Globethics Repository



Religious communities and ecological sustainability in Southern Africa and beyond

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Book
DOI	10.58863/20.500.12424/4306831
Publisher	Globethics Publications
Rights	2024 Philipp Öhlmann and Juliane Stork as editors and the respective authors.;Attribution 4.0 International
Download date	2026-11-18 07:31:57
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4306831

Sustainability 1

Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond

Philipp Öhlmann & Juliane Stork (Editors)



Globethics

Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond

Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond

Philipp Öhlmann & Juliane Stork (Eds.)

Globethics Sustainability Series No. 1

Globethics Sustainability Series
Director: Prof. Dr Fadi Daou, Executive Director of Globethics

Globethics Sustainability Series No. 1
Philipp Öhlmann & Juliane Stork (Eds.)*, Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond*
Geneva: Globethics Publications, 2024
DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4306831
ISBN 978-2-88931-548-2 (online version)
ISBN 978-2-88931-549-9 (print version)
© 2024 Philipp Öhlmann and Juliane Stork as editors and the respective authors
Published by Globethics Publications

Managing Editor: Dr Ignace Haaz
Assistant Editor: Jakob Bühlmann-Quero
Cover designer: Michael Cagnoni
Cover image: Pastor Stanford Rwafa, Seven Stars Apostolic Church, All Nations Branch, Primrose, South Africa
Image credit: Philipp Öhlmann

Globethics International Secretariat
Chemin du Pavillon 2
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva
Switzerland
Website: *https://globethics.net/publications*
Email: *publications@globethics.net*

All web links in this text have been verified as of June 2024

The electronic version of this book can be downloaded for free from the Globethics website: https://globethics.net

This book is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). See: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. CC BY includes the following elements: BY: credit must be given to the creator. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary 9

Foreword..... 13

Acknowledgements 17

Introduction

1. Introduction: Religious Communities and Environmental Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond 21
Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann

Ecological Theologies in Religious Communities in Southern Africa and Beyond

2. The Common Challenge of Ecological Sustainability: Questions to African Independent, Charismatic and Mainline Churches' Theologies..... 75
Christine Gühne and Dietrich Werner

3. The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology..... 95
Ernst M. Conradie

4. Ecotheology and the Contribution of Christian Communities: Sustainability Transitions Within the Civil Society A Response to Ernst Conradie..... 121
Wilhelm Gräb

5. Ecotheology in Context 127
Loreen Maseno

6. Ecotheology in Pentecostalism 141
Mangaliso Matshobane

7. Ecological Sustainability as a Topic of Redemption within the Theology of the Zion Christian Church 157
Barnabas E. Lekganyane

8. Response to Bishop Lekganyane 167
Coenie Burger

9. Perspectives of Traditional Leaders on Ecological Sustainability: Bolobedu 171
Cosmo Mapitsa

10. Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability: A Bahá'í Perspective.....175
Tahirih Matthee

11. Islamic Principles on the Significance and Preservation of Water and Sustainable Development.....193
Muhammad Ridwaan Gallant

Ecological Best Practice Examples in Southern Africa and Beyond

12. The Organization of African Instituted Churches: Working towards Ecological Transformation, Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture.....203
John Njeru Gichimu

13. Ecological Transformation and the Future of Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture: A Response to John Gichimu ..211
Dietrich Werner

14. Environmentalism and the Forest in Thai Buddhism.....225
Robekkah Ritchie

15. Religious Communities, Water Security and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa 237
Esper Jacobeth Ncube and Seulaule Calvin Mokgaditse

16. Ecological Challenges: Perspectives of a Church and Community Leader in the Township of Kaalfontein, South Africa 261
Siboniso Ngobese

17. Education for Ecological Transformation and Sustainability (Amongst all Faith Communities) 267
Kate Davies

18. How Can Religious Actors Become Active for Ecological Sustainabilty in Their Contexts – Lessons from the Green Anglicans Movement 277
Rachel Mash

19. Education for Ecological Transformation and Sustainability: The Example of Centro Emmanuel in Uruguay 291
Ileana Sosa Redaelli

20. Towards an All African Christian Environmental Network: Suggestions and Perspectives 301
Dietrich Werner and Cain Lerumo Matloko

Conclusion

21. Mapping the Way Forward on Religion and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa: Summary and Policy Recommendations 313
Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann

Contributors 327

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change and environmental degradation are threatening livelihoods in many parts of the world. One of the regions most affected is southern Africa, where temperatures are predicted to rise by up to 4°C by the end of the century. To develop pathways into a sustainable future and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, fundamental socioecological transformations are needed. This process requires not only appropriate policies as well as scientific knowledge, but necessitates radical paradigm shifts and changed mindsets and behaviour. Religious communities are crucial stakeholders for achieving these paradigm shifts: religion shapes social imaginaries, and people's values, and religious communities have the ability to act as agents of social, cultural, economic, political and ecological change. By fundamentally shaping people's worldviews, religion can be an important source of sustainable development.

Against this background, this volume seeks to further elucidate the role of religious communities for ecological sustainability in southern Africa and beyond, with respect to their theologies, lived religions and activities. It presents the contributions and summarizes, discusses and contextualizes the results of two transdisciplinary consultations that involved academics, development practitioners, environmental activists and religious leaders: (1) the capacity-building webinar *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa* jointly hosted by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Water, Environment and Climate Action (WECARE) work stream of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) as a side-event of the General Assembly of Members of PaRD 2020; and (2) the conference *Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society*

Actors for Ecological Sustainability, a joint initiative by the Research Programme RCSD at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Brot für die Welt and the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria.

This book seeks to further elucidate the role of religious communities for ecological sustainability in southern Africa, with respect to their theologies, lived religions and activities. Moreover, it provides resources for scholars and students of religion and ecological sustainability, religious communities and faith-based organizations (FBOs) as well as policymakers, practitioners and NGOs in the field of sustainable development. In this way, it seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange and to spark further engagement. Lastly, it highlights policy recommendations for governmental and intergovernmental actors, religious communities and faith-based organizations for further engagement with ecological sustainability in southern Africa. The volume engages in ecotheological debates and highlights best practice examples of southern African religious communities' environmental initiatives. Overall, the various examples presented in it substantiate the hypothesis that religious communities in southern Africa possess great potential for ecological sustainability and increasingly use this potential to promote ecological sustainability at various levels.

Finally, based on these two consultations, the final chapter highlights policy recommendations for governmental and intergovernmental actors, religious communities and FBOs and academia for further engagement with ecological sustainability in southern Africa.

—Local and national governments and intergovernmental actors are advised to increase the cooperation with religious communities in the promotion of ecological sustainability and the creation of opportunities for the engagement of religious communities and natural sciences. Environmental action should be supported as interreligious action, including all religious stakeholders.

Government actors should work towards protecting the environment in order to protect religious freedom and protecting religious freedom in order to protect the environment.

—Religious communities and FBOs are advised to strengthen climate change awareness among religious leaders and in religious communities. They bear great potential to become environmental learning spaces, and the involvement of children and youth is crucial. Environmental and climate advocacy by religious communities should be strengthened at all levels. United religious voices increase the effectiveness of advocacy. Moreover, religious communities and FBOs themselves need to develop climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

—Academic research should conduct in-depth studies on local religious knowledge about and action on the environment and evaluating the effectiveness of religious advocacy initiatives. Further recommendations are the foundation of a southern African research initiative on religion and ecological sustainability and the preservation of intergenerational and local knowledge.

FOREWORD

This volume presents, summarizes, discusses and contextualizes the contributions to the capacity-building webinar *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa* held on 1 September 2020. The event was jointly organized and hosted by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Water, Environment and Climate Action (WECARE) work stream of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). The webinar was held as a side-event of the General Assembly of Members of PaRD 2020 in Berlin, Germany, and hosted by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The webinar brought together over 50 participants from across sub-Saharan Africa, Germany and beyond and engaged academics from different disciplines, religious leaders as well as development practitioners and environmental activists in highly transdisciplinary discussions of the role of religious communities for environmental sustainability in southern Africa. The event provided an interreligious approach by including speakers from different Christian traditions (mainline Protestant, African Independent, Pentecostal), Muslim and Baha'i representatives as well as Buddhist and African Traditional Religious perspectives. The event formed part of the ongoing WECARE Work-Stream's collaborative work as well as the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development's key initiative on religious communities and ecological sustainability in southern Africa. It had three aims. First, to engage in discussions on different aspects of ecological sustainability and to foster knowledge exchange on the role of ecological sustainability in the theologies and the activities of different religious communities and faith-based organizations in southern Africa.

Second, to raise awareness of the ecological situation and of ecological actions of religious communities in southern Africa. Third, to contribute to the increasing southern African religious communities' engagement and commitment for ecological sustainability.

Moreover, the volume includes contributions and draws on insights from the conference *Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability* held at the University of Pretoria in Pretoria, South Africa, from 28 to 31 October 2019. The conference was jointly organized by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development, Brot für die Welt and the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. It assembled over 60 participants from academia and development practice as well as church representatives from Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe along with participants from Germany as well as Argentina and Uruguay. The conference not only facilitated intensive South–South and South–North knowledge exchange but also brought together a diverse group of Christian traditions from the region (mainline Protestants, African Independents, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Evangelicals) on the issue of ecological sustainability. The extensive programme of climate science lectures, excursions to ecological projects and theological reflections on the topic created a strong sense of urgency for action and further joint ecological engagement among the participants. The 2019 Pretoria conference was a direct response to the call of an earlier *Consultation on African Pentecostal and Independent Churches' Approaches to Development* held in 2018 to provide a forum of engagement with and capacity-building on religion and ecological sustainability in southern Africa. The 2020 Berlin Webinar continued and broadened this approach through interreligious engagement and by linking it to the WECARE work stream of PaRD.

This volume is not a purely academic one. Like the two consultations it is based on, the book follows a transdisciplinary approach. It includes academic papers from different disciplines along with contributions from religious leaders, environmental activists and representatives of non-governmental organizations in the field. The format, style and nature of the contributions reflects this diversity. However, it is the aim of this volume to include a pluriverse of perspectives and, in line with its transdisciplinary approach, accept these perspectives to be on equal footing and not to assume an a priori superiority of academic perspectives for knowledge production in the field of religion and ecological sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors sincerely thank the speakers and participants of the webinar *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa* at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on 1 September 2020 and the Conference *Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability* held at the University of Pretoria from 28 to 31 October 2019. We are deeply grateful to all contributors, who openly shared their knowledge and expertise on religious communities and ecological sustainability in southern Africa and beyond development during these two transdisciplinary consultations.

The webinar was held as a side-event of the General Assembly of Members of the International Partnership of Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) 2020 in Berlin, Germany, hosted by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The Pretoria conference was a joint initiative of the Research Programme RCSD, Brot für die Welt and the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. We thank the PaRD Water, Environment and Climate Action (WECARE) work stream, the team of the PaRD Secretariat as well as our collaborators at Brot für die Welt and the University of Pretoria for excellent cooperation. Furthermore, the valuable advice and support by the team of the Research Programme RCSD is greatly appreciated.

Financial support by the WECARE Work-Stream of PaRD through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development as well as Brot für die Welt and the University of Pretoria is gratefully acknowledged. Philipp Öhlmann acknowledges support by the Alexander

von Humboldt Foundation through a Feodor Lynen Fellowship during the finalization of this volume.

INTRODUCTION

1. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND BEYOND

Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann

1. Religious communities and environmental sustainability in Southern Africa

The current global debates about climate change have gained a new momentum since the Fridays for Future movement, initiated by Greta Thunberg in 2018, began to publicly denounce politicians' failure to act against climate change in school strikes and other forms of public protest.[1] A crucial factor propelling this movement is that the effects of climate change can be felt in all parts of the world. People worldwide started to *experience* the impacts of climate change through unprecedented extreme weather events.

African countries are among the most affected by climate change. The rise in temperatures is predicted to occur sooner and faster there than in most other parts of the world.[2] Environmental disasters such as droughts, floods and reduced crop yields and livestock capacities, as well as the

---

[1] A previous version of this chapter was published as part of the report *Religious Communities as Actors for Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond* (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2021).

[2] François A. Engelbrecht, Jimmy Adegoke, Mary-Jane Bopape, Mogesh Naidoo, Rebecca Garland, Marcus Thatcher, John McGregor, Jack Katzfey, Micha Werner, Charles Ichoku, and Charles Gatebe, "Projections of Rapidly Rising Surface Temperatures over Africa under Low Mitigation," *Environmental Research Letters* 10, no. 8 (2015).

spreading of climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria and cholera, threaten the continent. The United Nations Environment Programme warns that "low adaptive capacity makes Africa highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change".[3] Southern Africa is especially affected by the rising global temperatures and the damaging effects of climate change are felt by the populations already today. Temperatures in southern Africa are predicted to rise by 3 to 4°C by 2100.[4] To develop pathways into a sustainable future and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fundamental socioecological transformations are needed. This process requires not only appropriate policies as well as scientific knowledge, but necessitates radical paradigm shifts and changed mindsets and behaviour.[5]

1.1. Religious communities: Driving forces of transformation

Religious communities are crucial stakeholders for achieving these paradigm shifts, particularly in those areas of the world where religion is highly relevant in individual and public life. In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, "roughly nine-in-ten people or more say religion is *very important* in their lives".[6] Religious communities as

---

[3] UNEP, *GEO-6 Regional Assessment for Africa* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2016).

[4] Engelbrecht et al. *Ibidem*.

[5] Martin L. Parry, Osvaldo F. Canziani, Jean P. Palutikof, Paul van der Linden and Clair Hanson, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[6] Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010); John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).

important societal actors are among the largest *social* service providers in many parts of the world today. They often reach believers across social strata and age groups and influence politics and media. Most importantly, religion shapes social imaginaries and people's values.[7] In this context, religious communities have the ability to act as agents of social, cultural, economic, political and ecological change and to function as sources of knowledge. They bear a fundamental transformative potential, a "capacity to legitimise, in religious or ideological terms, the development of new motivations, activities, and institutions".[8] and strongly shape social and cultural values and world views. By fundamentally shaping people's worldviews, religion can be an important source of sustainable development and long-lasting change.

As a recent strategy paper by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development highlights: "Religion… influences people's way of thinking and their actions".[9] Similarly, the African Union's Agenda 2063 highlights the role of religion: "Religion and religious expressions play a profound role in the construction of the African identity and social interaction".[10] UNEP's report on *The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based*

---

[7] Roger S. Gottlieb, "Introduction. Religion and Ecology – What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1–18.

[8] Samuel N. Eisenstadt, "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in Analytical and Comparative Framework," in *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View*, ed. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (New York/London: Basic Books), 10.

[9] Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Religious Communities as Partners for Development Cooperation: Strategy Paper," (Berlin: Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016), 4.

[10] African Union, *Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want* (Addis Abeba: African Union, 2015), 40.

