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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Stu#ckelberger, Christoph
Publisher	Globethics.net
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-11-09 05:20:26
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/156801

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ECO-THEOLOGY STRATEGY

The Calling of Influencing Key Drivers

Christoph Stückelberger

7.1 500 Years of Creation Theology, 50 years of Eco-Theology

Eco-theology is not only a topic of the last decades, but is as old as theology itself throughout history.

The Old Church: creation theology as always part of faith and doctrine, even though not with a direct link to environmental destruction, but with reference to God the creator and sustainer of the creation.

In Reformation it is impressive that all reformers – even though concentrated on salvation of human individuals – always that non-human beings will be part of eternal life in heaven. No salvation of humans without salvation of the whole creation was their faith.[48]

In the 18th and 19th Century: Pietism emphasised individual salvation. There was a disconnection to technology and responsibility of

[48] See Stückelberger, Christoph, *Umwelt und Entwicklung. Eine sozialethische Orientierung,* Stuttgart 1996, 133-142.

churches for science and technology. This is one reason why churches did not interact with new technological developments by setting ethical and religious benchmarks.

In the 20th century: Eco-theology was rediscovered step by step, as early as 1925 by the Religious Socialist Leonhard Ragaz in Zurich,[49] then by Karl Barth in Basel.[50] From the 1970ies, a broad literature on eco-theology, eco-ethics and eco-praxis emerged.

Let me add my own history of dealing with eco-theology in the last four decades. 1979, at the age of 28, I was invited by my ethics professor Arthur Rich in Zurich to publish my first book, my master thesis, on a new lifestyle which respects environment and development.[51] 1986 I initiated and founded together with the great ecumenist Lukas Vischer the Swiss Association Church and Environment OeKU.[52] It continues since thirty years to work with parishes for eco-theology and eco-praxis. 1989 I represented the Conference of European Churches CEC at the multi-stakeholder Conference on Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change in Washington and sensitized by it initiated 1990 the first church campaign on Climate Change in Switzerland with the motto: "Reduce each year fossil energy by 2%". If this slogan was implemented in society, we could have solved the climate issue. The figures were on the table, the measures needed were clear. 1996 I published my habilitation on Environmental

[49] Ibid., 159-162.
[50] Ibid., 156-159. See Link, Christian, *Schöpfung, Vol. 1*, Gütersloh 1991, 257-329.
[51] Stückelberger, Christoph, *Aufbruch zu einem menschengerechten Wachstum. Sozialethische Ansätze für einen neuen Lebensstil*, Zürich 1979, 3rd edition 1982.
[52] Ökumenische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kirche und Umwelt, www.oeku.ch

Ethics.[53] I continue to support ongoing concrete actions, green churches, also by worldwide teaching.[54]

7.2 Survey 2016: Some Findings and Challenges

The *Global Survey on Eco-theology, Climate Justice and Food Security in Theol. Education and Christian Leadership Development* is an important survey on efforts on all continents.[55] The final report will show more details. At this place I want to draw the attention only on *five key recommendations:*

- Extension of resources and simplified access to resources. Online availability deserves first priority as form of distribution.
- Provision of resources in catchy ways. Therefore, these types of resources should be prioritized as the junctions to connect, focusing on liturgies.
- Improvement of inter-connected collaboration. The various "inter" seem to be beneficial for many participants and were often emphasised in the survey.
- To raise the number of institutions who provide ETCF-related lessons, is a key connector to raise awareness and knowledge, mainly for future ministers and church affiliated persons.
- Awareness-raising. Faith-based organisations and churches should not be the odd person out when it comes to environmental and climate issues. Public relations for the non-affiliated public is not of utmost priority, but should not be neglected.

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[53] Stückelberger, Christoph, *Umwelt und Entwicklung. Eine sozialethische Orientierung,* Stuttgart 1996.
[54] See a compilation of my texts on Eco-theology in Stückelberger, Christoph, *Global Ethics Applied, Vol 2 Environmental Ethics*, Globethics Readers Series, Geneva 2016.
[55] See in this volume pages 77ff.

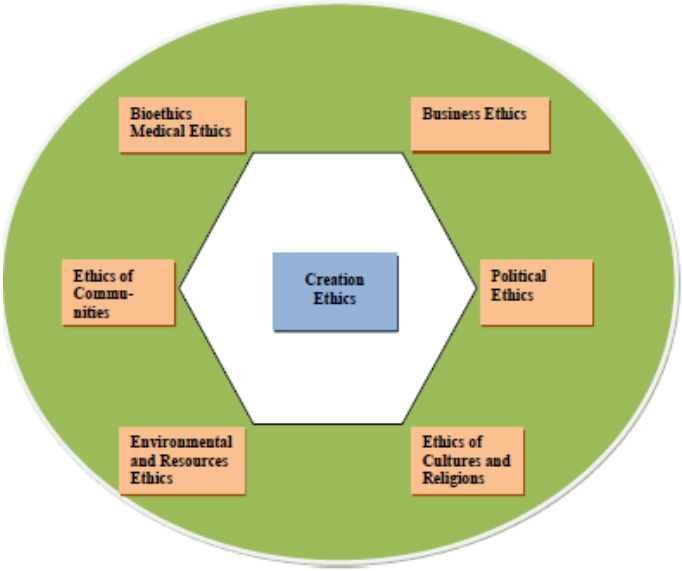
7.3 Theological Themes

In Eco-theology there is often a one-sided emphasis on Protology, the doctrine of creation and the beginning of the world. We rarely find deep considerations on Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, and Eschatology. We need to include all theological disciplines in Eco-theology!



