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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Werner, Dietrich, 1956-
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Download date	2026-07-11 22:56:43
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/3863483

ECO-THEOLOGY – ELEMENTS OF THE LEARNING JOURNEY IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Wuppertal Lecture

Dietrich Werner

1. Eco-Theology – Elements of the Learning Journey in the Ecumenical Movement

1.1 The neglect and the discovery of the ecological dimension in the ecumenical movement

The ecumenical movement grew as a renewal movement for the social witness of the churches and their unity in the shadow of two devastating world wars in the 20th century. Its major focus in its beginning period in the 20th century was reclaiming the Lordship of Christ over against both the church and the world as the world of nations was in a state of complete disorder and chaos in this period: The phase after the First and the Second World had underlined how much nationalism, denominational disunity and ethnocentrism could lead to devastation within the global community and in each national state. Thus in this period the reordering the life of societies and of the relations between nations was a major concern, not so much the harmony between humankind and nature. The theme of the first Ecumenical Assembly Amsterdam in 1948, “Man’s Disorder and God’s Design”, was reflected in terms of the relations between nations, people and denominations. Discovering the unity of both the churches and the unity of humankind after a period of devastating wars was at the heart of the ecumenical vision unfolded; relations between humankind with nature did not present a major focus yet in the period of the foundational years of the ecumenical movement. One can therefore argue that by and large the early ecumenical movement – at least before 1961 – remained within the framework of a mainly anthropocentric perception of Christology and Ecclesiology and also moved towards a predominantly positive appreciation of the role of science and technology in modernity which were seen as liberative forces after decades of destruction.

The classical criticism of the American historian Lynn White Jr.¹ that western Christianity to a large extent has remained uncritical to the expansionist and domination oriented attitudes of Western culture towards both nature and indigenous people during the colonial and industrialization periods, that it got married with secularist world views too easily and therefore Judeo-Christian civilization is the root of the ecological crisis, can be regarded as of critical relevance also for some major trends in the first phase of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century until the 60ies.

However, there were a few incidents already in the early period of ecumenical discourse in the period of the fifties which reflected an early hint towards the need for a creation theology as forming an essential part of a “theology of the world”, which was a major focus of the early ecu-

1 White, Lynn Townsend, Jr. “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis.” *Science* 155 (10 March 1967): 1203-1207.

menical discourse on nature and history. It was affirmed for instance during the WCC assembly in Evanston 1954 that “this world, disfigured and distorted as it is, is still God’s world. It is his creation, in which he is at work, and which he sustains in being until the day when the glory of his new creation will fully appear.”²

The discovery of ecology as an integral dimension of ecumenism came about in the 60ies as a result of three factors:

- a) the influence of orthodoxy and its cosmocentric ecclesiology/pneumatology,
- b) the beginning dialogue between faith and natural science and
- c) the insights of modern biblical scholarship on the creation narratives and modern schools of thought (like process theology).

During the New Delhi assembly 1961 the debate on the relation between nature and grace brought about challenging remarks by Joseph Sittler, arguing that a new kind of ecumenical theology is required which should focus not only on the relationship between salvation and human history, but also on salvation and nature (discussing aspects of the cosmological tradition of Christology in the New Testament tradition, based on Kol 1,15-20).³

The Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov in 1964 in a Faith and Order conference continued this line in unfolding an ecclesiology of love with and for the whole of creation (“a human heart which is full of compassion for the smallest pain which is inflicted to any created being in God’s cosmos”).⁴

The Uppsala assembly in 1968 with its theme “Behold, I make all things new” affirmed a dynamic understanding of God’s presence and work in the whole of creation: “The living God is the creative force within everything that is constantly renewing all things.”⁵

The Church and Society conference 1970 in Geneva, two years before the Club of Rome Report “Limits to Growth” (1972), under the title “The future of Humanum in a scientific-technical world” for the first time in ecumenical history articulated the tension between ecology, human progress and development and demanded for a “global policy of environmental protection” (Frederick H. Knelmann, Montreal, and Ernst von Weizsäcker, Carlson Blake).⁶

1.2 The birth of the ecological concept of sustainability

It should not be forgotten easily that the ecumenical discourse of church representatives, scientists and concerned environmentalists gave birth to the global concept of sustainability some years significantly before the UN conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992: It was the Bukarest Conference in 1974 on the “Role of Science, Technology for Human Development”⁷ which offered the birth place of the ecumenical concept of Sustainability (almost 20 years before

2 Evanston Assembly 1954, Report on „Christians in the Struggle for World Community“, in: Art. “Creation”, in: Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (Nicolas Lossky a.o. eds), WCC, Geneva 2002, p. 271; also: Walter William van Kirk: International Affairs – Christians in the Struggle for World Community, in: Ecumenical Review, *Volume 7, Issue 1*, October 1954, p. 42-48.

3 Steven Bouma-Prediger, Peter Baken (eds): *Evocations of Grace. The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics*. William Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000.