Solutions[11] further elaborates the essential role of religious values in shaping the behaviour of people towards sustainability. Religion has long played a role in promoting sustainable development. The existence of large, influential faith-based organizations (FBOs), such as World Vision, Brot für die Welt, Islamic Relief and many others, is testament to this, as are the impressive activities by religious communities which actively contribute to a context-bound and long-term development of their communities for instance through education, health-care and social cohesion programmes.[12]

Nonetheless, religion can also hinder these processes and constitute a source of exclusion, marginalization or opposition to transformations towards ecological sustainability. Whatever may be the case in a given context and for a specific religious community, it remains clear that religion is of fundamental importance for society-encompassing changes as they are necessary in light of climate change and further environmental degradation. Even where religion might have a retarding effect on the implementation of the SDGs, its fundamental influence on people's

---

[11] Iyad Abumoghli and Euan McCartney, *The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions: Faith for Earth Initiative* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2020).

[12] Barbara Bompani, "Religion and Development from Below: Independent Christianity in South Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 3 (2010): 307–330; Ignatius Swart and Elsabé Nell, "Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–27; Philipp Öhlmann, Marie-Luise Frost and Wilhelm Gräb, "Introduction: African Initiated Christianity and Sustainable Development," in *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonization of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*, ed. Philipp Öhlmann et al., Routledge Research in Religion and Development (Abingdon/Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–29.

worldviews and actions makes it important to engage with religious actors to bring them on board in the sustainable development agenda.

1.2. Religious communities in Southern Africa: Driving forces of ecological sustainability?

Against this background the fundamental question arises how religious actors, as vital societal stakeholders, position themselves with respect to the current global ecological crisis. Are they indifferent to or even hindering climate action and care for the environment? Or can they be considered vital driving forces of transformation to ecological sustainability. If so, how can they become stakeholders in this transformation?

The United Nations Environment Programme and the Fifth Assessment Report on the region of Africa for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stresses the importance of community-based adaptation as follows: "local-level [climate change] adaptation is best achieved by starting with existing local adaptive capacity, and incorporating and building upon present coping strategies and norms, including indigenous practices".[13] Religious communities thus seem to be ideally suited to fulfil their potential for ecological sustainability and to provide the structures and narratives for these adaptive strategies and practices.

An increasing number of studies have recently begun to investigate the relation of religious communities and ecological sustainability in

---

[13] Isabelle Niang, Oliver C. Ruppel, Mohamed A. Abdrabo, Ama Essel, Christopher Lennard, Jonathan Padgham and Penny Urquhart, "Africa," in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. Vicente R. Barros et al. (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1229.

southern Africa.[14] The existing literature on ecological religious teachings and initiatives in the region, however, only provides first indications on the role of religion for ecological sustainability. Moreover, it is by no means clear that religious communities always act in the interest of the environment and ecological sustainability.[15] On the contrary, religious communities can also be hindering forces for ecological transformation.[16] The diverse roles that religious communities play with regard to ecological sustainability thus still remain an important subject of further research.

---

[14] Jacob Kẹ́hìndé Olúpọ̀nà, "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa, "Spirit and Ecology in the Context of African Theology," in: *Scriptura* 111, no. 3 (2013); James N. Amanze, "From "Dominion" to "In Communion": Ecotheology from an African Perspective," in *Anglican EcoCare Journal of Ecotheology* 2 (2016); Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh, Mark S. Aidoo, Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh (eds.), *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon: RESOURCE Publications, 2019); Emmanuel Anim, "Environmental Sustainability and Eco-Justice: Reflections from an African Pentecostal," in *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth.* The "Wuppertal Call" – Contributions and Recommendations from an International Conference on Eco-Theology and Ethics of Sustainability Wuppertal, Germany, 16–19 June 2019, ed. Louk Andrianos et al. (Solingen: Foedus, 2019), 107–120; Ezra Chitando, "Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment," in *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, ed. M. Christian Green and Muhammed Haron, *Law and Religion in Africa* (Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2020), 7.

[15] Bron Taylor, "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2016): 268–305.

[16] Wylie Carr, Michael Patterson, Laurie Yung and Daniel Spencer, "The Faithful Skeptics: Evangelical Religious Beliefs and Perceptions of Climate Change," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 6, no. 3 (2012): 276–299.

Many reference points corroborate the hypothesis that religious communities increasingly act as relevant drivers of ecological sustainability and increasingly take on this role.[17] Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, religious communities worldwide were found to be very active in the field of ecological sustainability. In a survey on *Religious Leaders' Perspectives on Corona* conducted by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at HU, over two thirds responding religious leaders worldwide considered "strengthening environmental protection" as very important in the post-Covid-19 future – environmental concerns thereby constituting one of the highest overall priorities.

One of the most prominent examples of religious communities' engagement with ecological sustainability is the global "Care for Creation" movement emerging in Christian mainline churches[18] from the

---

[17] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter 'Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015; Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann, "Ökologische Nachhaltigkeit in African Initiated Churches," Kurzstellungnahme 04/2019 des Forschungsbereichs Religiöse Gemeinschaften und nachhaltige Entwicklung (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2019); Louk Andrianos, Michael Biehl, Ruth Gütter, Jochen Motte, Andar Parlindungan, Thomas Sandner, Juliane Stork, Dietrich Werner eds., *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth.* The "Wuppertal Call" – Contributions and Recommendations from an International Conference on Eco-Theology and Ethics of Sustainability Wuppertal, Germany, 16–19 June 2019 (Solingen: Foedus, 2019).

[18] World Council of Churches, *Breaking Barriers. Nairobi 1975.* The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Nairobi, 23 November–10 December 1975, ed. David M. Paton (London: S.P.C.K./Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1975); David G. Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995).

1970s onwards and which has recently received a new dynamic.[19] Such a dynamic is also visible among religious communities in sub-Saharan Africa. In a previous paper, we highlighted that also African Initiated Churches increasingly engage with climate change theologically, especially if the churches' members are affected directly.[20]

A leading example is that of the Zion Christian Church, southern Africa's largest religious community with a membership of over 15 million across the region. Its bishop, Barnabas E. Lekganyane, urged the government, companies and churches to act for environmental protection and elevated the care for creation to a matter of redemption: "[O]ur redemption is dependent on our ability to show that we can take care of what God has entrusted upon us"[21]. A move towards engagement with climate change and ecological sustainability is also visible in Pentecostal churches (see Section 2.2.1).

---

[19] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter 'Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015; Ursula Kowanda-Yassin, *Öko-Dschihad: Der grüne Islam – Beginn einer globalen Umweltbewegung*. With the assistance of N. Ismail. Leben auf Sicht (Salzburg/Wien: Residenz Verlag, 2018); Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh, Mark S. Aidoo and Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, eds., *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019); Andrianos et al., eds., *Kairos for Creation*; Markus Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik: Grundlagen und zentrale Herausforderungen* (Freiburg/ Basel/Wien: Herder, 2021).

[20] Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann, "Ökologische Nachhaltigkeit in African Initiated Churches," Kurzstellungnahme 04/2019 des Forschungsbereichs Religiöse Gemeinschaften und nachhaltige Entwicklung (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2019).

[21] Barnabas E. Lekganyane, "Ecological Sustainability as a Topic of Redemption Within the Theology of the Zion Christian Church," Public Keynote Lecture, *The ZCC Messenger* 105 (December 2019): 6–10.

This is mirrored in the activities of several grassroots initiatives across religious communities in the region such as the interreligious Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), or the Organization of African Instituted Churches' (OAIC) Livelihoods Programme and the Green Anglicans Movement. The dynamics of ecological engagement also become visible in small-scale local initiatives by religious communities initiating clean-up campaigns or in educational programmes as in the Gilgal Bible Church in an informal settlement between Johannesburg and Pretoria (see Section 2.3).

Engagement with climate change and ecological sustainability is by no means limited to Christianity; similar dynamics are visible in different religious communities across the region – be it the Baha'i interfaith environmental advocacy, Buddhist monks engaged in tree protection, Islamic theological rationales for ecological sustainability or the perspective of African Traditional Religion.

1.3. Aim and scope

This book seeks to further elucidate the role of religious communities for ecological sustainability in southern Africa, with respect to their theologies, lived religions and activities. Moreover, it provides resources for scholars and students of religion and ecological sustainability, religious communities and faith-based organizations (FBOs) as well as policymakers, practitioners and NGOs in the field of sustainable development. In this way, it seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange and to spark further engagement. Lastly, it highlights policy recommendations for governmental and intergovernmental actors, religious communities and faith-based organizations for further engagement with ecological sustainability in southern Africa.

Drawing on the capacity-building webinar *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa* (in the following: Berlin

Webinar) and the conference *Religious Communities as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability* (in the following: Pretoria conference), the approach is highly transdisciplinary: it facilitates dialogue between natural sciences and humanities and brings together academic perspectives with those of religious communities with environmental activists and development policy and practice. Moreover, it approaches the topic in an interreligious way, including voices from Christian traditions (mainline Protestant, African Independent, Pentecostal), Muslim and Baha'i representatives as well as Buddhist and African Traditional Religious perspectives.

The focus area of the volume is southern Africa. While southern Africa's histories, languages and religions differ across the region, the countries of the region similarly experience changing weather patterns and environmental destruction and face similar challenges of climate change mitigation problems – producing similar dynamics of ecological engagement in the varied religious communities in the region responding to these shared challenges. In a comparative perspective, this collection also goes beyond southern Africa, including voices from and perspectives on other African countries and other world regions that contribute to the understanding of religious communities as actors of ecological sustainability.

What is presented in this book can by no means claim to outline final conclusions on the role played by religious communities for ecological sustainability in southern Africa. The volume rather presents a spotlight on selected cases, perspectives and current dynamics and outlines best practices of religious communities' engagement with ecological sustainability. It seeks to establish an empirically grounded *opening* of the topic. The results of the two consultations this volume is based on serve as points of reference for a first analysis and interpretational framework of how religious communities act as drivers for ecological sustainability

in their communities in southern Africa. The policy recommendations in the concluding chapter draw on these reference points and aim to strengthen the steps that religious communities are currently taking as actors for ecological sustainability and to highlight the need for further transdisciplinary knowledge production and engagement.

The remainder of this introduction provides a summary of the contributions made at the two events, the majority of which are included in this volume. The main part (Section 2) begins with an outline of climate change predictions and the current state of ecological degradation in southern Africa from a natural sciences perspective (Section 2.1). It proceeds to outline different approaches to theologies on ecology, drawing on the ecotheological discourse in Christian theology, but also considering African Traditional, Baha'i, Islamic and ecofeminist perspectives (Section 2.2). In a third step (Section 2.3) it moves on to best practice examples of ecological actions by religious communities of different faiths and sizes to spotlight the diverse environmental action taking place on a grassroots level in southern African religious communities. These examples focus on the sub-themes of forestry and agriculture, water, waste and pollution, and ecological education and advocacy. Subsequent to this introduction this volume presents chapters written on the basis of the contributions and reflections at the events. They are structured in two main sections, *Ecological Theologies in Religious Communities in Southern Africa and Beyond* and *Ecological Best Practice Examples in Southern Africa and Beyond.* Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 21) first summarizes key points and results in comparative perspective, before presenting policy recommendations highlighted at the *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa* Berlin Webinar and the *Religious Communities as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability* Pretoria Conference and based on the findings presented in this volume.

2. Religious engagement with the environment in Southern Africa

2.1. Climate change predictions for southern Africa and environmental degradation phenomena

In his opening keynote on "Restricting Global Warming Under the Paris Agreement: Benefits and the consequences of failure for Africa and the world", Francois Engelbrecht, climate scientist at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, made a strong argument for global climate change *mitigation* and local climate change *adaptation* in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. The 2018 IPCC special report on global warming pointed out that a continuous warming of the planet of 1.5°C is likely to increase the frequency of droughts in southern Africa.[22] Furthermore, while local extreme weather events impact the local population, local food security and local health, *global* climate change consequences, such as the melting of the big ice sheets and the consequential rise in sea levels, will also impact southern Africa strongly.

Although in 2015 the world had warmed by approximately 1°C on average compared to pre-industrial temperatures (including water surfaces), some land masses already displayed warmer temperatures. Parts of the land masses of southern Africa have been warming far more than the global average. This means that, even if the world successfully restricts global warming to 2°C on average, temperatures in southern

[22] IPCC, "2018. Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty," ed. Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Africa would still increase by about 4°C.[23] According to Engelbrecht, southern Africa expects a temperature rise of 3 to 4°C if the Paris Agreement is fulfilled and global average temperature increases remain at 1.5°C. He reported that the South African government committed to climate change mitigation measures in 2019 at the United Nations' climate change summit, where President Ramaphosa announced a transition from the South African dependence on coal as the main energy source to alternative sources of energy.[24] Engelbrecht pointed out that even a successfully implemented Paris Agreement will imply future temperature increases and more frequent heatwaves, tropical storms and multi-year droughts. The IPCC special report concluded that 3°C of global warming would result in approximately 6°C of regional warming in southern Africa. Such an extreme temperature rise could make the maize crop, currently the most consumed vegetable, as well as the cattle industry, unsustainable in the region.

These projections by climatologists call for urgent action among all parties, but the effects of climate change are already being felt throughout southern Africa. It is these threatening perspectives for the region and the direct experiences of climate change which religious leaders experience daily that motivate religious communities to become actors for ecological sustainability.

---

[23] Most land regions are experiencing greater warming than the global average, while most ocean regions are warming at a slower rate. Depending on the temperature dataset considered, 20–40% of the global human population live in regions that, by the decade 2006–2015, had already experienced warming of more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in at least one season.

[24] Cyril Ramaphosa, "Statement by H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit, 23 September 2019" (Pretoria: Presidency of the Republic of South Africa).

Leaders of African Initiated Churches already commented on ecological changes in this regard in interviews conducted from 2017 to 2018 by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development in nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa.[25] The interviews showed firstly that some African Initiated Church leaders experienced climate change directly and secondly that they were ready to use their churches' infrastructure to act against the effects of climate change. The overall results from the study showed that African Initiated Church leaders were more concerned about climate change and its results such as changing weather patterns than about other environmental problems such as plastic pollution, mining or air pollution, although these are among the biggest problems in African countries.

From a South African peri-urban perspective this was also related to by church leader Siboniso Ngobese (see Section 2.3.3) during the Berlin Webinar. He described his experience in his Gilgal Bible Church located in the Kaalfontein in South Africa as follows:

> "We are surrounded by a lot of informal businesses … Therefore, half the time we breathe polluted air resulting from fires, smoke and this may lead to respiratory illnesses since we are surrounded by them. That is one of the problems we are having. We breathe polluted air! And then the other one is contaminated water. Most of the water around us is not hygienic. Major health problems result from the streams that are not clean. Environmental pollution is the major problem we have in my area."

---

[25] Philipp Öhlmann, Marie-Luise Frost and Wilhelm Gräb, "Potentials of Cooperation with African Initiated Churches for Sustainable Development: Summary of Research Results and Policy Recommendations for German Development Policy" (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2021).

The experiences of environmental destruction and climate change results were shared by all experts consulted during the Berlin Webinar and the Pretoria Conference. They were often accompanied by ecological theological reasonings, which are the focus of the following section.

2.2. Ecological theologies in religious communities in Southern Africa and beyond

2.2.1 Ecotheologies in African Christianity

Perspectives of Mainline Christianity

Christine Gühne (senior theological advisor at Brot für die Welt, Germany) and Dietrich Werner (at the time senior theological advisor to Brot für die Welt and currently senior research fellow in the Research Programme RCSD at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) spoke on the acute task for African churches to develop ecotheologies informed by their faith perspectives and cultural traditions in view of the effects of the ecological crisis in southern Africa and in the world as described by natural scientists. Their contribution is included as Chapter 2 in this volume. They advocated for an inclusive dialogue on climate change and ecological degradation between all religious traditions in southern Africa. This call for interreligious and interdenominational cooperation in light of the challenge of climate change, which effects all religions and denominations in the same area, was taken up by other speakers expressing different views on the urgency of interreligious dialogue for ecological sustainability.

