creation care is not a barrier to the Great Commission – it is an ally to preaching the gospel, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue and missionary collaborations.

Relatedly, ecological missiology ought to reclaim the word 'missionary' from the disempowering overtones of whiteness and colonialism. According to David Bosch, any theology that has no 'missionary' character

<sup>21</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975), 15-20.

<sup>22</sup> The Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series volume, *Life-Widening Mission* explores these marks in detail. See Cathy Ross (ed), *Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2012), especially 14-92, 143-52.

<sup>23</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 55, 126.



is not theology at all.<sup>24</sup> By implication, all theological disciplines are reflections of God's activities as well as human relationship with God, fellow humans, and the whole Creation. Christian mission, to use Ernst M. Conradie's words, addresses 'the full spectrum of God's acts aimed at the well-being of creation, or better, at the fellowship between the Creator and creation...'<sup>25</sup> This holistic approach to Christian mission invites a paradigm shift from viewing God apart from the Earth to planting God in Creation – for without the Creation, God remains unknown.

Although ecological missiology possesses eco-socio-political and economic elements, it invites people into what Bishop Mark McDonald terms theocentric or Trinitarian mission. McDonald argues that this mission is 'in sharp contrast to the late Christendom project of missionising, especially in the context of the West's colonial expansion'. Christian mission, he posits, understands the mission of God as 'the animating principle for all ministries'. This perception of the *missio Dei* moves Christian mission from the idea of God's absence (the assumption that missionaries bring God to others) to that of 'God's presence in creation, culture and history'.<sup>26</sup> Unlike a missiology of absence, a missiology of presence admits that God is always walking on Earth (Gen. 3:8) – for wherever we step is holy ground (Ex. 3:5).

A missiology of presence finds support in Scripture. Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, but the Earth remains God's sacred garden. While John Stott traces the mission of God to the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3),<sup>27</sup> the biblical Creator is also the 'Incarnate missionary' Spirit who creates, cares, loves, sustains, relates to and secures the rights of outcasts and the oppressed – both human and non-human beings alike. Amidst pressing human needs, however, we over-promote our interests over those of the Creation. Yet the established link between environmental degradation and poverty reveals the two faces of Jesus in the world today – the poor face and the ecological face. Boff writes:

Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they stem from two wounds that are bleeding. The first, the wound of poverty and wretchedness, tears the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people the world over. The second, the systematic aggression against the earth, destroys the equilibrium of the planet, threatened by the depredation made by a type of development undertaken by contemporary societies, now spread throughout the world. Both lines of reflection stem from a cry: the cry of the poor for life, liberty and beauty... in the case of liberation theology; the cry of the earth groaning under oppression... in that of ecology. Both seek

<sup>24</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 494.

<sup>25</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, 'Creation at the Heart of Mission?', *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology* 38, 3 (November 2010), 380-97, 393.

<sup>26</sup> Mark McDonald, 'Receiving a New Day of Mission,' in Cathy Ross (ed), *Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2012), 140.

<sup>27</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 21.

liberation: one of the poor by themselves, as historical agents...; the other of the earth through a new alliance between [the natural world] and human beings, in a brotherly/sisterly relationship...<sup>28</sup>

Against this background, the church's participation in the mission of God is a prophetic task – demanding and working for eco-social-justice across the globe.

In his 2015 Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis argues that 'a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*.'<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, he maintains that an 'ecological debt' exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected with commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.<sup>30</sup> But this debt is also due to effects of climate change, the disposal of waste and pollution:

The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. There is also the damage caused by the export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home, in the countries in which they raise their capital.<sup>31</sup>

Pope Francis's argument is complimented by *The Lancet* (a British medical journal) Commissions' 2015 report *Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health*. 'Donor countries,' the report contends, 'have a responsibility to support measures which reduce the impacts of climate change on human well-being and support adaptation... in low-income and middle-income countries.'<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, the *missio Creatoris Dei* invites us to listen, learn from and partner with other Christian and non-Christian communities on Creation care. Since God works to restore the Earth to its original state in

<sup>28</sup> Leonardo Boff, 'Liberation Theology and Ecology: Alternative, Confrontation or Complementarities,' in Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (eds), *Ecology and Poverty* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 67.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care For Our Common Home* (24th May 2015), 35 (italics his): [http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf) (accessed 18th June 2015). See Leonardo Boff's book, which bears the same title: *The Cry of the Earth, The Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 37.