4 See also: Paul Evdokimov: *The Sacrament of Love*, St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 2011.

5 The *Uppsala report 1968: official report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Uppsala July 4-20, 1968, WCC, Geneva 1968.

6 See: *Church and Society From Here to Where? Technology, Faith and the Future of Man*. Report on an Exploratory Conference, Geneva, 28 June-4 July 1970. Ed. by David Gill, Geneva, WCC 1970.

7 *Search for a Just and Sustainable Society: WCC Conference on Science and Technology for Human Development*, Bucharest, Romania, 24 June –2 July 1974, WCC, 1974.

UN Rio Conference!).⁸ Sustainability at this stage was described as a pattern of development in which environmental pollution is kept well under the capacities of the eco-system to absorb pollution; in which utilization of non-renewable energy resources is lower than what can be made available as new resources; human activities are to be held within the boundaries of natural climate conditions.⁹

It was both before, during and after the assembly in Nairobi 1975, that the voice of the Australian biologist Charles Birch was prominent in promoting new viewpoints of sustainability: He specifically argued that ecological liberation is not a distraction from the social liberation of the poor, but both belong together and are integrally linked with each other. His work was closely related also to processes leading to the famous MIT conference 1979 on Faith, Science and the Future in which 900 leading ethicists and scientists were participating.¹⁰

The Nairobi Assembly in 1975 articulated the concept of “just, participatory and sustainable society” (JPSS) which was a response to the growing recognition of the persistence of poverty and misery and at the same time of the limits of and threats to the earth’s capacity to sustain human life.¹¹ Unfortunately, the WCC central committee decided in 1979 not to accept the findings of the JPSS advisory committee due to doctrinal and ethical controversies between some church delegations.¹²

It were the follow up of the Nairobi conference and the preparations for the MIT conference 1979 in the GDR churches which led to the formation of an independent ecological movement in East Germany which still was under socialist and atheist rule (meetings in Luckow and Erfurt, Heino Falcke and others), which –in interconnection with other factors –paved the way for peaceful civil society revolution and the overthrow of the Socialist government at the end of the 80ies (1989 Fall of Berlin Wall) – an indication of the tremendous significance of the conciliar process for really making a lasting impact of the current world order at that stage and therefore not being in vain.¹³

1.3 The birth of the conciliar process for justice, peace and integrity of creation

The conciliar process for justice, peace and integrity of creation can be regarded as the major phase in which concepts of sustainability entered the mainstream of ecumenical social thinking, became an integral part of any conceptual thinking on justice and peace and also inspired a broad based ecumenical mass movement for something like a comprehensive socio-political transformation of economy and society. The history is well known: It was during the Vancouver assembly in 1983, that East German church delegates proposed the calling of a Genuine Universal Christian Council.

8 Vgl. Hans Joachim Döring: Sustainability und Ökumene, in: Brief zur Orientierung im Konflikt Mensch-Erde, Heft 54, 2000, S. 26-30, in: <http://www.oekumenezentrum-ekm.de/attachment/97805e02a6bf11de99800bf9f2dbda49da49/c1f6f928b90911de9472bb634039d34ed34e/sustainability.pdf>.

9 See the key texts on the concept of a sustainable society in: Science and Technology for Human Development. The Ambiguous Future and the Christian Hope. Bucharest June 24-July 2, 1974, in: Anticipation No 19, November 1974, p. 4ff, in German language in: Wolfram Stierle/Dietrich Werner/Martin Heider: Ethik für das Leben. 100 Jahre Ökumenische Wirtschaftsethik, Rothenburg 1996, S. 550ff.

10 See also: <http://oikoumene.net/home/hostudies/gerecht.book/one.book/index.html?entry=page.book.1.2.9.1>
11 See also: Roger S. Gottlieb: The Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 134ff; John B. Cobb, Jr.: Sustainability. Economy, Ecology and Justice. Wipf and Stock Eugene 1992, p. 84ff.

12 See: <http://oikoumene.net/home/hostudies/gerecht.book/one.book/index.html?entry=page.book.1.2.9>

13 Stephen Brown: Nachhaltigkeit und die Umwelt: Wie die ökumenische Bewegung half, den Umweltprotest in der DDR zu mobilisieren, WCC 2015, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/press-centre/news/sustainability-and-environment-how-the-ecumenical-movement-helped-mobilize-ecology-protest-in-east-germany>.

The WCC Central Committee then decided “to engage the member churches in a Conciliar Process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation” and that this project should be a priority for World Council programs. The foundation of this emphasis should be confessing Christ as the life of the world and Christian resistance to the demonic powers of death in racism, sexism, caste oppression, economic exploitation, militarism, violations of human rights, and the misuse of science and technology. Ecumenical study and action on the ecclesiological, spiritual, and socio-ethical implications of this commitment process should be organized.