7.4 Ethical Themes

In Creation Ethics we observe often a one-sided emphasis on Environmental Ethics in a narrow sense of the relation between human beings and nature. But the environment cannot be improved if we do not include more often ethics of economy, politics, technology, cultures, religions and media.



7.5 Church Actors

Churches and church-related institutions have manifold forms and specific chances and limitations related to environmental engagement

- Individual Christians as private persons
- Individual Christians in their professional professions
- Informal groups of Christians (e.g. bible study groups, action groups)
- Parishes
- Denominational churches (majority and minority churches)
- Christian movements, organised action groups, associations
- Academic and research institutions
- Interfaith activities
- National Councils of Churches

- Ecumenical associations on all levels up to the World Council of Churches and the Vatican.

7.6 EcoTheolStrategy (ETS as Contribution to SDG 2030)

In the last five decades, many very valuable contributions on eco-theology and eco-ethics have been written. Theologians and churches are good in arguments and statements, but they are often weak in strategies to influencing key drivers of development. An Ecological Theological Strategy (EcoTheolStrategy ETS) is needed. The churches could have much greater influence if they developed clearer strategies based on sharp analyses of power structures. Such a strategy is also an important contribution to the UN sustainable Development Goals SDGs.

7.6.1 The Calling for Influencing Key Drivers

Churches and theological institutions need a clearer analysis of power: Which are the key drivers of transformation? Which are the key strategies for transformation?

Mission as missio and calling of God is the call to transform the individual and the world in the light of God's spirit and the perspective of God's Kingdom. Key drivers of transformation today are technologies, economy, ideologies, religions and cultures.

I mention eight domains of influencing drivers of development. The following order means: I emphasize first those underdeveloped in churches and church-related organisations (CROs).

7.6.2 Influencing Technological Innovation

Theologies and churches have to analyse the worldview (visions, dreams, "The Silicon Valley Paradigm") and the means behind the technological innovation. Technological innovation is not neutral as it is

often seen, but is driven by certain visions, values and ideologies. Research ethics and innovation ethics is a key contribution to Eco-theology.[56]

Influencing technological innovation should happen in three phases:

1. Development of research projects and definition of priorities including ethical criteria (R&D phase)
2. Legislation for new technologies (implementation phase)
3. Consumption and recycling in the use of the technologies (sustainability phase, combined with 2).

7.6.3 Influencing Investors and Business

The Investors community, especially "Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change" IIGCC,[57] a global alliance of investors, mainly pension funds, for climate/ carbon-neutral investments, has a very great influence on environmentally relevant investments. Church should be more actively interact with them. At least two of the 120 members are church-related investment funds from Great Britain.[58] It goes in the right direction, but more church funds should join.

Cooperation with Christian Entrepreneurs: Christian entrepreneurs can play a key role in promoting green business (e.g. in China). The associations of catholic (e.g. BKU Bund Katholischer Unternehmer in Germany), protestant (e.g. VCU Verein Christlicher Unternehmer der Schweiz), orthodox (e.g. Association of Russian-orthodox entrepreneurs in Russia) and ecumenical entrepreneurs (e.g. Uniapac, the global

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[56] See Bastos de Morais, Jean-Claude/ Stückelberger, Christoph (eds.): *Innovation Ethics. African and Global Perspectives*, Geneva: Globethics Publications, 2014, free download at www.globethics.net/publications.

[57] http://www.iigcc.org. The 120 institutional members represent 13 trillion Euros in assets!

[58] Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church, Church of England.

association of Christian entrepreneurs) can play an important role for environmental economy.

Example Vatican Strategy: The Vatican has a clearer strategy than protestant institutions in including high level scientific experts and also entrepreneurs in discussing and advising on core church texts such as the Encyclica "Laudato Si" of Pope Francis. This created a large publicity and media coverage.

7.6.4 Influencing Politics: BRICS

BRICS/ BRICSTIN: The BRICS countries Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and the coming key economic players Turkey, Indonesia and Nigeria (TIN) are key actors for environmental protection and climate issues. This is one strategic reason why Globethics.net opened Regional Programmes/ National Contacts in these BRICSTIN countries!

Churches and religious organisations in these countries should be especially strengthened in their EcoTheolstrategy. The leverage for real impact on the environment is larger than in other developing countries.