<sup>32</sup> The Lancet Commissions, *Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health* (23rd June 2015), 2: <http://press.thelancet.com/Climate2Commission.pdf> (accessed 19th June 2015).

Jesus Christ, the church is mandated to work for the holistic liberation of all creatures. Here, the paradigm of Jesus as the ecological ancestor to all life can aid the appreciation of human relatedness to the natural world – we all share a single ancestor, Jesus Christ. Thus, global Christianity needs to re-learn the Christian faith aided by cultures not influenced by the Enlightenment, and a holistic reading of the Bible.

Also, the interconnectedness of Creation suggests that humanity shares a common fate with the Earth. Adam is formed from *adamah* and placed ‘in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’ (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew *abad* and *shama* translated as ‘to work’ and ‘to take care’ carry overtones of custodian and caring. While this text suggests that Adam and Eve were created with the missional task of tending God’s garden, this role is in their self-interest. Whereas the US-based climate change sceptic Evangelical group ‘Cornwall Alliance’ claims that global warming and higher carbon emissions are good for the Earth and humanity,<sup>33</sup> the Lancet Commissions concluded that climate change will adversely affect global health. ‘Responding to climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the twenty-first century,’<sup>34</sup> the Lancet Commissions assert. Similarly, Pope Francis writes, ‘*God forgives always, we men forgive sometimes, but creation never forgives and if you don’t care for it, it will destroy you.*’<sup>35</sup> Scientists Paul R. Epstein and Dan Ferber’s 2011 study in Kenya reached a similar conclusion.<sup>36</sup> For humanity, therefore, Earth care is a survival issue – with the poor impacted the most!

### The Re-emerging of Christian Mission as Creation Care

The re-emerging ecological consciousness in global Christianity is not new – it has always been part of the Christian faith and its creeds. Notwithstanding that the Enlightenment promoted the exploitation of Creation, it did not erase the biblical basis for Creation care: the Earth belongs to God, not to us. Against the assumption that we own this Earth, Wright states:

<sup>33</sup> Cornwall Alliance, ‘An Open Letter to Pope Francis on Climate Change,’ 27th April 2015: [www.cornwallalliance.org/2015/04/27/an-open-letter-to-pope-francisco-on-climate-change](http://www.cornwallalliance.org/2015/04/27/an-open-letter-to-pope-francisco-on-climate-change) (accessed 18th May 2015).

<sup>34</sup> The Lancet Commissions, *Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health* (23rd June 2015), 2: <http://press.thelancet.com/Climate2Commission.pdf> (accessed 19th June 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, ‘General Audience St. Peter’s Square,’ Wednesday, 21st May 2014 (italics his): [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papafrancesco\\_20140521\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papafrancesco_20140521_udienza-generale.html) (accessed 20th May 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Paul R. Epstein and Dan Ferber, *Changing Planet, Changing Health: How Climate Crisis Threatens our Health and What We Can Do About It* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 66.

The earth... belongs to God because God made it. At the very least, this reminds us that if the earth is God's, it is not ours. We do not own this planet, even if our behaviour tends to boast that we think we do. No, God is the earth's landlord and we are God's tenants. God has given the earth into our resident *possession* (Ps. 115:16), but we do not hold the title deed of ultimate ownership. So, as in any landlord-tenant relationship, God holds us accountable to himself for how we treat his property.<sup>37</sup>

Wright insists that this biblical affirmation has both socio-spiritual, ethical and missional implications. As Christians, we are accountable to God for how we relate to, and use, the Earth's natural goods.