Some further work on aspects of theology of creation within the conciliar process was done during major ecumenical consultations in Amsterdam 1987 and in Granvollen 1988: the notion of the “disintegration of creation” and the “need for reintegration God’s creation” were spelled out and a critique was articulated of the senseless exploitation of the natural resources as a consequence of the unlimited human mastery over creation which for centuries had been justified also by Christian dominium terrae theologies.¹⁴ This was a major phase in which new insights of pioneering eco-theologies were incorporated into the ecumenical discourse (Paul Evdokimov, Jürgen Moltmann, Douglas J. Hall).

At the same time the dynamic of the conciliar process did not remain to the academic theological discourse, on the contrary the framework of the conciliar process developed into a major platform on which political, social and ecological demands were jointly articulated by Christians for substantial reforms: The regional assemblies for JPIC (Stuttgart, Dresden, Assisi 1988) articulated key demands for ecological transformation of societies, culminating in the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel (1989). This “EEA1” can be regarded as the first comprehensive ecumenical church assembly in European contexts since 1054 at all and articulated a pioneering vision for the renewal of Europe in the context of ecological sustainability: Basel even demanded for a “new ecological world order” and a dramatic reduction of energy consumption patterns in western societies, including the renunciation of the nuclear energy option – which until now was put into practice on a political level only by the German government.

1.4 Granvollen 1988: WCC consultation on integrity of creation

The theological conference of WCC in Granvollen, Norway, probably was one of the most productive and theologically creative consultations on eco-theology in the ecumenical history. “For the first time in any consistent manner, the documents (of Granvollen) demonstrated the church’s readiness to consider the creation for its own sake and not only as the setting for the human drama”¹⁵ Remarkable and worth recalling is also the list produced there of possible deviations and distortions which have hindered a comprehensive eco-theological approach in the life of the churches so far and need to be overcome in developing a holistic approach to a Trinitarian theology of creation. The Granvollen study Report highlights the following:

- Theological reductionism, based on an individualized and spiritualized conceptualization of salvation which tends to believe that everything will solve itself once people are converted;
- Natural science based, technological hybris assuming that the ecological crisis fundamentally is a technological problem to be solved with technological means only;
- Leaning towards a romantic reconceptualization of nature, assuming that a back to untouched nature and pre-technological life-styles will solve the problems of modernity;

14 See: Art. “Creation”, Douglas John Hall, in: Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, WCC Geneva 2002, p. 274; also: D.J. Hall, *Imaging God: dominion as Stewardship*, Grand Rapids 1986 .

15 Douglas J. Hall, in: Art. Creation, in: Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 274.

- Resignation-based neo-apocalyptic perceptions which view the ecological crisis as pre-sign of the final end of this world to come soon for only the faithful to be rescued;
- Utopian temptations which project an ideal world without problems, perfectionist and ideal, without any temptations for sin and evil, jumping over the internal contradictions even within ecological life-styles;
- Fatalistic attitudes which articulate an attitude – whether in religious or in political rhetoric, that we cannot do anything as the world cannot be changed anymore;
- “Not my problem”-attitudes which perceive ecological issues as a challenge only for the industrialized countries or for a certain group of people, but not for oneself and one’s own people.¹⁶

It would be worth looking more deeply into the root causes, weaknesses and detailed processes which led to the feature that the conciliar process for justice, peace and integrity of creation while unleashing a lot of potential and energy for articulating a new vision of sustainability in the long run did not maintain the strength to keep eco-theological concerns at the top priority level of the global ecumenical movement. However, the culmination of the conciliar process in the so-called Seoul convocation on JPIC in the year 1990 produced the first ever Ecumenical Social Creed of all Christian churches together. From the 10 Affirmations of the Seoul Convocation two focussed explicitly on Creation.¹⁷ Conflicts and tensions continued between those in the ecumenical movement who would put integrity of creation first and those who argue that justice issues are the first priorities to be dealt with by ecumenical and development organizations. There were internal structural problems within the conciliar process: Considerable un-simultaneity of learning processes continued between the different regions of the world and different denominational environments. Sometimes there was a lack of clear follow up and monitoring mechanisms concerning implementation. The predominant focus on general statements with confessing language sometimes made it not easy to get churches engaged in concrete political objectives. A major global prioritization of environmental policies as well as eco-theology and therefore direct historical link and continuation of the conciliar process has only come with the Encyclical of Pope Francis on *Laudato Si* in 2015.