Werner also touched on another highly debated point among the participants of the consultations: the role of African Traditional Religions and African traditional perceptions on the environment in the different Christian church families in southern Africa. African Traditional Religions are often seen as encouraging responsible ecological behaviour

based on a holistic understanding of nature. At the same time, much of this traditional knowledge seems to be forgotten or to have been suppressed with the arrival of Christianity.[26] Werner asked whether Christianity had committed a grave mistake with regard to the environment by replacing the ecologically sensitive African worldviews with a dominating or subduing outlook on nature. The role that Christianity played in shaping a mindset of natural exploitation to fulfil "man's needs" was taken up by many Christian scholars and practitioners during the consultations.

Ernst Conradie, systematic theologian at the University of the Western Cape, spoke at the consultation in 2019 on mainline Christian ecotheology from a Protestant perspective. His contribution can be found in Chapter 3. According to Conradie, ecotheology emerged as a scholarly discourse in the 1970s, partly in response to growing ecological concerns, as for example stated in the contested report to the Club of Rome on Limits to Growth,[27] and partly in response to the equally contested thesis by Lynn White[28] that Christianity caused much of the environmental crisis due to its deeply anthropocentric orientation. Ecotheology should offer an "ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction." Conradie stressed that the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power was still active, for example in ecumenical calls for climate justice, in which the World Council of Churches had taken the lead.

---

[26] Emmanuel Anim, "Environmental Sustainability and Eco-Justice: Reflections from an African Pentecostal," in *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth*, ed. Louk Andrianos et al. (Solingen: Foedus, 2019), 107–119.

[27] Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

[28] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," in: *Science* 155 (1967): 3767.

This helped according to him to frame environmental issues as matters of justice (and not merely as matters of nature conservation or wilderness preservation). He admitted though that such calls were hardly heard by those in positions of political and economic power and that these calls were too often made from a safe distance, from which the Christian "prophets" of climate justice did not have to carry out the consequences of their words. Moreover, he pointed out that Christians are not taking the lead on climate justice and that, on the other hand, environmental activists typically did not align themselves with Christianity: "In fact, one may observe that natural scientists, against their own methodological inclinations, have become the prophets of our day by reiterating warnings over climate change, the loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification and a range of other 'planetary boundaries', speaking truth to power." He continued to argue that it was not Christianity itself that was to be blamed, but the ways in which the Christian gospel had been appropriated to legitimize domination over the creation. According to Conradie, the problem was not the "domination" command in Genesis 1:27 but that this command had been misinterpreted. "The more the ecological critique of Christianity is emphasized, the less room there seems to be for a Christian critique of ecological destruction. To point any fingers, leads to a recognition of more fingers pointing back at the complicity of Christianity." Finally, he said that the church first needed to react to these criticisms by "bringing its own house in order" before any credible prophetic role could be taken on by the church again in environmental matters.

The response to Ernst Conradie by Wilhelm Gräb, at the time head of the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, is included here as Chapter 4. He pointed out that a theocentric Christian theology, telling the story of God's work of creation, was still addressing the human position.

Therefore, anthropocentric or theocentric ways of doing theology did not represent alternatives in Christian theology but should be seen in a dialectical relationship. He stated that the Christian God who became human in Jesus Christ would never operate without cooperation with humans but that this cooperation must not lead to a negative anthropocentrism of enhancing human selfishness. It is the privilege of human beings to have this consciousness of absolute dependency. The consciousness of being the creatures and not the creator of the world is according to Gräb the consciousness of being dependent on given conditions of living, which humans cannot replace or renew. To underline that, he said that a theology of creation reflecting on human dependency remained the true intention of anthropocentrism in theology. This consciousness of being *creatures* and not the creator, according to Gräb, enforced the responsibility of human beings to preserve the unconditionally given natural environment and to act regardfully and carefully to all other creatures. He stated that it was a misunderstanding of anthropocentrism to regard this concept as one of the reasons for the ecological disaster. A new interpretation of the creation account in Genesis could result instead in a changing concept of the relationship between humans and non-human creatures: "We as humans do not have to dominate nature. Our obligation is stewardship." Gräb went on to say that humans must recognize that they are creatures (and not creators themselves) beside other creatures and must deal carefully with the conditions of life given to all creatures from the creator. For Gräb, it is therefore not theologically correct to say that humans should *preserve* the creation that is not theirs to preserve. Humans should instead realize that they are not responsible for the preservation of the whole creation – which is a creator's task – but instead for their *own interventions* in the God-given conditions of life. The main challenge of theology is to differentiate between what is God's work and what is the work of human beings, what

is the ultimate and what the pre-ultimate. Ecotheology could enforce the courage to be and to act with rational fantasy based on goal-oriented negotiations for sustainability transformation in the global village. The contribution of ecotheology, in Gräb's view, is to repeatedly tell the unbelievable biblical story that God the creator is at the same time God the saviour. Christians who understand their life in the light of the story of God's creative and redemptive work would be hopeful and courageous to act thoughtfully in desperate (ecological) situations where this seemed to be of no avail. For Gräb, liturgy transforms theology into a human resource of repeatedly gaining hope for opportunities of human activities amidst distress. Filled with hope, Christians could act on the forefront of the sustainability transition of the global society. He concluded by saying: "Christian communities fight at the forefront of the ecological movement as agents of civil society searching for the best ways of sustainability transition in all spheres of society."

In a different contribution on mainline Christian perspectives (Chapter 5), Loreen Maseno, lecturer at Maseno University in Kenya, pointed out that ecotheologies in the Global South first function as practices before they are (sometimes) only afterwards transferred into writing. One example of this process are the accounts of a tree planting eucharist ceremony that were described by Martinus Daneel for African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe.[29] This liturgical ceremony was developed orally in group meetings and spontaneously in the course of the practice of the ceremony itself. The discussion following Maseno's lecture centred around the resultant need for comprehensive learning material that explains the different approaches to ecotheology. Maseno

---

[29] Martinus L. Daneel, "African Initiated Churches as Vehicles of Earth-Care in Africa," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 535–567.

reported that in Kenya, young adults showed a new interest in ecology and brought environmental contents to their congregations from the university campuses. She suggested disseminating learning materials on ecotheologies via the influential Christian media channels in sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the academic field of religion and development should assess the translation of the different theologies into actions. Maseno concluded by remarking that the interreligious dialogue in Kenya mainly focused on the themes of politics and the environment. The environment could, according to her, be observed to be the main connecting topic and meeting point between the different religions. International FBOs and governments could support such interreligious dialogue forums on ecology to strengthen religious communities' joint environmental action in the local communities while at the same time fostering interreligious partnerships.

An African Pentecostal perspective on ecotheology

Mangaliso Matshobane, African Pentecostal church leader and postdoctoral scholar at the University of South Africa, engaged with ecological sustainability from an African Pentecostal perspective with a contribution focusing on southern African Pentecostal eschatologies and their implications for the environment. His written contribution can be found in Chapter 6. According to Matshobane, traditional Pentecostal views on ecology rely on two biblical arguments: firstly, on an anthropocentric *dominion theology* based on Genesis 1, which regards humans as the dominant creature over any others. Following this approach, saving the human soul is favoured over saving any other part of creation. Secondly, they rely on an *apocalyptic eschatology* (the teachings of the last things) that interprets climate change as part of a world that is close to its liberating end in a destructive apocalypse of the earth leading to a better, new life in the heavens. This interpretation of

apocalyptic theology centres around the belief that the destruction of the earth is a necessary prerequisite for this new heaven and earth to be built by God. All alterations to the planet caused by climate change are according to this perspective a result of God's will and a sign of the long-awaited apocalypse and redemption of the world. Withstanding climate change might therefore either hinder God's plan or at least – even if climate change itself was not a sign of the apocalypse – the world would in the end be destroyed in any case. The protection of this earth would according to this view be unnecessary.

In a second perspective, Matshobane presented a different understanding of apocalyptic eschatology among Pentecostals which interprets the apocalypse as a transformation of the current world into the new heavens and earth. This second interpretation favours ecological preservation as a holy escal exercise in accordance with God's plans for the redemption of the world. Consequently, Matshobane said there was an *emergence of ecotheology in this regard among Pentecostals*. Salvation is seen here as multidimensional and as affecting the material, social, cosmic and eschatological spheres over and above a personal salvation. Ecology in this view is not related to nature as opposed to human culture, but instead it becomes personal, ecclesiological and universal. Drawing on Clark Pinnock, who argued that the Holy Spirit – a key concept in Pentecostal theology – plays a critical role in creation, Matshobane pointed out that the Spirit was not only involved during the creation of the world, but was involved with creation even before humans were made, and also continues to be involved with creation today and in the future until the redemption of the world at the end of all time. According to Matshobane, this pneumatological ecology can serve as an angle for ecological spirituality for Pentecostals.

Matshobane also referred to the above-mentioned tree planting ceremonies held in Zimbabwe and described by Daneel[30] and pointed out that pneumatological ecology had laid the ground for the founding of the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches in Zimbabwe, which developed a tree planting liturgy including Christ as the saviour of the environment. Matshobane followed Asamoah-Gyadu[31] in that Christian "dominion" over creation needs to be seen as taking responsibility for rather than dominating over creation by Pentecostal and Charismatic church leaders.

Matshobane concluded by stating that salvation must be seen in the context of all creation and that the role of the spirit extended to all creation. He suggested that African Initiated Churches must develop liturgies based on scripture and reflective of their African heritage. This would also help African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in *formulating an African-based ecotheology*. Matshobane stated that the turn towards ecology by Pentecostals will potentially have a strong impact in Africa, due to the swiftly increasing influence of Pentecostalism in Africa ("Pentecostalization of African Christianity"). Although Pentecostals are engaging in the advocacy of the environment later than the discussions on the environment taking place in the global ecumenical movement since the 1970s, their environmental engagement would steer many more than "just" Pentecostal churches towards environmentally friendly beliefs and actions. For the time being though, Matshobane saw the internal advocacy among Pentecostal communities

---

[30] Daneel, *Ibidem.*

[31] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "God's Laws of Productivity, Creation in African Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 185–186.

who are still divided on the question which eschatology to follow as the most important task for Pentecostals. According to Matshobane, a change in Pentecostal spirituality constitutes the basis for environmental actions in Pentecostal churches in southern Africa – a notion reflected again in Rev. Rachel Mash's insights on the strategy of change applied by the Green Anglicans (see Section 2.3.4).

An African Independent perspective on ecology as a topic of redemption

During the 2019 consultation at the University of Pretoria, Barnabas E. Lekganyane, spiritual head of the largest church in South Africa, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), spoke on "Ecological Sustainability as a Topic of Redemption within the Theology of the Zion Christian Church". His speech was later published in the church's magazine *The Messenger*, which reaches millions of church members, and constitutes Chapter 7 of this volume.

Lekganyane made clear statements on the importance of the preservation of the natural environment, stating that "ecological sustainability is the foundation of life, and therefore discussions of sustainable development can take place only after ecological sustainability is guaranteed". Lekganyane based his arguments on the creation account in the Bible and emphasized that humans had a sacred relationship with nature as they could not be sustained outside of nature. Lekganyane connected this sacred relationship with God's gift of nature to the philosophical life principle of Ubuntu – a concept that highlights the interdependence of all life. He went on to explain that the connection of humans with all life expanded beyond the immediate time and space and back in time to the ancestors of people and forward in time to future generations. Harming the environment, he stated, would cause harm to all these generations of species and eventually also to oneself because the

relationships to all beings form the basis of one's identity. Making reference to the natural sciences, for example the Brundtland definition of sustainability,[32] and simultaneously referring to the Bible, Lekganyane presented a plurally informed picture of the basis for an ecotheology that culminated in an analysis of the consequences of environmental degradation. The bishop reported that environmental degradation also led to land deprivation for many black communities, which resulted in social injustice and spiritual identity problems through the dispossession of relations to the beings on this land. He said that: "To exploit without limit destroys the environment. This in turn destroys the ability of all of us and others to become; in the full Ubuntu sense". The church leader finished his speech by clearly marking the devastating influence that environmental destruction already has on people in South Africa, where "the unpredictability of weather patterns has effectively wiped away subsistence agriculture. To mitigate these destructive climate effects, Lekganyane urgently called for action by governments, businesses, communities and churches in his conclusion: "The time for action has come. No one can sit behind and watch. We all have to take a stance".

The response to Bishop Lekganyane's speech by Coenie Burger is included in the following as Chapter 8. Burger, Reformed theologian and leader in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, appreciated Bishop Lekganyane's words and the ZCC's contribution to society in South Africa. He reiterated Lekganyane's call to care for the environment and encourages religious communities in South Africa, such as the ZCC, to continue to play an active role in addressing the societal challenges of our time, such as the ecological crisis.

---

[32] WCED, "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future" (New York: United Nations, 1987).

The constructive and appreciative exchange of these two theologians, Lekganyane and Burger, from quite different denominational backgrounds, African Independent and Mainline Christian, is highly significant in the South African context, in which there is often little dialogue and cooperation across the groups of Mainline, African Independent and Pentecostal churches. This shows that the topic of ecological sustainability is not only a common concern across different denominations, but that common engagement for the care for creation constitutes a unique opportunity to foster interdenominational cooperation and dialogue.

2.2.2 Perspectives of traditional leaders on ecological sustainability

Cosmo Mapitsa, legal scholar and research fellow at the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, conducted a study on the perspectives on ecological sustainability of traditional leaders in the Bolobedu region in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The results were presented at the Berlin Webinar and a report of the key findings is included as Chapter 9 of this volume.

"Ecological sustainability," as Mapitsa points out, "is viewed as intrinsically integrated with all aspects of Bolobedu life". Specific religious-cultural rules or taboos (*Kheila*) stipulate appropriate behaviour in relation to the natural environment, such as the sacredness of specific animals, trees or rivers. However, as traditional values are eroding, the relevance of these rules are decreasing and with them the spiritual restrictions of environmental exploitation. Based on the views held by his interlocutors, Balobedu traditional leaders, Mapitsa concludes that encouraging ecological sustainability based on religious-cultural values is predominantly applicable to settings in which such traditions continue to be relevant. However, including traditional leaders and traditional

religious leaders in policy-making processes and fostering environmental values based on African traditional culture and religion, can contribute to fostering mindsets of ecological sustainability in society.