Example China: Green churches in China have an enormous potential with 50-100 Mio Christians. E.g. Globethics.net with its Leadership Centre offered trainings in China and Geneva for Christian Entrepreneurs and church leaders and it supported the opening of the Amity International Office in Geneva[59] on 9 March 2015 to strengthen advocacy work of Chinese Christian NGOs including advocacy for climate change.

[59] Amity is a thirty years old Christian development and emergency aid agency, founded by the China Christian Council CCC/ TSPM with its headquarter in Nanjing/China. www.amityfoundation.org

7.6.5 Influencing Theologies and Ideologies

De-legitimize violent extremism[60] with religious justifications as abuses of religion is very important not only for peace, but environmental stability. There is no environmental protection without peace and social justice. This is still true and reflects the holistic view of the biblical shalom which includes social, environmental, economic and security aspects of peace. *Promote peaceful transformation.*

De-legitimize apocalyptic end-war (Armaggedon) and *Promote that only God is judging history and is mastering time/ kairos.*

De-legitimize Christian fatalism: fatalism is sin. Promote life-supporting *action as an expression of faith and response to God's Alliance.*

De-legitimize technological and economic mono-cultural optimism and *promote economic, technological and cultural diversity as biodiversity.*

De-legitimize populist, absolutist order politics and *promote a culture of trust in God's providence in times of chaos.*

7.6.6 Influencing by Liturgy and Spirituality

Strengthen Eco-spirituality means: unveil the energy coming from biblical visions of God's kingdom and life. Experience of the "alternative which is possible" (experience: clean air and stars on sky in the Swiss Alps for Christian Entrepreneurs from Beijing).

Enable processes of mourning and hope: Mourn on end of (over-) consumption and discover the liberating potential of the "Age of Less" and of a new lifestyle.

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[60] See the statement on 6 March of the interfaith consultation in Nairobi, organised by Globethics.net: http://www.globethics.net/de/-/press-release-christians-and-muslims-cooperate-to-overcome-violent-extremism.

Collection of prayers: Express cry, mourning, joy, thankfulness and responsive faith in action in prayers. Churches also need to help believers to reformulate their prayers, e.g. praying for rain or sun should be replaced by praying for the wisdom, access to information and the courage to be involved in actions for climate justice.

7.6.7 Influencing by Information and Education

Information and education are core areas of churches and they invested most of their energy in environmental concerns in these activities. This remains important, but the question is which forms and instruments of education are the most effective with the greatest impact.

German and Swiss Churches have been active in broad environmental campaigns for decades. But more and more churches and church-related agencies on all continents are active in information campaigns and education efforts.

Some examples:

- The Suba Environmental Education of Kenya SEEK[61] seeks the transformation of the greater Suba area in Kenya by providing opportunities for the young and old to know God through the wonders of His creation, while becoming environmentally literate, able to address environmental issues in a Biblical way that cares for both people and the earth. Is combines mission and environment.
- An example for access to information is the Globethics.net online Library, e.g. with a special collection on Climate Ethics.[62] Download of over four million documents is for free via the internet.

[61] www.missionwild.org/index.php/about.
[62] www.globethics.net/library.

- An example for broad campaining: "Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland" was a very comprehensive large study and related to a large ecumenical campaign for the profound transformation of society. It was an action by Bread for the World, BUND and the Wuppertal Institute.[63]
- Examples for Eco-spirituality are manifold, e.g. Earthhealing[64] or movements in India.[65]

7.6.8 Influencing by Church Actions

The Conference on Eco-theology in Volos, Greece, showed manifold encouraging examples for church-related actions presented from Korea, the Ecumenical Church and Environment Network ECEN, the United Evangelical Mission UEM, from Rwanda, Latvia, Lebanon etc. These actions are very important signs of home and have a concrete impact.

But churches and church-related organisations such as development and mission partners should reserve more funds and human resources for advocacy and ecumenical voices such as climate justice of the World Council of Churches. Churches are often not present and therefore not heard in international fora and the UN decision-making bodies. If only one additional percent of the funds invested for environment on parish and province/ diocesan level was spent for global ecumenical advocacy, the churches voices would be better heard.

7.6.9 Influencing by Networks

In an interconnected world based on internet and social media, networks are powerful instruments and must be part of the

[63] www.zukunftsfaehiges-deutschland.de
[64] www.earthhealing.info
[65] www.religiousindia.org/tag/eco-spirituality

EcoTheolStrategy. Some encouraging examples of such faith-based environmental networks are:

- Climate Justice networks[66]
- European Christian Environmental Network ECEN[67]
- Evangelical Environmental Network EEN[68]
- Ecumenical Water Network[69]
- Globethics.net.[70]

All these different activities together, not isolated, can build the Ecumenical Environmental Strategy EcoTheolStrategy.

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[67] www.ecen.org,

[68] www.een.org

[69] www.oikoumene.org/activities/ewn-home.html

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