However: Sometimes the success is even beyond what was deliberately planned for within ecumenical circles: It can well be argued that it was secularized versions and elements of the ecumenical discourses within the conciliar process which directly and indirectly inspired the later process at UN levels, which later led to the Rio Summit on Environment and Development in 1993, the Paris Global Climate Summit and subsequently the UN Agenda for sustainable development (2015).¹⁸

1.5 Ecumenical Accompaniment for the global climate change discourses

Shortly after the Seoul Convocation on the JPIC theme there was the Canberra assembly of the WCC in 1991 under the theme “Come Holy Spirit, Renew the whole creation”: This was the first assembly with an overall ecological theme – a unique chance and tremendous challenge! As bush

16 A German version of these possible temptations and misleading theologies from the Granvollen Report can be found in: Wolfram Stierle/Dietrich Werner/Martin Heider: *Ethik für das Leben. 100 Jahre Ökumenische Wirtschaftsethik*, Rothenburg 1996, S. 539ff.

17 See for the whole context: Ernst Conradie: *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In search of an inspiring vision*, Sun Press Stellenbosch, 2011, page 72ff; see also: <http://oikoumene.net/home/hostudies/gerecht.book/one.book/index.html?entry=page.book.1.5.1>.

18 Beat Dietschy: *Der konziliare Prozess und die Agenda für nachhaltige Entwicklung*, in: *Jahrbuch Diakonie Schweiz* 1 (2017), S. 33ff.

fires were ravaging in eyesight from the assembly venue and the whole tragic story of the aborigines and the suppression of their harmonious ways of relating to nature in the processes of western colonization and conquest were in the air, the imperative to review classical doctrines of human mastery over nature and to move towards a comprehensive new eco-theological approach were quite strong. The reports of section I and II are still worth reading which produced strong results in terms of the eco-theological work in Canberra.¹⁹ A key conviction which had been articulated already in Granvollen was taken up in Canberra and set the tone for a new understanding also of a life-centered economy which was gaining momentum within the ecumenical discourse: "Growth for growth's sake is the strategy of the cancer cell."²⁰

Since the Canberra assembly also the political engagement in lobbying work towards global climate change issues took on a new urgency and priority: Since the WCC 1991 consultation on climate change in Gwatt a permanent climate change working group of WCC has accompanied all the international negotiations on climate change. Since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in 1992, the WCC was also present at all UN climate change conferences.

Highlights in the work after Canberra included the 1994 Johannesburg conference which produced the Study on "Accelerated Climate Change: Signs of Peril, Test of Faith"²¹ as well as the David Hallmann Report on Climate Change for Porto Alegre which was produced as part of the Mandate for the Justice, peace and Creation Team at the 1998 Harare Assembly.²²

6. Other fields of ecumenical engagement in eco-theology

The brief survey given here can only highlight general trends such as the observation that major engagement in the WCC in the 90ies was devoted to issues of climate change: This is also affirmed by the fact that after the III. European Ecumenical Assembly (EEAC III) in Sibiu in 2007, an intensification of the work of European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN), which was founded in 1998, took place. It could be critically asked to what extent other similar regional Christian Environmental Networks have followed and were founded in Asia, Africa and Latin-America. Perhaps this is a task to be considered by this Wuppertal conference.

However there were also other thematic fields which gained attention, if not with the similar attention and energy due to lack of staff and resources, so still these other fields were also gradually becoming more visible. Only recently therefore ecumenical commitments can be noted to other areas like the following:

- In 2007 the Johannesburg conference focused on issues of bio-technology and genetic engineering and for the first time made churches aware of the huge task of interrelating the discourses on technology and the discourses on justice as part of their public theology efforts.

19 See Canberra Report Section I and II, in: <http://oikoumene.net/eng.home/eng.global/eng.canberra91/eng.canber.2/index.html>.

20 Again quoted by Konrad Raiser: Adress to the UN Summit on Social Development Copenhagen 1995, in: *Ec Rev* 47 (1995), p. 385.

21 Accelerated Climate Change: Signs of Peril, Test of Faith 1994, in: *The Church and Climate Change*, *EcRev* 49 Vol. 2, April 1997.

22 See David G. Hallmann, *The WCC Climate Change Programme. History, Lessons, Challenges*, in: *Climate Change*, WCC, 2005, in: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/climate-change/@@download/file/Climate_Change_Brochure_2005.pdf.

- Since 2006 (Porto Alegre) also major engagement unfolded in water issues, which led to the Ecumenical Water Network, (EWN) as an expression also to make visible the churches engagement in the International Decade on “Water for Life” 2005-2015.²³
- There was little engagement in the last decades on issues of bio-diversity, only a new statement was tabled at the WCC ExCom in May 2019 which highlighted the enormous challenges ahead in this area.²⁴
- In 2016 a major ecumenical conference at the Volos Academy in Greece came up with the Volos Manifesto for a genuine “Ecological Reformation of Christianity”: Radicalizing the Reformation tradition by calling for a twofold critique, namely both a deeper Christian critique of the root causes of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of forms of Christianity which have not recognized the ecological dimensions of the Gospel.²⁵
- A lot could be reflected about how the conciliar process on justice, peace and integrity of creation which had three elements, including a strong emphasis on creation, was transformed and continued in 2013 Busan assembly into the ecumenical pilgrimage on justice and peace, which had only two elements, namely justice and peace.²⁶ However, the recent period in the ecumenical discourse in the last decade can tentatively also be marked positively by a growing convergence between ecumenical social ethics, ecumenical missiology and ecclesiology in terms of the recognition of the significance of a comprehensive cosmological or ecological approach to both unity, mission and prophetic service of the churches:

The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, (2011) was marking the Conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001–2010: The “Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace” articulated a trinitarian understanding of peace, including “peace with the earth”. In its statements one could read: “Violence as embedded in current processes of globalization is by no means limited to the human community, but it has become more clearly than ever before to what extent the environment, climate, and indeed the whole of God’s creation are being affected and are suffering violence.”²⁷ Thus the culmination of the Decade to Overcome Violence can be also regarded as the beginnings of an ecological just peace ethics.

Some similar transformations and positive trends can be observed in the ecumenical discourse on mission which has taken up the notion of an ecological or cosmocentric understanding of mission much more strongly. The Manila conference from 2012 in its new mission statement “Together Towards Life”²⁸ emphasized strongly: “Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God’s mission begins with the act of creation. Creation’s life and God’s life are entwined. The mission of God’s Spirit encompasses us all in an ever-giving act of grace. We are

23 <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/1-statements-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/water-for-life>.

24 <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-executive-committee-global-biodiversity-crisis-reaches-urgent-level>.

25 <https://www.globethics.net/-/ecotheology-conference-in-greece-and-manifesto>; <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/manifesto-on-an-ecological-reformation-of-all-christian-traditions>.

26 See on this also: Fernando Enns, Behutsam Mitgehen mit Deinem Gott. Der ökumenische Pilgerweg der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens als Neuausrichtung der ökumenischen Bewegung, in: <https://wccpilgrimage.org/de/trittsteine/was-ist-ein-pilgerweg/materialien/wccpil-grimagesite-app-staticdocument-1/@@images/file>.

27 See on Kingston Jamaica: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/copy_of_JustPeaceCompanion2ndEd_SAMPLE.pdf.

28 <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.

therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life.”

Ethics of Sustainability – challenges in the global ecumenical debate on eco-theology

Looking back to a rich, diverse and complex history of ecumenical discourses on eco-theology and ethics of sustainability which cannot fully present here, one cannot refrain also from arriving at certain overarching general critical questions, pointing to challenges, tensions and dilemmas the ecumenical movement has and had to wrestle with in coping with both a 2000 years of history of different Christian doctrines concerning the relation between humanity and nature as well as different languages applied and used in the different church traditions in current context. Critical questions pointing to these challenges can be articulated as follows:

- How is it possible to relate contextuality of eco-theological reflections with catholicity in ecumenical approaches to eco-theology, common global focus and targeted regional goals for joint lobbying work?
- How can the ecumenical movement and the churches engaged in it ensure comprehensiveness in eco-theological reflection with equal immersion in the different subject areas of eco-theological ethics as there are so many? (eco-theology and ecological ethics; ecology and economy for life; ecology and ecclesiology; ecology and genetic engineering; eco-ethics and earth system sciences; eco-ethics and issues of water, oceans and atmosphere; eco-ethics and nuclear energy and waste issues; eco-ethics and seeds in agriculture; eco-theology, spirituality, value-change and cultures; eco-ethics and population growth; eco-theological ethics and animal ethics; eco-ethics and agriculture/nutrition)
- How does it become possible and effective to relate the ecumenical witness of churches in areas of eco-theology and sustainability with the strategic lobbying activities of specialized ministries, namely of ACT Alliance?
- How has the ecumenical movement managed to relate major ecumenical Christian discourses both to secular UN discourses and also – which still is another issue – interfaith discourses in eco-ethics and sustainability studies? (like: Faith4Earth and UN -Environment processes; Great Transition Global Network of Global Scenario Group; Laudato Si Alliance: Protect the Earth – Dignify Humanity Initiative; World Future Council)?

These critical questions remain on the common agenda of this consultation as well as the discourse of those who want to shape the future impact of the eco-theological discourse in the ecumenical movement.

Apart from these general critical questions pointing to structural and thematic challenges we can summarize our reflections on the learning journey of the eco-theological discourse in the ecumenical movement in briefly pointing to

- Five common core convictions reached so far in the international ecumenical discourse on eco-theology (a)
- Five major shortcomings identified in the current global discourse on sustainability (b) and to
- Five urgent priorities for future ecumenical commitments in eco-theology and ethics of sustainability (c)

These short thesis-like propositions are offered here to stimulate common discussion and debate in the future ecumenical discourse:

- a) Five common core convictions reached so far in the international ecumenical discourse on eco-theology
 - 1) The earth is not just the property of human beings, but the mirror of God's glory.
 - 2) The Christocentric focus of the ecumenical movement has been widened to a trinitarian and cosmological perspective.
 - 3) An integrated ethics for life (ethics of sustainability) based on the interrelatedness of justice, peace and integrity of creation/care for creation is at the core of the ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace.
 - 4) The unity of the church, unity of humankind and unity of all creation need to be seen as belonging together.
 - 5) The misunderstandings of the traditional theology of the dominium terrae need to be overcome.