2.2.3 A Bahá'í perspective

Ms Tahirih Matthee from the Bahá'í community of South Africa gave an insight into the theological reasoning behind Bahá'í engagement with the environment at the Berlin Webinar. The revised written version is printed in Chapter 10. She said that Bahá'í believed that humans are essentially spiritual beings in a material space. The oneness of God, religion and humans was according to her at the heart of the Bahá'í community. Matthee explained that the Bahá'í writings clearly stated that humans must not worship nature but should be custodians of the environment. The overarching unity paradigm also called Bahá'í for global unity in environmental actions. Matthee suggested therefore "the global establishment of community building activities such as children's classes, junior youth groups, study circles in the institute courses and devotional gatherings… to learn about the stewardship role towards nature and to carry out acts of service." God has provided all that we need for us in nature, she said, and that: "Our collective responsibility is to live in harmony with nature for ecological sustainability". Matthee furthermore highlighted that "Bahá'í Faith institutions have provided communications calling for an urgent response to climate change more than a decade ago". One of the tasks for faith communities was to educate their believers, to take up the knowledge of the environmental sciences, and to "implement practices aligned to stewardship of the environment".

Of crucial importance for the Bahá'í is interfaith dialogue, as Matthee highlighted. This is, for example, reflected in the view that the diversity of perspectives offered in interreligious dialogue brings truth. Interreligious alliances and strong interreligious voices are vital to

successfully engage with political decision makers on the topic of environmental protection – especially when political decisions were not made in the interests of the poor. Religious communities could act on their behalf as they cannot expect much support from other communities and do not have another lobby. The strong point of *religious* communities was in her view that these communities could take on the perspective of the poor and stand up together and make a strong point and challenge the politicians on their neglect of the environment that in consequence affects the poor the most. Matthee therefore called for a united voice of faith communities for the environment and encouraged science and religion to come together to converse on climate change. She concluded by emphasizing the commitment to moral principles and values in lifestyle choices of their members that would impact the environment negatively and by pointing out the serious intention of the Bahá'í community in South Africa to play a positive role in behavioural change for ecological sustainability.

2.2.4 A Muslim perspective

Muhammad Gallant, Islamic Studies scholar at the University of the Western Cape and founder of the Environmental Affairs Department of the South African Muslim Judicial Council, spoke at the Berlin Webinar on an ecotheological Muslim perspective, focusing on water in the Qur'an. Chapter 11 summarizes the exposition by Gallant. Quoting Sura 23, verse 18 of the Qur'an, he emphasized firstly that Allah sent water in the form of sufficient, but not destructive, rains, and that Allah controlled in his mercy the quality and accessibility of all water. The Qur'an highlighted according to Gallant in several places the preciousness of freshwater, as a source of life to all creatures, that is subject to the power and goodwill of Allah. Freshwater was, in Gallant's account, in this sense a reminder to all creatures to be thankful to their creator.

Furthermore, Gallant pointed out that from a Muslim perspective "every living species on the earth must have a right to water" as Prophet Muhammad had declared that water, pasture and fire could not be withheld from anyone. Gallant derived concrete rules from these writings and stated that as a result it was "not permissible to withhold excess water where there are others who have need of it". He translated this into a concrete prohibition of the building of upstream river dams or the obligation to freely share water from pumps or ponds with anyone in need of water. In addition to these concrete social-justice-related rules, Gallant also derived a general request for gratitude to Allah for freshwater from his readings of the Qur'an. This gratitude should according to him prevent any pollution or waste of the precious freshwater. As a third point, Gallant gave an account of the socio-religious function, that water takes in the purification ritual before prayer in Islam. Water, in his account, was essential for the ritual prayers to Allah. He highlighted how wasting water was forbidden for any purpose and regardless of whether it was scarce or abundant. In conclusion, Gallant highlighted that the Qur'an demands a careful and sparing use of water on the basis of social justice arguments such as the sharing of water with those in need in a society with limited water access, as well as ritual-related points in the ablution ritual and on spiritual accounts such as gratitude and respect to the creator.

2.2.5 An ecofeminist perspective

Tanya van Wyk, senior lecturer at the University of Pretoria, elaborated on the approach of religious ecofeminism. Ecofeminism was coined as a term in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne,[33] who defined it as women's potential to bring about ecological change. Different branches of the women's environmental movement have developed since, which

[33] Françoise D'Eaubonne*, Feminism or Death* (Verso: London, 2022).

acknowledges that women's contexts and how their personhood and livelihood is affected by climate change are not the same for all women. Ecofeminism emphasizes that the domination and degradation of nature and the exploitation of women have significant connections. *Androcentrism*, which situates maleness at the centre of one's worldview, is at the heart of this double exploitation. Van Wyk referred to Rosemary Radford-Ruether highlighting that ecofeminist movements refer to the complex reality of how women and nature have both been exploited. It furthermore includes how women and nature have been exploited by colonizing powers, how women function as the mediators of nature's benefits to their families and may be caretakers of nature in this context.

A cultural-symbolic approach that has an ideological superstructure unites the different strands of ecofeminism under the appreciation and critique of the woman–nature connection. The connection was established in an attempt to include the ideals of a tradition around interpreting the earth as mother into ecofeminism. This relationship of motherhood and earth was originally derived from spiritual understandings of the caring, giving, nurturing the earth upon which humans depend, much like a child to a mother. However, this notion has been debated and strongly rejected in academic discourse for its essentialist perspective on women, who are according to this approach more linked to nature, to giving, caring and nurturing, and also to a spiritual connection to the world than men are. A socioeconomic perspective inclusive of race and class perspectives does not deny but criticizes this romanticizing connection between nature and women as it analyses how women's bodies and labour are exploited to create wealth in capitalism just as nature is. Instead of following along with the image of the nurturing woman, men should also be taken into the responsibility of caring for the earth.

Van Wyk raised the question of whether a distinction was necessary between ecofeminism in the Global North and the Global South as

the impoverishment of women and of land were often at the centre of ecofeminism and as these were experienced more strongly and occurred more often in the Global South. Does the Global South have a more direct and urgent connection to ecofeminism than the Global North? Although asking this question to provoke thoughts on the necessity of direct experiences of climate change or land pollution for the effectiveness of ecofeminism, Van Wyk warned of the proliferation of stereotypes of first and third world divides possibly enforced by this notion. In her opinion, it was more important to focus on a unified effort to combat the exploitation of women and nature, while recognizing differences in experience and context. Van Wyk also suggested that there was a need to come up with a term related to ecofeminism that was more inclusive, for example queer ecologies, global feminist environmental justice or gender and the environment.

In Van Wyk's view, it is not the "natural" responsibility of women to protect the environment, but because of global power hierarchies, women might be better equipped to deconstruct current global power structures that exploit the environment. In the discussion on Van Wyk's contribution it was pointed out how important role models are for women, for example Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai. In light of this importance, the absence of leading women who could function as such role models in the Pentecostal movement and in the mainline ecumenical movement was criticized.

2.3. Ecological best practice examples in Southern Africa and beyond

2.3.1 Actions on reforestation and agriculture

Agricultural training by the Organization of African Instituted Churches in East Africa

Rev. Nicta Lubaale, general secretary of the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), spoke on sustainable agriculture and the agricultural education programmes by the Organization of African Instituted Churches in Kenya. He started off with the statement that the ecological crisis was similar to the health crisis of COVID-19 in its consequences. Many people could be affected by hunger and poverty through both crises, leading to a third crisis: severe famine. He called on the audience for action to prevent this: "We should be prophets of what we want".

Based on the OAIC's vision that the African people are transformed by Christianity, "building on their cultures" and "living an abundant life in community for their children and the world"[34], Lubaale introduced the activities of OAIC focusing on agriculture and ecological sustainability. As a continental network of churches, the OAIC uses church structures of African Initiated Churches and their liturgies to disseminate their work, but also closely cooperates with other religious communities in its programmes. Working mostly in rural areas and focusing on agricultural production in individual households and on ecological education during agricultural training. Relying on cultural structures and cultural narratives that reflect "ecological harmony" and local languages, OAIC opens opportunities to speak about ecological problems and problem-solving strategies in appealing ways that engage people more easily and directly.

---

[34] OAIC, n.d. "Website of the Organization of African Instituted Churches: About Us," https://www.oaic.org/about-us/, accessed 19 September 2023.

Considering that two-thirds of the people in southern Africa live in severe or moderate food insecurity, Lubaale raised the question: "How do people who live in hunger pray about the earth?" He emphasized that hunger in the region is partly a result of the environmental changes, as the nutritional value that land might produce decreases with ecological degradation. Soil degradation and unsustainable, genetically modified crop seeds lead to the need to buy seeds from professional seed companies every year. The awareness of soil health has increased among farmers because of substantial decreases in yields. This has led to a wide acceptance of the sustainable farming programmes that the OAIC offers. Farmers are currently also raising their voices in the fight against climate change and engage politically with the topic upon experiencing droughts and floods themselves. One of their questions for the future is how their governments are going to deal with the expected unemployment due to the impact of climate change on the high number of jobs in agriculture. Lubaale also named the transformation of wetlands into farming land or construction sites and deforestation as important problems in the region. Deforestation is hard to stop because almost every household uses wood from living trees and bushes as firewood for cooking as electricity is too expensive and unavailable for most people.

Lubaale reported that the interest of participants in the OAIC development programmes resulted from the direct positive impact that these programmes had. A core motivation was to be part of sustainable seed banks instead of being dependent on genetically modified seeds that could not be replanted and provided for lower-quality foods than the traditional seeds. These existential needs motivated people from different faiths to work together, share their knowledge, and then spread it again in their own faith communities for action. He emphasized that the collective processes of agriculture he had witnessed were not only processes of environmental consciousness-building, but also of peacebuilding and

community engagement. The acceptance of the OAIC's work has been so wide that currently 70% of their resources are donated by the local churches as they realized how strongly agricultural work is linked to the survival of the communities.

Working for ecologically sustainable communities, the OAIC applies the following strategy: first to create environmental awareness, secondly enabling communities to come up with their own structures for ecological sustainability (seed banks, independent marketing) and thirdly analyse the process and results with the community. The communication processes within the communities are organized in multigenerational, multi-faith and multi-gender groups. The elders would for example convene in their own age group, speak about the ecological changes since their childhood among themselves and then report to the youth group about the observed changes. The younger generation thus learns from people they know and trust that the environment in their own area was much healthier 50 years ago. The elder generation is at the same time held accountable for their impact on the lives of the current and future generations.

The following discussion evolved around a method to document these intergenerational encounters as the participants agreed that the intergenerational learning was so normal to the communities that they would not document the insights of the elders in writing, as a result of which they would eventually be lost. The intergenerational learning was expressed to be a specificity to an African way of learning in the community that should be officially included in the local school system for environmental learning.

In a similar vein, John Gichimu presented the work of the OAIC as a best practice example of churches' engagement with environmental preservation and sustainable agriculture. This contribution is included as Chapter 12 in this volume. Gichimu highlights that the work of the organization reaches 400,000 farmers across east Africa through the

cooperation with religious communities at local level and the training of farmers' resource persons and lead farmers as multipliers. Highlighting the motivation for the OAIC's work in the area of sustainable agriculture, he *inter alia* elaborates that African Initiated Churches "understand ecology to be a resource given by God" and appreciate and celebrate God's creation as source for livelihoods. Gichimu points to the strong connection of ways of doing agriculture and spirituality as well as theology. Using agricultural resources sustainably is considered to be a divine mandate.

Gichimu's paper was followed by a response by Dietrich Werner (see Chapter 13), at the time senior theological advisor to Bread for the World and currently senior research fellow in the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Werner highlighted ten major points, pointing to areas of further engagement in the area of religion and ecological sustainability.

Tree ordination rituals in Buddhist communities in Thailand

In a comparative view focusing on southeast Asia, Robekkah Ritchie, at the time scholar on Buddhism at Freie Universität Berlin, reported that Buddhist communities engage with the environment in many different regions and forms. Chapter 14 is an expanded written version of her presentation at the Berlin Webinar. Ritchie chose Thailand as an example where Theravada Buddhism is practiced a lot and builds on a long tradition of monks wandering through nature (Forest Tradition). She explained:

> "The Forest Tradition has spread internationally, in part due to the influential monk Ajahn Chah (1918–1992), who founded an international monastery in northeastern Thailand where a number of Westerners ordained and practised. Arguably the greatest

> challenge to monastics practising in the forest has been the widespread deforestation in Thailand in recent decades, which has impacted and altered the forests, physical landscapes, and the relationship to the forest."

With the developing deforestation and the close approach to climatic tipping points, Buddhist communities in Thailand saw the need for environmental action. The wandering monks noticed the increasing deforestation early as their areas for religiously motivated wandering decreased. As a consequence of the bad state *their* forests were in, the monks developed new religious rituals and started to *ordain* trees as Buddhist monks. This ordination of trees into the rank of a monk was symbolized by the wrapping of the trees in Buddhist monk robes. According to Ritchie, monks' robes are deeply embedded in and an important aspect of culture in Thailand. The robes convey meaning not just for the monastic community itself but in wider social contexts as well. The respect that society shows the monks is extended to the trees and thereby protects them from being cut down. The religious rituals successfully helped to protect the forests. Ritchie explained: "The creation of this ritual began as a way to raise awareness of deforestation and combat it with reforestation, and it has developed into a broader movement that has also spread into neighbouring countries."

The ritual became entangled in the complex relations of political, religious and social strata in Thailand when it became:

> "an asserting sense of 'Thainess' for ethnic and religious minorities as the ritual entered the mainstream in the mid-1990s. In 1997, the king officially endorsed the practice, and asked Thai citizens to ordain 50 million trees in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of his accession. This proclamation became an active campaign, the 'Program for the Community Forest Ordination of

> 50 Million Trees in Honor of the King's Golden Jubilee,' which involved outreach to hundreds of villages. Not only did this legitimize tree ordination as a mainstream practice, but it also allowed groups whose Thainess had fallen into question to perform tree ordinations to reassert their citizenship as Thais."

Ritchie concluded by stating that Buddhist movements can be observed to respect the environment far beyond Thailand. For example, while the predominantly Buddhist country of Bhutan is the only country in the world with a negative carbon footprint, also in China the Buddhist-inspired popular vegetarian movement has a CO_2-reducing impact on the society.

2.3.2 Actions on water

Religious communities' importance in community-based water management

Esper Ncube, water and sanitation expert at Rand Water, spoke about the important role that religious communities have in preserving natural resources like water, in coping with droughts and with the effects of natural disasters. She subsequently contributed Chapter 15 to this volume jointly with Collin Mokgaditse. Ncube pointed out that religious communities in general, but especially traditional religious communities, had a high potential in engaging with these topics beneficially through their often-gentle religious practices and stances towards the environment. She stressed the natural water scarcity of southern Africa, exacerbated by the unequal access to water, leaking and aged water pipe systems as well as climate change. Drought has been a continuous threat to the agricultural sector and at the same time "water is universally known as a religious symbol", so her argument. Its spiritual character should be more strongly emphasized and made fruitful during the development,

interpretation and analysis of water laws. She found that religious communities were strongly connected with water resources through ceremonial uses as a spiritual symbol and as an object of worship. Ncube stated:

> "The protection of the abodes of the Gods from entrance, utilization and exploitation overtly or covertly encourages conservation and management of natural resources. … These African Traditional Religious strategies for natural resource conservation and management have somehow been eroded by acculturation and enculturation of most African communities through the introduction of Christianity as a modern way of worship."

With this observation she took up the critical argument against the influence of Christianity on nature conservation that had been brought up in the contributions on ecotheologies by Conradie, Gräb, Werner and Maseno and that was a recurring theme during the consultations. In her talk, Ncube as a renowned water expert made the suggestion to take up the traditional religious knowledge on water and natural resources in state regulations. By introducing this approach, she proposed a bridge between religious communities and natural sciences in practice.