As this volume concludes, the following are some practical missiological ideas that global Christianity can embrace in Earth care:<sup>38</sup>

### *Instil Environmental Consciousness in Children and Young Adults*

Christian mission ought to instil environmental consciousness in young people and children. Youth groups, Sunday School children, baptism and confirmation candidates should be instructed to value and treat the natural world as a Sacramental Commons. Changing the theological paradigms at the church school level will aid the formation and the nurturing of ecologically conscious disciples.

### *Build Bridges – Engage Sciences in the Mission of Creation Care*

Ecological missiology is highly complex and can hardly be practised in isolation from other fields of knowledge. Science and religion are not enemies in ecological ethics and mission, but partners – after all, some scientists are committed Christians. And as repeatedly noted, all human beings regardless of their religious convictions are invited to employ their gifts to care for the Earth.

### *Expand Moral Lenses to Include Creation*

Christian mission needs to expand its moral lenses to include the entire Creation. In many parts of the global South, Christianity has been the voice of the oppressed and the voiceless. However, we cannot defend the poor without addressing environmental degradation. Moreover, the God who demands that we care for one another also invites us to care for the Earth. As already noted, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers just as we are the Earth's keepers. While accepting the challenges of involuntary poverty

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<sup>37</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 397.

<sup>38</sup> With modifications, this section is adapted from Kaoma, *The Creator's Symphony*, 140-44.

to Earth care, all Christians are invited to participate in God's mission regardless.

### *Address the Global Divide between the Rich and the Poor*

The growing economic inequality and the global divide between the rich and the poor, and the culture of materialism that characterises the global North, are not only unsustainable but also immoral. The global North should lead sustainable lifestyles, while the global South, especially African Christianity needs to confront corruption and the exploitation of Africa's natural goods by a minority while masses languish in perpetual poverty.

### *Teach Theology with the Earth in Mind – Form Eco-Ministers*

Immediate attention needs to be paid to reforming our theological seminaries into eco-friendly learning institutions. Amidst the recurring crisis, theologians ought to ask (a) in what ways are theological disciplines enhancing the goodness of creation locally, nationally and globally? And (b) can God still look at the Creation and declare the natural world 'very good'? In short, Christian theology, ethics and spirituality must be taught with the Earth in mind – all theological disciplines ought to enhance ecological responsibilities and action.

### *Lobby Governments to Reduce Carbon Emissions*

As the global community works to reduce carbon footprints, Christians should pro-actively and insistently lobby governments to cap carbon emissions. Apart from investing in eco-friendly companies, and divesting from companies that trade in fossil fuels, Christians can demand that multinational companies adhere to the same environmental standards found in the West when drilling for oil and dumping wastes in the global South. Christians should also pro-actively engage governments to adhere to international conventions on climate change as a meaningful way of ensuring ecological well-being today and in the future.

### *Build on the Biblical Foundation of Creation*

The mission of Earth care needs to take the biblical conception of Creation seriously. By re-reading the Bible from the perspective of the Earth, the missionary nature of the natural world to humanity and vice versa can emerge. We were created to serve the natural world just as the natural world serves us. Besides, the biblical witness to the goodness and sacredness of Creation can inform and reform human attitudes towards the Earth.

### *We need Missionary Partnership around Creation Care*

Tree-planting and land reclamation are some of the Earth-healing initiatives that ought to typify global Christian partnerships and witness. In the past, Christian unity has been witnessed in efforts to combat racism, HIV/AIDS, poverty and other social ills. Today, we need Christian unity in the fight against environmental degradation. Since the majority of Africans depend on wood for fuel, for example, there is a need to encourage and partner with them to plant two trees for every tree felled. In addition, there is a need to help poor people access solar power. Just as Christian communities have partnered in safe-water provision to the poor, we need Christian partnership in the provision of solar power to the Earth's poor.

### *Declare a Decade of Creation Care*

Global Christianity is generally agreed that Creation care is an important element of the mission of the Creator God. Hence, global Christianity should seriously consider declaring 'a decade of Environmental Protection and Creation care'. During this period, all Christians can engage in applied acts of Earth care. Imagine the number of trees we can plant if every Christian on planet Earth planted ten trees in a decade!