- b) Five major shortcomings identified in the current global discourse on sustainability
 - 1) There are contradictions between the economic goals and the ecological goals in the SDG Agenda from 2015: Which goals dominate the UN process?²⁹
 - 2) An alternative growth concept is still under – or ill-defined and indicators for growth measurement are politically not agreed: What kind of growth within the planetary boundaries do we want?³⁰
 - 3) A new definition of value and the implementation of the polluter pays principle is still lacking: What value do we pay for (market value, ecological value, cultural value)?
 - 4) The reconciliation and integration between ecology and legislation is insufficient: Who cares and fights for the rights of nature? How to strengthen the strategic links between Ecology and Jurisprudence? How to get churches more visible engaged in the ongoing UN dialogues on Harmony with Nature?³¹ How to mobilize for Earth Jurisprudence?³²
 - 5) Education for sustainability and health – Who prepares a broad revolution in ETCF education?³³

- c) Five urgent priorities for future ecumenical commitments in eco-theology and ethics of sustainability
 - 1) The growing inter-generational and inter-contextual/regional conflicts around impacts of climate change: Who pays for ecological costs?
 - 2) Assaults against the very fabric of biological life – genome-editing and patenting of seeds in

29 See Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker/Anders Wijkman u.a.: Bericht des Club of Rome 2018: „Wir sind dran. Was wir ändern müssen, wenn wir bleiben wollen“, S. 90ff.

30 See for instance: Martin R. Stuchtey, Per-Anders Emkvist, Klaus Zumwinkel: A Good Disruption. Redefining Growth in the Twenty-First Century, Bloomsbury,. London 2016.

31 See the series of international dialogues since 2011: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/dialogues/>.

32 See the debate on Earth Jurisprudence in the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN), in: <https://therightsofnature.org/principles-of-earth-jurisprudence/>.

33 See: Dietrich Werner/Elisabeth Jeglitzka (eds): Eco-theology, Climate Justice and Food Security. Theological Education and Leadership Development. Globethics.net Geneva 2005, in: https://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403236/GE_Global_14_web.pdf.

the name of agricultural productivity: Who decides on the extent to which science and technology manipulate the essence of creation?³⁴

- 3) Threats against biodiversity on earth: Towards a theology of eco-responsible land use and waste disposal: How do we clean up toxic waste from the lands and the plastic from the oceans?
- 4) Digitization and acceleration of the loss of memory of the dignity and ecological integrity of life – the need for new narratives and rituals to sustain spiritual value change towards sustainability: How do we cope and reflect on the long-term consequences of the digital information revolution on both of the ecological and the psychological systems? Or to be put positively: Which narratives can still inspire, motivate and sustain a mass-conversion to sustainable lifestyles in times of apocalyptic trends?
- 5) How to break the circle of growing meat production, increasing health threats and environmental degradation? – Towards an ecological nutrition revolution: How to change what humans eat?³⁵

Kairos for Creation – How to Mobilize People’s Passion for the Planet?

In bringing this paper to a close we can only tentatively point to some directions and needs which underline the practical, strategic and conceptual nature of the Wuppertal conference which is mandated to make common suggestions on how to deepen and continue the ecumenical engagement in issues of eco-theology and ethics of sustainability in the years to come after the next WCC assembly. We are all sure that we need a re-priorization in the work of the churches and the ecumenical movement as the global climate change has become an undeniable global life risk challenge for the whole of humanity as well as the inhabited planet. Continuing business as usual will not do as we live in a global unprecedented and accelerating ecological crisis.

One of the first priorities this conference has to wrestle with is to find a common answer to the question: What is the key and main theological challenge in the context of the planetary ecological crisis?

How can we speak of the presence of God as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the whole of the inhabited cosmos in the apocalyptic context of a manmade crisis of the earth’s sustaining planetary ecological systems? What sources do we have of our common hope? Eco-theology which does not give hope, is not proper Christian creation theology. How to renew our sense of hope if we simultaneously listen to the ongoing promise of the biblical God, that the rhythms of summer and winter, frost and heat, sowing and harvest will never cease and at the same time listen to language of the climate scientists who argue that the very essence of the natural rhythms and balances which sustain life and its continuation on this planet is deeply disturbed?

We need to spell out what is the nature of the „Kairos for Creation” which we feel strongly has come at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century as the window of opportunity in which we still have the chance of fundamentally changing the course of history and current rates of global warming is a rather short, limited one and time flees faster than we can imagine. We do

34 On the debate see: <https://www.the-scientist.com/bio-business/companies-use-crispr-to-improve-crops-65362>; and the campaign of Vandana Shiva: <https://www.lifegate.com/people/lifestyle/monsanto-india-seed-patent-vandana>.