2.3.3 Actions on waste and pollution

The Gilgal Bible Church: An African independent local best practice example

Siboniso Ngobese, spiritual head of Gilgal Bible Church in the township of Kaalfontein north of Johannesburg, reported on his church as an example of a local religious community engaging with the environmental problems experienced in its community on a local and practical level. Chapter 16 is based on his presentations both at the

Pretoria Conference and the Berlin Webinar. The community in which the church is located is affected by environmental pollution on a daily basis. Polluted air leads to respiratory illnesses and contaminated water causes major health problems. Ngobese attributed both to informal businesses operating without environmental protection standards in Kaalfontein. He also accounted for the problems of illegal garbage dumping in the neighbourhood of this congregation and the ensuing dangers for children playing at these illegal dumpsites. Overpopulation and electricity shortages lead to health problems as people had to resort to lung-damaging paraffin and wood fires. In addition to environmental pollution, Ngobese described that his church members experienced climate change in the form of heatwaves and decreasing harvests from small-scale gardening. The church responds to these environmental problems through community outreach programmes in gardening and a cooperation with the schools for environment education programmes as well as clean-up campaigns in the neighbourhood. Gilgal Bible Church promotes recycling and the implementation of environmental cleaning habits into members' daily lives to conserve natural resources, reduce energy consumption, and reduce global warming. Ngobese said that his church teaches that "godliness is next to cleanliness". This meant in effect that Christians were to be stewards of the earth and to protect creation.

2.3.4 Actions on ecological education and advocacy

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)

Kate Davies, co-founder of the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute, spoke about the interreligious work of SAFCEI and subsequently contributed Chapter 17 to this volume. Davies suggests that faith leadership is influential and trusted by all age groups, making congregations ideal centres of life-long learning about sustainable living

practices. SAFCEI has worked on the supposition that the way humans treat nature depends on their perception of it. She stated that African spirituality saw a spiritual presence in all of nature. In contrast, the Abrahamic faiths and Western spirituality has a human-centred worldview. Because of this, secular materialism has prevailed and nature has been largely evaluated according to its economic value.

SAFCEI's experience from working with different faith communities across southern Africa suggests that the lack of environmental action among the communities often results from the absence of a mandate from the faith leadership. This is related to a religious narrative that centres around human salvation rather than stewardship, a lack of environmental knowledge and of dialogue between science and religion. Additionally, the perception in South Africa that environmental conservation was a middle-class or privileged area of concern was, until a decade ago, strong among many marginalised communities. According to SAFCEI's observations, the interest in environmental protection is currently increasing in faith communities because of degraded life support systems and a growing awareness of climate change impacts.

To achieve the aim of supporting religious leaders to become "change agents and eco-justice activists", SAFCEI works on different levels. Firstly, the organization strengthens religious leaders' capacity to advocate for ethical governance. Leaders are encouraged to speak out and issue statements and resolutions on eco-justice. They are also motivated to protect the environment and establish sustainable practices in their own congregations. SAFCEI works with people of faith at the grassroots level encouraging them to develop and mark environmental liturgies and celebrations. It shares information on resource management and on local and global community advocacy and action. Community clean-ups and praying presences, vigils or demonstrations at threatened natural sites and campaigns and court cases against nuclear power, fossil fuels and

pollution were other examples of involvement of religious communities. SAFCEI encouraged the celebration of special environmental days, with symbolic tree planting ceremonies after collective decision-making and action. From Davies' point of view, the collective decision to engage with the environment was the most important basis for a faith group to be effective.

One of the most important pillars of SAFCEI's work is their Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT) programme. Participants are selected from local leadership. During extended workshops, environment-related challenges are shared, and future plans are formulated collaboratively. Davies reported that SAFCEI has established a network that connects these leadership groups from different faiths. In this way, environmental and multi-faith dialogue and peacebuilding are interwoven through the focus on the common goals of building resilience and environmental restoration and protection.

Davies also stressed the importance of international advocacy: more international solidarity, and a stronger multi-faith voice is needed. She named the international Christian call for ecological action issued in Germany in 2019, the "Wuppertal Call Kairos for Creation"[35], as an example of what could be developed by faith leadership in Africa. She said that it was important to establish a stronger connection between global advocacy and local action and pointed to the need for an African advocacy roadmap guiding religious communities on how to engage with national governments, the African Union and other African political decision-making bodies.

---

[35] Andrianos et al., eds. *Kairos for Creation*.

The Green Anglicans

Rachel Mash, Environmental Coordinator in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, spoke about the work of the Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, founded in 2004 and well-known today as the Green Anglicans movement (see Chapter 18). The basis for the Green Anglicans was to create new spiritual narratives for the communities they worked with for environmental protection. The movement aimed to tailor their ecological actions to the community so that every community could "change its spiritual DNA". According to Mash, for Christians this meant rereading the bible and starting with the topic of salvation asking the questions: Is it only humans that are going to be saved? Or the whole cosmos? What is the word of God? Is it the written scripture or the whole of creation that has the fingerprint of God? Did Jesus preach the word to the whole creation or only to humans? Finding the importance of the environment on the Christian faith through responding to these questions would provide for a starting point that thoroughly focuses the communities' *beliefs* on the environment, which was the stable basis for any environmental action to follow from it.

In addition to the spiritual message, also the right messenger needs to be chosen for a community to accept environmental spiritual teachings. In this regard, Mash emphasized the vital role of young people as eco-messengers to their communities. The older generation on the other hand needs to confess that a massive part of environmental destruction had taken place during their lives. On the issue of intergenerational justice, Mash asked the older generation to listen to the younger generation, who are often more of the experts on climate change and the important factors impacting their futures. "Don't run campaigns without consulting the young people!", was her strong demand.

The young messengers need to be reached through the right means – social media in the experience of the Green Anglicans. Mash suggested

"movement-building instead of institution-building!". Transformation does not take place when individuals change, but when *networked* individuals change. Mash also spoke about the importance of environmental education. To reach more young people, Sunday schools and madrasas needed to educate children so that they would "fall in love with creation". In a next step, youth would need to get involved in environmental actions, for example through a clean-up of their local neighbourhoods. These actions would be successful when the cleaning of the areas became a "reclaiming of the polluted lands" and resulted in "doing something fun and beautiful with it". The practical insights that Mash gave into the successful environmental campaigns of the Green Anglicans ended on a note about tree planting. The tree planting actions that had according to her become increasingly popular in sub-Saharan Africa should be substituted by tree-growing initiatives, as in her experience the trees were often neglected once a group had planted them. Just as Maseno had spoken about the successful oral tree planting eucharist ceremonies in Zimbabwe, Rev. Mash spoke about tree planting rituals as well. She highlighted the importance of not only planting trees but caring for trees and suggested connecting tree planting with a long-term action or with personal celebrations like baptism or wedding ceremonies. Such tree planting ceremonies were also suggested at the 2019 consultation by Charles Bakolo from the Malawi Creation Care Network, where tree planting weddings, birthdays, confirmations and so on are regularly and successfully celebrated.

The Green Teaching and Learning Community

Tanya van Wyk presented the interdenominational initiative "The Green Teaching and Learning Community – Green TLC" and their approach to sharing environmental knowledge among Christians in southern Africa at the webinar. The Green TLC was founded in 2019 as

a result of the consultation at the University of Pretoria with the aim to spread specifically targeted scientific environmental knowledge about southern Africa and to connect scientific information with different religious perspectives on the environment. The steering group of the Green TLC has since been drafting interdenominational learning materials and has established a growing WhatsApp channel that provided inputs on environmental sciences and environmental theologies. The members took turns to provide the content to reflect their different Christian perspectives in the channel.

Education for ecological transformation and sustainability: the example of Centro Emmanuel in Uruguay

Turning the perspectives of the 2019 consultation's participants to South America and thereby providing a unique opportunity for South-South exchange, Ileana Sosa Radaelli introduced the work of Centro Emmanuel in Uruguay. Her introduction into the motivation and work of the centre can be found in Chapter 19. The rurally located Centro Emmanuel seeks to promote ecological awareness and to promote spaces for ecotheological reflection. It conducts educational activities, among others for children and youth as well as church members and congregations, hosts seminars and runs an agroecological model farm to capacitate and accompany farmers in environmentally friendly and sustainable agriculture. The approach of the centre is undergirded by the belief

> "that in our interactions with the community and, above all, in educational activities with children and youth, our approach to the big issue of environmental sustainability should be based on empathy and mutual care, fostering mutual understanding and discovering that we are inextricably linked to one another and to nature."

Centro Emmanuel hence seeks to combine agroecology and ecotheology to foster ethics of care for creation and to illustrate pathways into a sustainable future.

Towards an All African Christian Environmental Network

Dietrich Werner and Cain Lerumo Matloko took the deliberations at the 2019 Pretoria consultation one step further by proposing the creation of an All-African Christian Environmental network. This suggestion is included in Chapter 20 as the final chapter before the conclusion. The aim of this network is to provide a forum for the continued sharing of knowledge and best practices and to constitute a unified voice of churches in Africa on the ecological crisis and to thereby multiply churches' impact in the care for creation and international advocacy thereon. Werner and Matloko stated that "there is need for a coordinated, informed and effective Christian voice in Africa to allow ecumenical efforts to advocate, lobby and educate Christians and policy makers for sustainable change."

3. Mapping the way forward on religion and ecological sustainability in Southern Africa

Finally, the concluding chapter by Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann (Chapter 21) sets out to summarize key points of discussion of the Berlin Webinar and the Pretoria Conference, thereby trying to synthesize highlights from the diverse debates led at the two events. Based on the contributions to the two events, many of which are included in this volume, the concluding chapter goes on to provide recommendations on the way forward for different groups of actors in the nexus of religion and ecological sustainability. Recommendations are provided to local and national governments and intergovernmental actors, to religious

communities and faith-based organisations as well as to academic scholarship.

Bibliography

Abumoghli, Iyad, and Euan McCartney. *The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions: Faith for Earth Initiative*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2020. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34063/ESE.pdf.

African Union. *Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want*. Addis Abeba: African Union, 2015. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf.

Amanze, James N. "From "Dominion" to "In Communion": Ecotheology from an African Perspective." *Anglican EcoCare Journal of Ecotheology* 2 (2016): 11–21.

Andrianos, Louk, Michael Biehl, Ruth Gütter, Jochen Motte, Andar Parlindungan, Thomas Sandner, Juliane Stork, Dietrich Werner, eds. *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth.* Solingen: Foedus, 2019.

Andrianos, Louk, Michael Biehl, Ruth Gütter, Jochen Motte, Andar Parlindungan, Thomas Sandner, Juliane Stork, Dietrich Werner. "Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth." In *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth*, edited by Louk Andrianos et al., 9–12. Solingen: Foedus, 2019.

Anim, Emmanuel. "Environmental Sustainability and Eco-Justice: Reflections from an African Pentecostal." In *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth*, edited by Louk Andrianos et al. 107–119, Solingen: Foedus, 2019.

Bompani, Barbara. "Religion and Development from Below: Independent Christianity in South Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 3 (2010): 307–330. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006610X525435.

Carr, Wylie, Michael Patterson, Laurie Yung, and Daniel Spencer. "The Faithful Skeptics: Evangelical Religious Beliefs and Perceptions of Climate Change." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 6, no 3 (2012): 276–299.

Chitando, Ezra. "Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment." In *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, edited by M. C. Green and Muhammed Haron, 3–16. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2020.

Conradie, Ernst M. "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate." *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (2020): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.7833/119-1-1566.

Daneel, Martinus L. "African Initiated Churches as Vehicles of Earth-Care in Africa." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 535–567. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Eisenstadt, Samuel N. "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in Analytical and Comparative Framework." In *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View*, edited by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 3–45. New York/London: Basic Books: 10.

Engelbrecht, Francois A., Jimmy Adegoke, Mary-Jane Bopape, Mogesh Naidoo, and Rebecca Garland. "Projections of Rapidly Rising Surface Temperatures over Africa Under Low Mitigation." *Environmental Research Letters* 10 (2015): 1–16.

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. "Religious Communities as Partners for Development Cooperation: Strategy Paper." Berlin: Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016.

Gottlieb, Roger S. "Introduction. Religion and Ecology – What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 1–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hallman, David G., ed. *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North.* Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995.

IPCC. "2018. Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty," edited by Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157940

Kowanda-Yassin, Ursula. *Öko-Dschihad: Der grüne Islam - Beginn einer globalen Umweltbewegung*. With the assistance of N. Ismail. Leben auf Sicht. Salzburg/Wien: Residenz Verlag, 2018.

Lekganyane, Barnabas E. "Ecological Sustainability as a Topic of Redemption Within the Theology of the Zion Christian Church." Public Keynote Lecture. *The ZCC Messenger* 105 (December 2019): 6–10.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Heinemann, 1990.

Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind.* New York: Universe Books, 1972.

Niang, Isabelle, Oliver C. Ruppel, Mohamed A. Abdrabo, Ama Essel, Christopher Lennard, Jonathan Padgham, and Penny Urquhart. "Africa". In *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, edited by V.R. Barros et al. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014: 1199–1265.

Ntreh, Benjamin Abotchie, Mark S. Aidoo, and Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, eds. *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa.* Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019.

OAIC. n.d. "Website of the Organization of African Instituted Churches: About Us." https://www.oaic.org/about-us/. Accessed 19 September 2023.

Öhlmann, Philipp, Marie-Luise Frost, and Wilhelm Gräb. "Introduction: African Initiated Christianity and Sustainable Development." In *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonization of Development: Sustainable Development in*

Pentecostal and Independent Churches, edited by Philipp Öhlmann et al., 1–29. Routledge Research in Religion and Development. Abingdon, Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2020.

Öhlmann, Philipp, Marie-Luise Frost, and Wilhelm Gräb. "Potentials of Cooperation with African Initiated Churches for Sustainable Development: Summary of Research Results and Policy Recommendations for German Development Policy." Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2021. https://doi.org/10.18452/22892.

Olúpọ̀nà, Jacob Kẹ́hìndé. "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 259–282. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Parry, Martin L., Osvaldo F. Canziani, Jean P. Palutikof, Paul van der Linden, and Clair Hanson. "Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010.

Pope Francis. *Encyclical Letter 'Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Radford-Ruether, Rosemary. *Women Healing the Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Ramaphosa, Cyril. "Statement by H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit, 23 September 2019." Pretoria: Presidency of the Republic of South Africa. https://www.dirco.gov.za/statement-by-h-e-president-cyril-ramaphosa-of-south-africa-to-the-united-nations-secretary-generals-climate-summit-23-september-2019/.

Sakupapa, Teddy Chalwe. "Spirit and Ecology in the Context of African Theology." *Scriptura* 111, no. 3 (2013): 422–430.

Stork, Juliane, and Philipp Öhlmann. "Ökologische Nachhaltigkeit in African Initiated Churches." Kurzstellungnahme 04/2019 des Forschungsbereichs Religiöse Gemeinschaften und nachhaltige Entwicklung. Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2019. https://www.rcsd.hu-berlin.de/de/publikationen/pdf-dateien/kurzstellungnahme-04-2019-oekologie-in-aics.pdf/at_download/file.