### **God So Loved the Cosmos**

The mission of the Creator God knows no boundaries and neither does Christian mission. As one body of Christ, we are all invited to listen and learn from one another as we participate in the mission of God. Against the neo-colonial assumption that missionary partnership implies sharing only material goods, global Christianity can benefit from, and learn ecological consciousness and simple lifestyles from, God's missionaries in the global South. Non-western theological motifs and themes that attach sacredness to the Earth can aid the replacement of theologies tainted by the Enlightenment that disconnect us from the Earth. The Christology of Jesus as the ecological ancestor, complemented by the biblical witness of Jesus as both the source of life (John 1:1-3) and the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15-20), can reform, inform, as well as enhance Earth care in Christian mission. God loves the Cosmos – it is God's mission, God's Creation, and God's church – the Creator God invites us to be part of this sacred and holy mission.

### **Resources**

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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Marthinus L. Daneel, ThD**, Emeritus Professor of Missiology, University of South Africa, and Boston University. Pioneer leader of grassroots religiously-based Earth care, Daneel developed contextualised ecumenical ministries in theological education, community development, and Earth-keeping for and with African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe. Publications include *The God of the Matopo Hills* (1970), *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vols. I-III (1971, 1976, 1988), *African Earthkeepers: Interfaith Mission in Earth Care*, Vols. I-II (1998, 2000), and *Fullness of Life for All* (co-editor, 2003). His novel (*Guerrilla Snuff*) (1995), was selected one of the 75 best Zimbabwean books of the twentieth century.

**Bishop Bud Cederholm** was Suffragan (assistant) bishop in Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts until his retirement in November 2011. An active voice and witness for environmental stewardship. In Fall 2010, launched an ambitious Green Grants Initiative to encourage, challenge and support all congregations in environmental stewardship through grants, resource-sharing and education. Is also a musician, gardener and avid Boston Red Sox and New England Patriots fan. He and his wife, Ruth Ann, have two sons and five grandchildren.

**Andrea Ramos Santos, PhD**, is Executive Director of A Rocha Brazil, professional ecologist with specialisation in Environmental Education.

**Raquel Gonçalves Arouca, PhD**, is Co-ordinator of Projects for A Rocha Brazil, and holds a Master's in Ecology and Natural Resources, and a Doctorate in Entomology with specialisation in Environmental Education. Gínia Cesar Bontempo, Member of A Rocha Brazil's Scientific Council; Carina Oliveira Abreu, Project Co-ordinator, A Rocha Brazil.

**Per Ivar Våje, Dr Sc**, from Norway, is educated as a soil scientist. He has worked as a development agent with churches in Ethiopia and Madagascar for nine years, and three years as a researcher of soil and water at interface of agriculture and the environment. Currently a national co-ordinator of the 'Creation and Sustainability' project, which focuses on climate change from a theological perspective reflecting all denominations in Norway.

**Dana L. Robert, PhD**, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission, and Director, Center for Global Christianity and Mission, Boston University. A historian of Christianity as it crosses cultural and geographic boundaries, with particular expertise in North American and African mission history. At Boston University since 1984, she directs

one of the oldest doctoral programmes in Mission Studies and World Christianity in the United States. Among her books are *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice*; *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (ed); *African Initiatives in Christian Mission* (ed) and *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Wiley-Blackwell, now in sixth printing). In addition to her position in the School of Theology, is also affiliated with African Studies Center at Boston University: [drobdan@bu.edu](mailto:drobdan@bu.edu)

**John Hart, PhD**, Professor of Christian Ethics, Boston University School of Theology, has written six books: *Encountering ETI: Aliens in Avatar and the Americas*; *Cosmic Commons: Spirit, Science, and Space*; *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*; *What Are They Saying About... Environmental Theology?*; *Ethics and Technology: Innovation and Transformation in Community Contexts*; and *The Spirit of the Earth: A Theology of the Land*. Is also Editor, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*. PhD and STM from Union Theological Seminary, New York, where he was Tutor in Christian Ethics, and also Tutor for Gustavo Gutiérrez. ‘Ghost writer’ for two regional Catholic bishops’ environmental statements, and for draft of a papal homily; has also worked with native peoples’ human rights organisations. Has presented more than two hundred lectures on socio-ecological ethics on five continents, in 34 US states, and in Australia, Brazil, Canada, UK, Italy, Nepal, and Switzerland.