35 See the debate for instance in: Meat Atlas – Facts on Figures about the animals we eat, Boell-Stiftung 2014, in: <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/resources/fsn-resources/meat-atlas>.

not just want to produce abstract doctrinal statements but we want to contribute to mobilizing People's Passion for the Planet in every continent of this precious world. We can do this only if we convincingly argue from a faith perspective making our distinct value the special asset we have to bring into the global discourses. We need to answer the question: What is the Basis of Hope in a Time of Despair?

Might be we should learn from the example of the tradition of various Kairos-Theology statements in various contexts during last years which actually have both a sound and critical analysis of the political and ideological context as well as a deep theological reflection and basis both to brought together organically: We could dream of a new Global Kairos for Creation Call or Document which could be formulated in some closeness or analogy to the South African Kairos Document from 1985.

It could spell out common and new eco-theological convictions in similar steps as applied to the South African Kairos Statement:

- 1) The Moment of Ecological Truth has come: It is important and a challenge today to both listening to the cries of the poor, listening to the cries of the earth as well as listening to the cries of the prophets (scientists) of today.
- 2) The Moment of Ecclesial and Ecumenical Truth has come: It is important and a challenge today that the Global Church is divided in its ecological commitments, integrity and common goals and attitudes.
- 3) The Moment of Theological Truth has come: It is important and a challenge today to strengthen the discernment of three types of theology as there are also false prophets and theology or religion can be misused to justify scenarios which irreconcilable with the belief in God as Creator of all:

There are Conventional World theologies/theologies of excuse (market centred and business as usual theologies; relativization and cosmetic adaptation approaches, negating climate change theologies, anthropocentric domination theologies);

There seems to be Barbarization scenario and Break Down theologies (nationalist theologies of a fortress world; apocalyptic and escapist theologies of a breakdown and spiritualistic individual refuge of sectarian groups);

There are also different approaches to proper theologies of transformation towards a great transition to eco-communalism or new values of sustainability which the ecumenical movement has inspired in the past and should continue to inspire in the future.³⁶

We will be able to provide motivation and orientation for people in reviving their passion for the planet, if we articulate the basis of hope in a time of despair in a way which addresses and spells out all the our key dimensions of a new ecumenical approach to eco-theology which have been articulated in the history of the ecumenical discourse outlined here:

- **The Prophetic dimension** of a new ecumenical eco-theological paradigm: de-constructing false religious and secular claims in the understanding of the role of humans in the whole of inhabited earth; announcing key values of a new ecological civilization in accordance with the Covenant of God with all Creation.
- **The Priestly dimension** of a new ecumenical eco-theological paradigm: dealing with the pastoral dimensions of providing energy and motivation for eco-social transformation today;

36 See on the Great Transition Scenarios approach: <https://www.greattransition.org/>.

- **The Kingly dimension** of a new ecumenical eco-theological paradigm: translating key ethical dimensions in a new system of legislation for nature and Earth Jurisprudence
- **The Wisdom dimension** of a new ecumenical eco-theological paradigm: Recollecting and harvesting indigenous and regional cultural elements of wisdom tradition for a new art of life within planetary boundaries and learning for sustainable life-styles from ancient Christian and pre-Christian wisdom traditions.

The distinct potential of such an international consultation on issues of eco-theology and ethics of sustainability is to enable churches and church-related agencies to learn from each other where and how engagement in eco-theology is needed and growing in different sectors of World Christianity. It is also to articulate a concern for more strategic planning for the future of eco-theological and ethical work in the global ecumenical movement. There is a sense of urgency in what the scientists tell us – despite all ongoing denial of human induced climate change – as the time given to us to change the course of human civilization and the system of carbon fossil fuels might be quite limited a period. We should consider a re-priorization of ecumenical efforts which need to pool and unite efforts of joined learning, common lobbying work and concrete commitments and changes in local action. “Integrity of creation” –the key-word from Vancouver 1983 should be a top priority again, in close interconnection with issues of peace and justice. Currently the devastating effects of ongoing global climate change are about to reverse, destroy and contradict all global efforts put in poverty alleviation and development in the past 60 years. We need to consider something like a global ecumenical decade of ecological learning, stimulating a new passion for creation and a joint new culture of mobilizing religious resources for the care of creation. If the recent study of ETH Zürich³⁷ scientifically and politically is affirmed that global reforestation plans could well have an unexpected positive impact on curbing global CO2 emissions and reduce global warming, each local church would have a major task to become an agent of cultivating a new consciousness of respecting and nurturing trees as one of the most precious gift to bring down emissions from fuel to zero, to contribute its significant contribution in the global movement of faiths for the earth³⁸ and to provide a glimpse of hope for the suffering earth.