Swart, Ignatius, and Elsabé Nell. "Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3862.

Taylor, Bron. "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly."

Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture 10, no. 3. (2016): 268–305.

UNEP. *GEO-6 Regional Assessment for Africa*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2016. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7595/GEO_Africa_201611.pdf.

Vogt, Markus. *Christliche Umweltethik: Grundlagen und zentrale Herausforderungen*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2021.

WCED. "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future." New York: United Nations, 1987.

White, Lynn. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203.

World Council of Churches. *Breaking Barriers. Nairobi 1975*. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Nairobi, 23 November–10 December 1975, edited by David M. Paton. London: S.P.C.K./ Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1975.

ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGIES IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND BEYOND

2. THE COMMON CHALLENGE OF ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY: QUESTIONS TO AFRICAN INDEPENDENT, CHARISMATIC AND MAINLINE CHURCHES' THEOLOGIES

Christine Gühne and Dietrich Werner

The question this introductory contribution to the conference in Pretoria on "churches in southern Africa as civil society actors for ecological sustainability" is wrestling with is about African perspectives for an ecological reformation of Christianity.[1] The suggestion to embark on a serious and comprehensive process for an ecological reformation Christianity has been formulated some time ago.[2] Ernst Conradie who had been part of that initiative later concretizes the imperative by stating that theological work should include a dual approach, both an ecological critique of Christianity as well as a Christian critique on the ecological shortcomings of modernity.[3] The question at stake here is whether and to

---

[1] Paper presented at the Conference Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

[2] See "Volos Call for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity," in "Conference Calls for Ecological Reformation of Christianity", by the World Council of Churches. News item 7 April 2016, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/conference-calls-for-ecological-reformation-of-christianity.

[3] See Wuppertal Call "Kairos for Creation. Confessing Hope for the Earth," in *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth - The Wuppertal Call*, World

what extent we can enhance mainstreaming issues of ecotheology in African theologies and in African theological education in a way which could take up some of the successful experiences we have had in mainstreaming issues of gender justice and HIV/AIDS in African theological circles.

The training of trainers workshops (TOT) that we had in this country or in Zimbabwe facilitated for instance by the EHAIHA program or by Ujamaa Centre in UKZN University and by the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians have made a crucial and historic impact in changing mindsets and avoiding stigmatization and overcoming traditional barriers in terms of gender stereotypes. The same cannot be said yet with many churches and programs in theological education in terms of mainstreaming eco-theologies. A recent global research report[4] found out that there are still major shortcomings in terms of available resources for ecotheological sensitization, curriculum models and well-trained educators which can bring together updated resources for increasing understanding, knowledge and practical skills in the areas of care for creation and ethics of sustainability. To strengthen and enhance eco-theological reflection from and within African resources, bringing together traditional African wisdom traditions, insights from biblical tradition and churches traditions as well as putting them in dialogue with insights from advanced natural scientists from both African background as well as international research networks is an important challenge, but

---

Council of Churches. News item 25 June 2019, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/kairos-for-creation-confessing-hope-for-the-earth-the-wuppertal-call.

[4] Elisabeth Jeglitzka and Dietrich Werner, eds., *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development*, Globethics.net Geneva 2016, accessed 26 August 2023, https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/156830.

also promising task. It cannot be fulfilled by one tradition alone and by remaining only in denominational isolated pockets of self-reference.

It is instead a joint task which needs more dialogue both between mainline churches, African Independent churches as well as Charismatic/Pentecostal churches in the African continent. This promise and potential of this consultation is that it brings together key representatives from all of them. Each church tradition has its own unique contribution to make, Orthodox, Reformed, Charismatic and Independent churches will have different learning journeys in terms of care for creation and attitudes with regard to nature and the utilization of its resources. However, as the earth and its finite resources is but one and given to the whole of humanity, we cannot afford to leave one tradition apart and behind in sharing on our common responsibility for protecting good mother earth. Thus, we need to embark on a more shared approach to African perspectives on ecotheology and ethics of sustainability which is the key goal of this conference. Let me start my reflections in sharing a remarkable story which was narrated by one of our participants:

> "The village in Eastern Ghana where I grew up was situated next to a forest and to a river. The forest was holy because of the ancestors who were alive in it. The river was holy because of the water spirits who were dwelling in the stream. Then at some point, the people of my village became Christians. There were no more ancestors in the forest and no more spirits in the water. Water and woods ceased to be holy and became goods ready to be used by humans. Today the forest does not exist anymore, and the water of the river is highly contaminated. Who has made mistakes in this case?"
>
> Emmanuel Amin, Church of Pentecost, Ghana

What has happened in northern Ghana has happened in many corners of our globe. The result of this is documented by science in many ways. Let me shortly show you some diagrams that document very different areas of human development – yet all these diagrams look the same and only show one direction: A steep curve upwards in the decades since about the 1950s. All of the six major graphs presenting recent data from earth system sciences, the Global Population / Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the development of Global Exports / Global Primary Energy Use, the atmospheric CO_2-Concentration / Global Fertilizer Consumption and the ecological footprints worldwide show a similar, shocking picture: A tremendous increase of the curves just in the short time span since about middle of the twentieth century, i.e., since the beginning of massive industrialization and globalization of economy in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Taken together, this has caused geological scientists to assume that our planet already has entered into a new geological epoch, into a new era of earth history: they have given this new era the name *Anthropocene*,[5] because for the first time now the traces of human life become visible in the geological strata of the earth. It is an earth deeply marked and changed by humans. It is an epoch that is heavily transcending the limits of the earth. It is a dramatic economic growth, which is violating the planetary boundaries. It is an earth in danger to tip over into a completely different system, hardly tolerable for life, as we know it until now. Scientists in a German institute that counsels the government think that we have a time

[5] See for instance: Damian Carrington, "The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-influenced Age," *The Guardian,* 29 August 2016, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth.

limit of two generations ahead of us[6] – a very short period with a window of opportunity to find ways to readjust to planetary boundaries – or we will be exposed to unalterable changes.

Clive Hamilton, an Australian environmental expert, summarizes it very clearly: "The greatest tragedy is the absence of a sense of the tragedy".[7]

Again, my question from the beginning: Who has made mistakes in this case? What does this mean for Christians? How have churches, how has especially a growing Spirit-centered Christianity on the African continent to deal with this, react to this? I would like to mention three points and raise some questions for this conference.

Let me start by quoting Frank Macchia who is an American Pentecostal ecumenical theologian, also former president of the Society for Pentecostal Theological Studies and editor of the Pentecostal Journal "Pneuma":

> "The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. Being filled with the Spirit will thrust one into a process of discernment that seeks to unmask the lies that support injustice and oppression. A prophetic spirituality and theology depends on such discernment. There is

---

[6] This is echoed by recent UN statements that we are the last generation to stop otherwise unalterable climate change can happen. See Damian Carrington, "We Are Last Generation That Can Stop Climate Change," UN summit, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2018, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/03/we-are-last-generation-that-can-stop-climate-change-un-summit.

[7] Clive Hamilton, "The Great Climate Silence: We Are on the Edge of the Abyss But We Ignore it," *The Guardian,* 5 May 2017, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/05/the-great-climate-silence-we-are-on-the-edge-of-the-abyss-but-we-ignore-it.

> evidence of such a direction in recent Pentecostal theological reflection."[8]

Theology of Creation in times of the Anthropocene

What kind of truth do we teach about creation in our churches? What do we believe when we confess God as the creator of heaven and earth? I would like to offer two versions of the same biblical narrative. Which one of the following two versions is predominantly taught in your church? Which one do your people have in mind?

> a) In the beginning God has created heaven and earth in six days. On the last day – as climax of creation – humankind was created. For humans the whole creation was made. Humans have been created in the image of God and is called to be "very good". As crown of creation the human was enthroned to subdue the earth. On the seventh day of creation, nothing important came to pass. God took a day of rest. Jesus came into the world as Son of God to take our sins. He died on the cross for all humans to redeem us. At the end of times all those who believe in Christ and will be filled by his spirit will go to heaven. It is a new heaven and a new earth, a place without suffering, without death. The old earth will pass away. However, those who believe in Christ will live forever.

According to this version, creation – this earth – is just the stage, the scenery, the background for God's history with humanity. The planet is a discontinued model under the signature of death which can be exploited

---

[8] Frank D. Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms of Pentecostal Theology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray Dempster et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books Int., 1999), 13.

and which does not need our care. This is because on the last day we will be saved from it and will get a new one at the end of times.

The second version of the creation narrative goes on slightly different:

> b) In seven days God has created heaven and earth. Humankind is the last and the most dependent and vulnerable of all creatures. Humankind is taken from dust and will go back to the dust. The seventh day, the day of rest, the Sabbath is the crown and completion of creation. Creation as an entire whole is said to be "very good" in the eyes of God. As God's image humans are told to be a blessing to this earth by looking after it as good stewards in the footsteps of the creator: they are asked to mirror God's blessing in creation. In Jesus, God took on flesh and became part of creation. In Jesus, God took care of God's broken and damaged creation by blessing and healing it. Jesus made the kingdom of God visible through the gifts of creation (parables, holy supper). In his death on the cross he has conquered all powers of death and destruction. His resurrection is the victory over all this and the beginning of the renewal of all creation. The whole of creation is under the promise of this renewal. The new earth is THIS earth, where deserts will flourish and will rejoice at the advent of the Messiah.

According to that alternative version humans are one part of God's history with the whole of creation. The new earth is THIS earth, which will be liberated from its bondage to decay. It will be brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God; even though creation now is groaning as in the pains of childbirth (see Romans 8:22).

Who has made a mistake in this case? Has theology supported the dangers of Anthropocene by focusing entirely on humanity – even more, entirely on human souls – and forgetting about its complete dependency on bodily needs and humans as part of creation? What did the missionaries

in Emmanuel's Ghanaian village preach to the indigenous people so that in consequence their preaching led to environmental destruction? What is preached and taught in our churches about creation – and how do people consequently treat the earth and its precious resources? Is it an anthropocentric narrative of creation or is it a cosmocentric narrative of creation, which is the minds of people and the faithful? Could it be that a reductionist anthropocentric concept of creation needs to be identified as one of the dominant forms of "misleading theologies" in contemporary African (and also Global) Christian which the All Africa Conference of Churches project since 2019 is trying to critically deal with?[9] Let us take the following questions into discussion groups at a later stage:

— How do our churches think and teach about creation?

— Are humans exalted at the expense of creation or are they placed in the system of the whole earth?

— How can Spirit-centred faith lead to and support the rediscovery of the holiness of creation?

— Can it bring about a process of discernment to unmask the lies and excuses with which we deceive ourselves when it turns to destructive consequences of economies and lifestyles?

[9] All African Conference of Churches (AACC), "First Symposium on Misleading Theologies" 2019, in https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/confronting-misleading-theologies.

Veni *Creator* Spiritus!

A second major reflection on contours of African ecotheologies comes from critically reading one of the greatest traditions of biblical teachings about creation which comes from the Psalms:

> *Praise the Lord, my soul.*
> *Lord my God, you are very great;*
> *You are clothed with splendour and majesty.*
> *He set the earth on its foundation; it can never be moved.*
> *At your rebuke the waters fled. You set a boundary they cannot cross.*
> *He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.*
> *…*
> *How many are your works, Lord!*
> *In wisdom you made them all,*
> *The earth is full of your creatures.*
> *When you send your Spirit,*
> *They are created,*
> *And you renew the face of the ground.*
>
> *But may sinners vanish from the earth*
> *And the wicked be no more.*
> *Praise the Lord, my soul.*
>
> From Psalm 104

In this old psalm, a deep knowledge concerning life is preserved: it has to do with *rhythms* on the one hand and with *limits and boundaries* on the other. God is praised for being the one who set a boundary against all threats of the fragile system of the earth. Those who have written and prayed this have closely observed the earth and have concluded: Everything that is alive depends on rhythms and boundaries. The human

is but one actor in this system, integrated into it, belonging to it, in need of it. Dependent and vulnerable. God is the keeper of life, his spirit fills and renews all of his creation. This is praised and admired in a long poem. Only at the end the psalm changes: Suddenly we come across a somehow aggressive prayer that the sinners may vanish and the wicked be no more. What is this? Does it mean that religious people are violent? Shall we skip this verse in order to restore the beauty of this psalm? I do not think we should do that. I do think that this verse has a message for us: It shows us the one and only point from which this fragile system can be attacked, disturbed and destroyed. This point in the system is the human, is humanity. And sin or wickedness according to this psalm is: not accepting God's good boundaries, disturbing the rhythms that he has established, destroying the balance of life that God has breathed into creation with God's life-giving Spirit. It is an old text with a very relevant message today!

A leading German natural scientist who counsels the German government recently has said that in the last centuries innovation has always meant to push boundaries and transgress them, to exceed limits. All technical inventions have followed this model: Let's be faster, let's go further, let's achieve more in shorter time. It is the language and the paradigm of unlimited growth. But unlimited growth in a limited system will clearly lead into the destruction of this system! Unlimited growth is the strategy of the cancer cell, was stated by the WCC assembly in Canberra and by Edward Abbey.[10] Scientist David Attenborough has summarized, "Whoever believes in unlimited growth in a limited system

[10] Graeme Deans and Mary Larson, "Growth for Growth Sake: A Recipe for a Potential Disaster," *Ivey Business Journal* October 2008, accessed 26 August 2023, https://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/growth-for-growths-sake-a-recipe-for-a-potential-disaster/.

is either crazy – or an economist".[11] Another, Guy Mcpherson, has stated, "If you think that economy is more important than ecology, try holding your breath while counting your money".[12]

The big challenge ahead of us is now to stimulate innovation in the future by learning to keep limits, to stay inside planetary boundaries. This has to be the paradigm of innovation, of any new model for development in the future. It questions all economic models based on unlimited growth. And it underlines the deep truth of a very old psalm.

How can churches contribute to a paradigm of development which is keeping these limits, by staying inside planetary boundaries, by leaving behind models of unlimited growth? It means to learn to make peace with limitations and with boundaries, to accept them. It entails even to be grateful for these limitations and boundaries because they are precious gifts from God, created to preserve life. It means to be liberated from the pressure of ever more growth and accumulation. But again the question then comes up: How can we achieve that, how can that happen? Aren't human beings unchangeably attracted by the wish to exceed limits? How do human beings change and learn to share, to be satisfied with less, not to boast with individual accumulation? New concepts like

---

[11] David Attenborough, "Someone Who Believes in Infinite Growth Is 'Either a Madman or an Economist," *Mongabay,* 16 October 2013, accessed 26 August 2023, https://news.mongabay.com/2013/10/david-attenborough-someone-who-believes-in-infinite-growth-is-either-a-madman-or-an-economist/.

[12] Attenborough, *Ibidem.*

"Economy of enough"[13] come to mind, the de-growth movement[14] becomes an interesting partner to be in dialogue with which has to do with deceleration and living better with less to consume. This involves also sensitive questions to our own styles of nutrition and food consumption: How many churches would dare to take up the initiative "Less meat – less heat" which argues that we can reduce the environmental impact on the world's climate by drastically reducing our daily meat consumption, which can at the same time add positively to the health of people?[15]

We all know that humans do not change their behaviour just because of knowledge or because of education. This is only one pillar. But we need more. Experts of learning psychology tell us that only knowledge that is at the same time received and digested emotionally and spiritually can touch people's hearts and hands together with their minds. If it only stays in our brains, it will not shape our individual and social lifestyles, our cultures in a way that is sustainable in a way that reduces the crazy need to build identities through ever more consumption and generates liberated attitudes that are ready to become part of a sharing economy.