**Revd Dave Bookless, PhD** candidate in Biblical Theology and Conservation Biology at the University of Cambridge, and an Associate of the Faraday Institute, was born in India to missionary parents, but spent most of his adult life in multicultural UK contexts in Bradford and then Southall, where he lives with his wife and daughters. An ordained Anglican, has advised the Church of England on environmental matters, chaired the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland, and was co-founder and National Director of A Rocha UK. Currently Director of Theology for A Rocha International. Has contributed to many books and journals, and authored *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God’s World* (IVP 2008) and *God Doesn’t Do Waste: Redeeming the Whole of Life* (IVP 2010). Writes a regular eco-blog at [www.blog.arocha.org](http://www.blog.arocha.org)

**Amos Yong, PhD**, is Professor of Theology and Mission and director of the Center for Missiological Research at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California since 2014. Holds degrees in theology, history and religious studies from western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Seminary), Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, and Boston

University, Boston, Massachusetts, and an undergraduate degree from Bethany University of the Assemblies of God. Has authored or edited over thirty volumes. He and his wife, Alma, have three children – Aizaiah (married to Neddy), on the pastoral team at New Life Church, Renton, Washington; Alyssa, a graduate of Vanguard University, Costa Mesa, California; and Annalisa, a student at Point Loma University, San Diego, California. Amos and Alma reside in Pasadena, California.

**Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, PhD**, is Metropolitan of Niranam Diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India. Also serves World Council of Churches as Moderator of Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and as Chairperson of Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI).

**Norm Faramelli, PhD**, is an Episcopal priest with extensive pastoral experience in urban ministry. A trained chemical engineer, he served the National Episcopal Church and other national denominations in the US on the development of programmes in eco-justice issues for over ten years. In addition to being a consultant to congregations and other church bodies, has worked in governmental agencies on transportation and environmental planning. Has also had a long career dealing with ecumenical, economic and environmental justice issues. Currently working with the Massachusetts Interfaith Worker Justice coalition on issues of economic inequality. Received his PhD from Temple University, focusing on relationship of contemporary theology and technology.

**Tallessyn Zawn Grenfell-Lee** is a PhD candidate in Ecological Ethics at Boston University School of Theology. She has published in various peer-reviewed journals including *Neuron*; *Molecular and Cellular Biology*; *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*; and in various books, and in the *Wiley & Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*. Has contributed to the feminism and religion blog *feminismandreligion.com*. Before studying ethics, worked in molecular biology, conducting research in Alzheimer's disease and ovarian cancer. An alumna of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and of Harvard University's department of Molecular and Cellular Biology.

**Chris Wright, PhD**, is the International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership, which provides literature, scholarships and preaching training for Majority World pastors and seminaries. Taught in India for five years. Books include *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*; *The Mission of God*; *The God I Don't Understand*; and *The Mission of God's People*. Chris and his wife Liz have four adult children and several grandchildren and live in London, as members of All Souls' Church, Langham Place.



**Mary Elizabeth Moore, PhD**, is Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Theology and Education, Boston University. Her passion is to journey with others to cultivate deeper faith and a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. Most recent books include: *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*; *Ministering with the Earth*; and *Teaching from the Heart*, plus three edited volumes: *A Living Tradition: Critical Recovery and Reconstruction of Wesleyan Heritage*; *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*; and *Practical Theology and Hermeneutics*. Mary Elizabeth is married to Allen, and they are blessed with five children and eight grandchildren.