Appendix: Current eco-theological initiatives of the World Council of Churches 2019 (Louk Andrianos)

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been working on care for creation for many decades and its eco-theological initiatives have been started as early as 1970. The present world development model is threatening the lives and livelihoods of many, especially among the world’s poorest people, and destroying biodiversity. The WCC ecumenical vision is to overcome this model based on over-consumption and greed. The concept of sustainable communities, care for creation, sustainability and climate justice are the main concerns of the eco-theological works of the WCC through its Diakonia and Witness (DW) on Ecological and Economic justice (EEJ).

The programmatic objective of current eco-theological initiatives of WCC-EEJ are to strengthen the common prophetic voice of member churches and ecumenical partners in promoting life

37 See for instance: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/04/planting-billions-trees-best-tackle-climate-crisis-scientists-canopy-emissions>; <https://www.science news.org/article/planting-trees-could-buy-more-time-fight-climate-change-thought>.

38 See: <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/faith-earth-initiative>.

dignity, rights and justice in economy, ecology, climate change, water, food, health and healing, children, youth and gender-related issues.

Economic and ecological issues are interlinked and inseparable. Eco-theology at the WCC refers to theological reflections and actions on both ecological and economic issues. The focuses of eco-theological activities of the WCC are threefold: (a) Theological reflection and interfaith cooperation on economic and ecological justice; (b) Transformative education for economic and ecological justice, and (c) Advocacy and Accompaniment for Economy of life and Climate justice. Examples of the current projects in each area of eco-theological activity of the WCC_EEJ are the following.

I. Theological reflection and interfaith cooperation on economic and ecological justice

- On indigenous spiritualities and theologies of the Oikos: common reflection with the WCC Indigenous Peoples reference group on climate justice and theologies of the Oikos (common home).
- On contextualizing care for creation, climate justice and linking ecological and economic justice: Publication of working papers on theologies of the Oikos from eco-theological conferences and other workshops in the Ecumenical Review journal of the WCC.
- On Climate Change and Human Rights at the Geneva Interfaith Forum in collaboration with the Franciscans International and Brahma Kumaris.
- On the Celebration of Season of Creation (SOC) in collaboration with the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), Anglican Communion Environmental Network, World Evangelical Alliance, ACT Alliance, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and WCC Spirituality.
- On Faith and Ethical Perspectives for the Conference of Parties (COP 25) of the UNFCCC: in collaboration with Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change and Human Rights.
- On the Christian Right, Populism, and Climate Change: Conduct of a workshop to explore the links between Christian fundamentalism, populism and false climate change narratives.
- On ethics of sustainability, eco-theologies and models of eco-churches in different contexts in collaboration with EKD, BFW, LWF etc.

II. Transformative education for economic and ecological justice

- Training on Economy of Life, care for creation, sustainability and climate justice during the meeting of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change in collaboration with the WCC Mission from the Margins and Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC).
- Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM school) in collaboration with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Council of World Mission (CWM) and Lutheran World Federation (LWF).
- Eco-School on water, food and climate justice in collaboration with the EWN (Ecumenical Water Network), the EAA (Ecumenical Alliance Advocacy) –Food for Life, and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).
- Webinars on Food, Health and Trade Online in collaboration with WCC EAA –Food for Life and WCC-Health and Healing.
- Conduct of the biannual conference on Ecological Theology and Environmental Ethics (ECO-THEE) at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Greece on the theme of “Ecological racism and prophetic voices for ecological crisis” on September 23-26, 2019.
- Conference on the “Future Life in the Arctic” bringing together church leaders and Indig-

enous representatives to discuss common agendas of justice, peace and climate change as a follow up to the Icelandic conference.

- Conduct of the biannual conference on Sustainable Alternatives for Poverty Reduction and Eco-justice (SAPREJ) with academic institutions and NGO acting in Africa, Latina America and Pacific islands for 2020.
- Dissemination of the “Roadmap for Churches, Congregations and Communities towards an Economy of Life and Eco-justice”: a tool kit developed by (late) Pastor Norman Tendis in early 2019 for WCC member churches.

III. Advocacy and Accompaniment for Economy of life and Climate justice

- Advocacy for economic and climate justice at the UN High-level Political Forum on the SDGs in New York, USA.
- Advocacy for climate justice at the UNFCCC COP 25 in Chile.
- Contributing to “Oikotree” workshop and pilgrim team visit addressing “extractivism” in collaboration with WCRC, CWM and Franciscans International.
- Advocacy at the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) Interfaith Consultation on Just Finance and Debt and engagement with international financial institutions and faith based organisations.
- Dialogue on the theme “Stronger Together” with Faith-based Entrepreneurs in Europe in collaboration with Geneva Agape Foundation.
- Engagement in the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland with ACT Alliance and LWF.
- Development and dissemination of the Oikos IQ (interactive quizzes) online application to promote deeper awareness of the impact of contemporary lifestyles to the natural environment and to the global earth sustainability.