I think that Spirit Centred Churches have a lot to contribute to this deep and holistic transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. In this spiritual tradition, people are not only taught with words, but they do experience change. Praying in tongues, prayers of deliverance and of

---

[13] Dan O' Neill, "The Economics of Enough," *The Guardian,* 1 May 2013, accessed 26 Augustus 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2013/may/01/economics-of-enough. See also Diane Coyle, *The Economics of Enough: How to Run the Economy as If the Future Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[14] Degrowth, "What is degrowth?", accessed 26 August 2023. https://degrowth.info/en/degrowth.

[15] Paul McCartney, *Less Meat, Less Heat. A Recipe for Our Planet* (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 2016).

healing make people feel the freedom and experience the presence of God in their lives and God's power of transformation in our times. It is a power to touch and transform individual biographies – but there is more about it. Overcoming an anthropocentric reductionism in the understanding of spiritual transformation is the key to unfolding the cosmocentric and ecological relevance of charismatic movements in Africa:

> "The Spirit of God is not only the `soul´ of the church but is also the Spirit of creation and of the kingdom to come. Spiritual gifts build up a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit – but they also have the power to reach out into the society, to shape communities, to touch creation. The Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Jesus Christ, calling us to follow him in his footsteps. He has challenged people by telling them: you cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. He has called people to leave personal wealth and to be ready to follow him…. The problem with much of the popular teaching (…) on healing is its implicit isolation of sickness from the broader plight of human injustice and suffering. Also involved in this emphasis is the isolation of healing from the work of the Spirit of God in all of creation to bring redemption and liberation. (…) There are implications here for relating divine healing and speaking in tongues in a way that rescues both from self-centred illusions. (…) After all, if the healing of the body is the foretaste of final resurrection (…), why not consider the work of the Spirit in social (and sustainable, added by authors) transformation to be a foretaste of the kingdom of God to come?"[16]

[16] Maccia, "The Struggle for Global Witness," 20.

This leads us to another set of questions worth being discussed later in groups:

— How to balance individual faith experiences / ethics and social ethics in a responsible way?

— What is labelled as "sin" in our churches? Individual moral failures? Social injustice and oppression? And also ways of life, production and consumption that destroy the rhythms and limits of God's creation? Ways of life that make life impossible for generations to come?

— What do the gifts of the Creator Spirit contain for the healing of the earth?

— What do we preach about Jesus? About discipleship in his footsteps?

— How can the gifts of the Spirit (joy, love, reconciliation, healing, prayer, tongues, prophecy and so on) lead into a culture of mutual sharing and responsible stewardship inside planetary boundaries?

What do *prosperity* and *blessing* mean in times of ecological crisis? Pentecostal churches as a hindrance or a positive contributing factor to integral human development?

Pentecostal churches in much of west Africa are attractive social organizations for the young middle classes of their country that are striving for upward social mobility. Many of these churches take up the desires, dreams and aspirations of the young generation in their countries and are able to offer a framework for them that obviously fulfils spiritual and social needs and concerns at the same time. Charismatic and

Pentecostal churches speak the language that fits into the worldview of the people and they are able to communicate a relevant message to them that strongly builds up their self-confidence. This is impressive and also a challenge to some of the historical mainline churches. Charismatic churches alter and rearrange the mindsets of their members and encourage to them to perceive themselves not as "victims" any longer – but as "victors".[17] People are enabled to see themselves as victors in the spiritual sense, which can also become true and relevant in the economic sense. This turnaround is an encouragement with tremendous consequences for economic activities. But it is a gift that has to be handled with great care.

There is also a danger in it: Promising upward social mobility and success, emphasizing prosperity and material blessing in the framework of the global market culture of our times with its heavily destructive consequences is not at all an innocent enterprise! Does it mean to confuse the service of Christ with the service of "Mammon"? Whom do we worship, what do we promise to the worshippers?

> "There was a time when Pentecostals warned themselves and anyone else who would listen not to become entangled and dependent on the `things of the world´. Pentecostals were suspicious of the passing fads of stylish clothing, the latest hairdo, glitzy new consumer products. They were also (…) suspicious that the powerful new mass media could be a seductive lure, tricking people into the empty values of the consumer market culture. Perhaps it is time for a rebirth of that ethic of simplicity.

---

[17] See Dana Freeman, *Pentecostalism and Development*, who has argued, "The key element in this transformation of subjectivity, however, is a shift from seeing oneself as a victim to seeing oneself as a victor." Dana Freeman, ed., *Pentecostalism and Development. Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

> That suspicion of the things of this world, for which the early Pentecostals were so famous. (…) Christianity is not against markets, but it is unalterably opposed to allowing The Markets and its false ethic to dictate the meaning of life; and the gospel stands in dramatic opposition to the dominant values of the currently reigning global market culture. In the next century, Christians will have to develop ways of living marked by communal sharing, not by individualistic accumulation. For Pentecostals this means that there must be more sermons on Acts 5 ('They had all things in common') as well as on Acts 2."[18]

This leads us to a third set of key questions, which are offered for group discussions:

— How do African Mainline Churches, Pentecostal Churches and Churches of the Independent Traditions think and teach about "prosperity" and "blessing" in our times? How to strengthen the ability of discernment and in consequence exercise the spiritual gift of prophecy to challenge the values of the reigning market culture in all corners of the globe?

— Do churches encourage communal sharing and actively look for an economy of the common good? Can the churches even develop small-scale models for an economy of sharing and caring for the common good? Or do we support and praise individualistic accumulation? Do we even "baptize" this accumulation by identifying it with God's blessing?

---

[18] Harvey Cox, "Pentecostalism and Global Market Culture: A Response to Issues Facing Pentecostalism in a Postmodern World," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, ed. M. Dempster et al. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 394–395.

— Which images lead us in our attempts of poverty eradication? Can we think of or do we look for ways of poverty eradication and economic empowerment that do not just copy models of ever more resource consumption and unlimited growth?

Apparently time has come when African churches together take up the task of outlining new African theologies of earth care and ethics of sustainability in sharing their different learning journeys with each other and in deepening the common Christian tradition embedded both in Biblical and church tradition as well as in traditional African wisdom traditions, which are so close to some of the key spiritual texts on ecology offered to us in the traditions of the Psalms:

> *"Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*
> *You have set your glory in the heavens.*
> *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars*
> *Which you have set in place,*
> *What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*
> *(...)*
> *Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* (Psalm 8)

Bibliography

All African Conference of Churches (AACC). "First Symposium on Misleading Theologies." 2019, https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/confronting-misleading-theologies.

Attenborough, David. "Someone Who Believes in Infinite Growth Is 'Either a Madman or an Economist." *Mongabay*, 16 October

2013, accessed 26 August 2023, https://news.mongabay.com/2013/10/david-attenborough-someone-who-believes-in-infinite-growth-is-either-a-madman-or-an-economist/.

Carrington, Damian. "The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-influenced Age." *The Guardian*, 29 August 2016, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth.

Carrington, Damian. "We Are Last Generation That Can Stop Climate Change." UN summit, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2018, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/03/we-are-last-generation-that-can-stop-climate-change-un-summit.

Conradie, Ernst M., Ekaterini Tsalampouni, and Dietrich Werner, eds. "Volos Call for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity." In Conference Calls for Ecological Reformation of Christianity, by the World Council of Churches. News item 7 April 2016. Accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/conference-calls-for-ecological-reformation-of-christianity.

Cox, Harvey. "Pentecostalism and Global Market Culture: A Response to Issues Facing Pentecostalism in a Postmodern World." In *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, edited by M. Dempster et al., 127–130. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999.

Deans, Graeme and Mary Larson. "Growth for Growth Sake: A Recipe for a Potential Disaster." Ivey Business Journal

October 2008, accessed 26 August 2023, https://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/growth-for-growths-sake-a-recipe-for-a-potential-disaster/.

Degrowth. "What is degrowth?", accessed 26 August 2023. https://degrowth.info/en/degrowth.

Freeman, Dana, ed. *Pentecostalism and Development. Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Hamilton, Clive. "The Great Climate Silence: We Are on the Edge of the Abyss But We Ignore it." *The Guardian*, 5 May 2017. Accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/05/the-great-climate-silence-we-are-on-the-edge-of-the-abyss-but-we-ignore-it.

Jeglitzka, Elisabeth, and Dietrich Werner, eds. "Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development." Globethics.net Geneva 2016. Accessed 26 August 2023, https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/156830.

Macchia, Frank D. "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms of Pentecostal Theology." In *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, edited by Murray Dempster et al., 8–29. Regnum Books Int., 1999.

McCartney, Paul. *Less Meat, Less Heat. A Recipe for Our Planet*. Munich: Claudius Verlag, 2016.

Wuppertal Call. "Kairos for Creation. Confessing Hope for the Earth." In Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth – The Wuppertal Call, World Council of Churches. News item

25 June 2019. Accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/kairos-for-creation-confessing-hope-for-the-earth-the-wuppertal-call.

3. THE FOUR TASKS OF CHRISTIAN ECOTHEOLOGY: REVISITING THE CURRENT DEBATE

Ernst M. Conradie

Five decades of ecotheology

Christian ecotheology emerged[1] as a scholarly discourse in the 1970s,[2] partly in response to growing ecological concerns, expressed for example in the contested report to the Club of Rome on *Limits to Growth*,[3] and partly in response to the equally contested thesis by Lynn

---

[1] This chapter was first published as article in *Scriptura* 119, no.1 (2020): 1–13, http://dx.doi.org/10.7833/119-1-1566. Reprinted here with permission. This contribution is based on a paper presented at a conference entitled "Together Towards Eco-theologies, Ethics of Sustainability and Eco-friendly Churches", held in Wuppertal, Germany, in preparation for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The argument was further tested in a paper entitled "Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology", read at the Conference on "Churches in Southern Africa As Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability", held at the University of Pretoria, 28–31 October 2019. An earlier, extended version was published as conference proceedings. See Ernst M. Conradie, "What is God Really Up To in a Time Like This? Discerning the Spirit's Movements As Core Task of Christian Eco-theology?" in *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth*, ed. Louk Andrianos et al. (Solingen: Foedus, 2019), 31–44.

[2] There were of course precursors to the emergence of ecotheology. See especially Panu Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler and Early Ecotheology* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2017).

[3] See Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William Behrens, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

White that Christianity is a root cause of the environmental crisis given its deeply anthropocentric orientation.[4] Sources of inspiration to address these challenges emerged from a retrieval of the biblical roots and subsequent history of the Christian tradition, its classic texts, doctrines, moral codes, forms of praxis, saints and leading theologians.[5] For a decade or two ecotheology retained a clear focus, namely reflection on the relationship between "man" and nature, later reformulated as the place and role of humanity within the biophysical environment,[6] or (for some) humanity's significance in cosmic evolution.[7] If anything, ecotheology could be equated with renewed attention to the doctrine of creation, anthropology and environmental ethics.

Since the 1990s ecotheology has become an increasingly amorphous discourse – covering a wide array of themes and underlying problems, situated in diverse geographical contexts, expressed in multiple languages, emerging in basically all confessional traditions and schools of theology, covering all the traditional sub-disciplines of Christian theology, trapped in the same old methodological disputes (e.g., between biblical studies and systematic theology, systematic theology and

---

[4] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science* 155 (1967), 1203–1207.

[5] One reference may suffice, namely to the now classic study by H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

[6] It may suffice to mention only one such contribution amongst numerous others, namely by James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

[7] See especially the contributions in the tradition of Pierre Teilhard De Chardin and Thomas Berry, particularly Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

practical theology, religion and theology).[8] Arguments are typically reiterated in different contexts, often in isolation from what emerges elsewhere. At the same time, ecotheology is characterized by global divides – along confessional lines, between the North and the South, the West and the East, on issues of gender and sexual orientation and, especially, by reference to contemporary science (especially in the Global North) and/or traditional, indigenous wisdom (widespread in the Global South).[9] Worldviews clearly play an important role albeit that this category is itself contested and open to confusion.[10] With other theological discourses, ecotheology shares the need to distinguish Christian theology from other forms of theology (especially in the Abrahamic faiths but also with reference to notions of the "Supreme Being" in indigenous religion), theology from religious studies, the humanities from the social sciences and, in the Anthropocene, the humanities from the natural sciences.

---

[8] From time to time I have offered reviews of such developments. See especially Ernst M. Conradie, "Reformed Perspectives from the South African Context on an Agenda for Ecological Theology," *Ecotheology: The Journal of Religion, Nature and the Environment* 10, no. 3 (2005), 281–314; *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006); "Contemporary Challenges to Christian Ecotheology: Some Reflections on the State of the Debate after Five Decades," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 147 (2013): 106–123.

[9] See for example Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005).

[10] See Ernst M. Conradie, "Views on Worldviews: An Overview of the Use of the Term Worldview in Selected Theological Discourses," *Scriptura* 113 (2014): 1–12; "Ways of Viewing an Evolving World amidst Ecological Destruction," *Scriptura* 117 (2018): 1–13.

A twofold critique and a twofold constructive contribution

Given the increasingly amorphous character of Christian theology there is little hope of gaining methodological clarity and a sense of direction for future discourse. Indeed, it is hard to discern any "current paths and emerging horizons".[11] In this contribution I will nevertheless suggest that, at best, throughout the last five decades Christian ecotheology arguably retained both a critical and a constructive task. As I have often suggested, ecotheology offers a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. This is similar to feminist theology that offers a feminist critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of patriarchy, and to Black theology that offers a *Black* critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of white supremacy. These dual critiques need to be held together. The genius of Christian ecotheology lies in its ability to maintain this dual critique. Without a critique of Christianity, it becomes an apologetic exercise that overlooks the need for a radical ecological reformation of Christianity and merely reiterates human responsibility towards the environment through notions of stewardship or priesthood. Without a Christian critique of ecological destruction, ecotheology loses its ability to offer any distinct contribution to wider debates. Ecotheology then becomes nothing more than one branch of *religion and ecology* and cannot avoid the traps of self-secularization.

Such a dual critique would itself become empty without a recognition of the more constructive task of ecotheology. This constructive task is

---

[11] See Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond and Denis Edwards, eds., *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology* (London: T&T Clark, 2014).

also of a dual nature. This includes both a contribution to Christian authenticity and, on that particular basis, also a contribution to public, inter-disciplinary discourse on sustainability[12] – where such a contribution is often highly contested. I will suggest below that the former entails five key prophetic and pastoral tasks, namely to read the signs of the times (the symptoms), to expose the underlying root causes of the problem (diagnostics), to discern the counter-movement of the Spirit, to tell the story of God's work accordingly and to express a prophetic vision of what the world could and should be like.

In the discussion I will offer some further reflection first on the twofold critical task of Christian ecotheology (under the rubric of an ecological reformation of Christianity) and then on the twofold constructive task (under the rubric of vision and discernment), deliberately keeping these together.