**Kwok Pui-lan, ThD**, was born in Hong Kong and is the William F. Cole Professor of Christian Theology and Spirituality at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Past president of the American Academy of Religion. Publications include: *Gender, Globalization, and Peacebuilding*; *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*; *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*; and *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*. She is the editor of *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology and Women and Christianity* in four volumes.

**Rodney L. Petersen, PhD**, is a Research Associate in the Center for Global Christianity and Mission, Boston University School of Theology. Currently Executive Director of Co-operative Metropolitan Ministries in Boston, and Executive Director of The Lord's Day Alliance in the U; formerly served as Executive Director of the Boston Theological Institute, having taught in the schools of the consortium. Author and/or editor of *Consumption, Population, and Sustainability: Perspectives from Science and Religion* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000); *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and 21st Century Discipleship* (Wipf & Stock, 2013). Served as Research Associate and General Editor of *Divinings: History of Religion* at Harvard by George H. Williams, three volumes (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

**Hermann Mvula** is a PhD candidate and graduate of theology from Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya, where he spent six years of his theological education. Served as project co-ordinator for a joint project of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries and World Vision Malawi before joining the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Malawi where he heads the Department and teaches biblical theology. Has published in many books and journals, and presented academic papers including 'The Praxis of Political Theology: Speaking the Truth to Caesar' (2013); and 'Back to the Basics: The Supernatural Imperatives of Caring for Creation' (2014).



**Tim Carriker, PhD**, holds MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, ThM in Missiology and PhD in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. Mission Co-worker of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Missiological Consultant and Educator for the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil, Chaplain of A Rocha Brazil, and Consultant for 'Ecology and Faith' for Brazilian Evangelical Alliance. Has served as Professor of Mission and Bible at numerous seminaries and universities in Brazil. Has published six books, and over a hundred articles, as well as editing seven volumes, as well as being General Editor for the Mission Study Bible, published by the Brazilian Bible Society (2014), with versions currently being prepared in Spanish and English.

**Lubunga W'Ehusha, PhD**, is from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); he holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Had previously graduated with an MSc in Geology in DRC. Has written numerous journal articles, conference papers and chapters in published books. More recently, read a paper entitled 'Moving at the Pace of the Cattle: Care for nature in Genesis' during the conference of the Old Testament Society of Southern Africa, held at the University of Johannesburg in September 2014.

**Kapya J. Kaoma, ThD**, is Visiting Researcher at Boston University Center for Global Christianity and Mission; Rector of Christ Church; adjunct Professor at Episcopal Divinity School (USA) and St John's University College (Zambia). Books include *The Creator's Symphony: African Christianity and the Plight of Earth and the Poor*; *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu*; and *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams: Democracy, the Oppressed, and the Church in Africa*.

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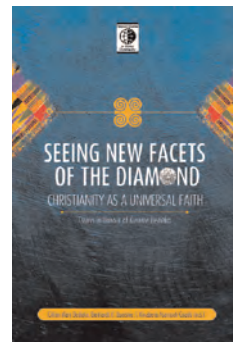
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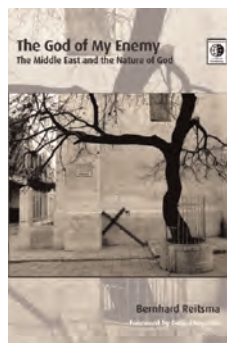


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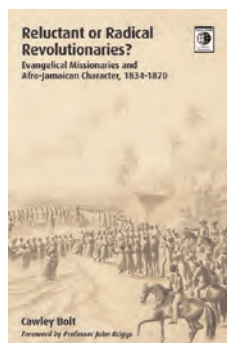
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**Kapya J. Kaoma** is Visiting Researcher at Boston University's Center for Global Christianity and Mission and adjunct Professor at St John's University College, Zambia. He holds degrees from Theological College of Central Africa (now Evangelical University College), Zambia; Trinity College, England; Episcopal Divinity School, and Boston University in the United States. He is author of *The Creator's Symphony: African Christianity and the Plight of Earth and the Poor* (2015) and *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams: Democracy, the Oppressed, and the Church in Africa* (2015).



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