An ecological reformation of Christianity

There is something deeply unnerving for Christians, both in the Global North and in the Global South, regarding the dual critique mentioned above. Several layers of such unease may be identified, painting with rather broad brush strokes:

First, the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power is alive and well, for example in ecumenical calls for climate justice and the recognition of climate debt. The World Council of Churches has taken the

[12] This is indeed highly contested. See my contribution to the debate in Ernst M. Conradie, "Twelve Theses on the Place of Christian Theology in Multi-disciplinary Conversations," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1:1 (2015): 375–386.

lead here with sustained statements over several decades.[13] This has helped to ensure that environmental issues are framed as matters of justice (and not merely nature conservation or wilderness preservation). The intricate links between sustainability, peace, health, poverty and gender have to be recognized as *transversals* that are at least dimensions of all other social challenges.[14] These efforts are to be commended. However, on a cautionary note, it is also true that such calls are hardly heard by those in positions of political and economic power so that these all too often come from a safe distance where prophets do not have to carry the consequences of their words.[15] Moreover, Christians do not take the lead here in the sense that environmental activists in the forefront of such challenges to power typically do not align themselves with Christianity. It seems that the divides between right-wing and left-wing Christianity (in the 1970s *evangelicals* versus *ecumenicals*) are often deeper on issues of (climate) justice than between Christians and activists in other religious traditions. In fact, one may observe that natural scientists, against their own methodological inclinations, have become the prophets of our day by reiterating warnings over climate change, the loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification and a range of other *planetary*

---

[13] See e.g., alongside many earlier contributions, Rogate Mshana, ed., *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Africa: Ecumenical Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC, 2012).

[14] The integral relatedness between poverty and ecology is evident in two South African ecumenical statements, namely *The Land is Crying for Justice: A Discussion Document on Christianity and Environmental Justice in South Africa* (Stellenbosch: Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, 2002); and *The Oikos Journey: A Theological Reflection on the Economic Crisis in South Africa* (Durban: Diakonia Council of Churches, 2006).

[15] This is my core argument in Ernst M. Conradie, "Climate Change and the Common Good: Some Reflections from the South African Context," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010), 271–293.

boundaries, speaking truth to power. They may be heard, but their warnings are not necessarily heeded, and some have been targeted, intimidated and vilified.[16] There is also a danger of false prophets here, not least when scientists are portrayed as the self-appointed saviours of human civilisation.

Second, Orthodox and evangelical Christians may well be concerned that external criteria (ecological sustainability) are applied to critique Christianity. Is this not another form of natural theology, albeit of a progressive kind? This can be circumvented by discovering that ecological concerns are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, its sacred texts, doctrines, moral codes and forms of praxis. If so, it is not Christianity that is at fault but the ways in which the Christian gospel has been appropriated to legitimize domination. Accordingly, the problem is not the command in Genesis 1:27 but that this command has been gravely misunderstood. However, as the ecological critique of Christianity deepened, this apologetic position became harder to sustain. The Bible may contain sources of ecological wisdom but at least some *grey* texts are deeply ambiguous.[17] Accordingly, the problem does not only lie with the interpretation of Genesis 1:27 but with the harshness of the command itself.[18] Likewise, every aspect of the Christian faith has become

---

[16] See the account in Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

[17] See for example Norman C. Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009).

[18] This is much discussed in literature on ecotheology and especially in an ecological biblical hermeneutics. The challenge is posted starkly by Norman Habel in his essay "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 34–48. For an overview, see my essay Ernst M. Conradie,

contested, for example the emphasis on God's transcendence, human supremacy, dualist views on the soul rather the body, Spirit rather than matter, the *myth* of the fall of humanity and the original *goodness* of creation, anthropocentric soteriologies, divine election, Christocentric exclusivism, eschatological escapism and so forth.[19] This critique is readily extended to Christian ethics, pastoral praxis, ecclesial ministries and especially to Christian mission given its alignment with colonialism. Put differently, such an ecological reformation is not only a matter of ethics but also of ecclesiology.[20] A Christian blessing of discourse on sustainability on the basis of a rejuvenated doctrine of creation would not suffice.

Third, there is some bitter irony here concerning global divides. While so-called secular north-western Europe is turning its back on Christianity, the centre of gravity in global Christianity is moving south and east, found especially in the proliferation of multiple forms of

---

"What on Earth is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed.David G. Horrell et al.(London: T&T Clark, 2010), 295–314.

[19] My lifetime commitment is to address such issues through monographs such as *Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a New Century* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2005); *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); *The Earth in God's Economy: Creation, Salvation and Consummation in Ecological Perspective* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015); and *Redeeming Sin? Social Diagnostics amid Ecological Destruction* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

[20] For a discussion from within the African context, see Ernst M. Conradie, Hans S.A. Engdahl and Isabel Apowo Phiri, eds., "Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical Theology in Africa," *The Ecumenical Review* 67:4 (2016), 495–497, 498–663; also Ernst M. Conradie, ed., *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013).

Pentecostalism – and to some extent the Americanization of Christianity. Wherever this has happened, the ecological critique of Christianity has deepened. In the south the alignment of Christianity with colonialism prompted calls for decolonizing Christianity, the heart of the Christian gospel and the Trinitarian core of the Christian faith.[21] In the African context this begs many further questions about the continuity between Christianity and African traditional religion and culture. Some argue for their compatibility, while others resist Christianity as a colonizing, divisive religion.[22] Likewise, in the east the Christian faith is scrutinized in conversation with Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

Fourth, there is another way in which this dual critique is unnerving. The more the ecological critique of Christianity is emphasized, the less room there seems to be for a Christian critique of ecological destruction. To point any fingers leads to a recognition of more fingers pointing back at the complicity of Christianity. If Christianity is indeed part of the underlying problem, as is widely assumed from outside Christianity, then the most significant contribution that Christians can make to address ecological problems may be to get their own house in order. This may be hard to swallow as it implies that Christians should stop proclaiming that it has a message that can save the world. The question is no longer whether there can be salvation outside the church, but whether there is

---

[21] For a recent, provocative contribution to this debate, see Ernst M. Conradie and Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa, "'Decolonising the Doctrine of the Trinity' or 'The Decolonising Doctrine of the Trinity'?," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 161 (2018): 37–53.

[22] Teddy Sakupapa, "The Decolonising Content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology: A Decolonial Analysis," *Missionalia* 46, no. 3 (2018): 406–424.

salvation inside the church,[23] whether the church itself and its message can still be salvaged, whether its decline is inevitable and even needs to be celebrated.

In the *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* that Hilda Koster and I edited, we took this critique as a point of departure, namely suggesting that if north-Atlantic Christianity is indeed associated with the root causes of anthropogenic climate change, then addressing north-Atlantic Christian theology from within may be crucial in order to address climate change.[24] Again, the most significant contribution that Christians can make to global discourse on climate change is to get their own house in order. Of course, there are alternatives, namely, to abandon Christianity and to opt for another religion or something like secular humanism.

Fifth, for Christianity in the Global South the challenge is different. Where people have embraced Christianity (as is the case in most of Africa) and, with it, aspects of western culture – and American forms of consumerism[25] – they need to figure out what this really means given the contested and tainted legacy of Christianity and the vibrancy of other religious traditions. In generalized terms, while some people resisted colonisation and also Christianity as the colonisation of consciousness, some appropriated Christianity in order to survive amidst colonial oppression – and now readily abandon it. Others may have become Christians in order to gain access to the inner secrets of western culture – and its cultural artefacts in terms of guns, cars, aeroplanes, televisions,

---

[23] For this comment, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 384.

[24] See Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., *The T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

[25] See Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and a Critique of Consumerism: A Survey of Six Points of Entry* (Wellington: Bible Media, 2009).

computers and cellular phones (and soccer!). The key to such technology may be science and therefore education and behind that modernity, but many surmise (correctly) that the rise of science is partly due to and partly despite Christianity.

Yet others have discerned the liberative and inclusive impulse of the Christian gospel. They understood the message better than the western messengers ever did – slaves better than slave owners, the colonized better than their colonizers, Dalits better than English landlords, those who are gay better than those who are straight. But they may well wonder whether Christianity is really needed in order to maintain such an impulse. This is exacerbated by the bad press that churches often receive, by ecclesial hierarchies, its patriarchal leadership, its alignment with political power, its oppressive teachings on contraception, abortion, HIV, sexual orientation and so forth. Yet, it is also true that many have embraced Christianity deeply and enthusiastically as a source of stability, resilience and sustenance. They operate with a hermeneutics of trust in the Bible, the tradition and the church. They find themselves bewildered when confronted with contemporary challenges. One example is the covenantal promise, symbolized by God's rainbow, that the earth will never again be destroyed through water – which poses an existential crisis of faith for Christians in Kiribati and Tuvalu.[26]

Calls for an ongoing ecological reformation of Christianity have to be understood in this light.[27] In one of the earliest versions of such a call

---

[26] I was first alerted to this in conversation with Clive Pearson and have since picked this up in numerous further conversations, most recently with Upolu Vaai (Pacific Theological Seminary).

[27] See especially Lisa Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm, eds., *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf

James Nash observed that this implies both a recognition that Christianity needs to be reformed (or else a reformation is not necessary) and that it can indeed be reformed from within (or else a reformation is not possible).[28] As I have argued elsewhere, such a reformation can be prompted anywhere, but the impulse for the reformation then becomes re-appropriated to address other problems so that it soon becomes comprehensive, touching pretty much on all aspects – the biblical texts, the history of the Christian tradition, Christian doctrine, moral codes, forms of praxis, rituals, spirituality and so forth.[29] The Lutheran reformation may have started with malpractices around the selling of indulgences but soon had implications for almost every single aspect of society. Likewise, the Genevan reformation was set in motion by the city's invitation to Calvin to stay there as a refugee, but soon he challenged the authorities for not being welcoming enough to the floods of (often wealthy) refugees flocking to the city. This again had far-reaching implications for every aspect of society and also shaped Calvin's own theology. Given the polemical nature of such a reformation, ongoing theological reflection is necessarily required for the sake of clarification. This suggests a dialectic between reformation and critical reflection on such reformation.

---

and Stock, 2016); also Ernst M. Conradie, Elizabeth Tsalampouni and Dietrich Werner, eds., "Manifesto on an Ecological Reformation of All Christian Traditions: The Volos Call," in *Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development,* ed. Dietrich Werner and Elizabeth Jeglitzka (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), 99–108.

[28] See James A. Nash, "Towards the Ecological Reformation of Christianity," *Interpretation* 50:1 (1996): 5–15.

[29] See especially Ernst M. Conradie and Miranda N. Pillay, eds., *Ecclesial Deform and Reform Movements in the South African Context* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2015).

Vision and discernment: the royal, priestly and prophetic tasks of ecotheology

Does Christianity then have any distinctive constructive contribution to offer in collaborative, multi-disciplinary efforts in public forums to address escalating ecological concerns? The question mark in the last sentence signals that the answer should not be taken for granted and that the content of any such answer will necessarily be contested. The priority may need to remain the dual critique rather than the dual constructive contributions. I will nevertheless proceed to offer some reflections on the latter.

My reflections are shaped by the form of prophetic Kairos theology that emerged in South Africa in the 1980s with specific reference to the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986),[30] the *Kairos Document* (1985/1986), the *Road to Damascus* (1989) and later the *Accra Confession* (2004). Common to these documents is the recognition of the difference between *chronos* and *kairos*,[31] between the ongoing (priestly) tasks of *doing theology* and the prophetic possibility of a moment of crisis where the truth of the gospel is at stake.

There is also the more practical task of exercising responsibility regarding earth-keeping at the micro- and macro-levels (the so-called *royal* task of believers). This requires critical reflection on ethos, praxis

---

[30] See especially Daan Cloete and Dirk. J. Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, 1982* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1984).

[31] One excellent discussion is by Albert Nolan, "Theology in a Prophetic Mode," in *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares*, ed. Buti Thlagale and Itumeleng Mosala (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), 131–140.

and wisdom.[32] Arguably, this constructive task in society can only come to fruition if it is indeed based on a contribution to Christian authenticity. From a theological perspective this may be the most important of the three responsibilities (prophetic, priestly and royal) given that Christianity is not an aim in itself but is aimed at the coming reign of God. This task clearly requires constant engagement in the public sphere between churches, faith-based organisations, various levels of government, business and industry on a range of concrete issues but also on moral visions, rights, values, middle axioms, policies and programmes. It, for example, requires critical engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as proposed by the United Nations. I will not explore this *royal* task in any detail here since there is ample literature in this regard. Suffice to say that the distinct contribution of Christian ecotheology in such debates in the public sphere is not always clear. It is understandable and indeed sometimes necessary that Christians merely reiterate what is said by others or translate Christian convictions in highly generalized categories in order to find the common ground that may be necessary. At the same time, Christians should not shy away from making a contribution to the common good if they are the only ones who are able to make such a contribution.

The priestly task of Christian (eco)theology is necessary in order to keep alive what may be called a liturgical vision of the world.[33] Worshippers enter the Christian liturgy with the burdens of the world on their shoulders, as sinners and as sinned against, with all their natural

---

[32] In addition to ample available material on environmental ethics, see also Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In Search of an Inspiring Vision* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2011).

[33] I developed this more fully in Chapter 2 of *The Earth in God's Economy*, especially building on the work of Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

theologies, ideologies, idolatries and heresies. They bring with them views and analyses of the world around them and its dominant powers, e.g., it is money that makes the world go round; it is the rich, strong, famous, dexterous, talkative and beautiful who rule the world. They come with *warped* views of the world[34] as *oh so beautiful* (romanticism), as *red in tooth and claw* (social Darwinism), as natural resources available for exploitation (capitalism), as something so sublime that it is to be worshipped (New Age mysticism), or as a threat to be tamed and brought under human control (ecomodernism).

Through the liturgy worshippers may slowly learn to see the world in a new light, in the light of the Light of the world. They may begin to see the world around them through God's eyes, as God's beloved creation. They may realize that this messed-up world and the messed-up lives in and around them are nevertheless beloved, so much so that for God it is even worth dying for.[35] They may learn to see the invisible, an intuition deeply embedded in Hebrew, Greek and African sensibilities. They may begin to see the earth in the light of *heaven*, in terms of what the world may become and in a hidden way already is.

This is a deeply counter-intuitive vision. For those with little power in society it may require long services to retrain their eyes, to see that it really is love that makes the world go round, that God's love works through the vulnerability of the cross. For those in positions of power it

---

[34] For such "warped" worldviews see Howard A. Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).

[35] See the comment by Douglas John Hall: "This world, for all its pain and anguish of spirit, in spite of its injustice and cruelty, the deadly competition of the species and their never wholly successful struggle to survive – this world is the world for which God has offered up his 'only begotten Son'," in *The Steward: A Biblical Model Come of Age* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 120.

may take even longer to see this, but they often don't have time. Seeing things differently does make a world of difference. In Desmond Tutu's vision, it means to see the beggar as one's brother, the prostitute as one's sister, the rapist as one's uncle.[36] When believers exit from the liturgy with God's blessing, they are inspired by the vision that a different world is not only possible but has already been established, even though it remains hidden. The *liturgy after the liturgy* enables them to transform the world according to the core identity and characteristics of the Triune God, namely mercy and therefore justice.

Constructive discourse on Christian ecotheology, sustainability, environmental ethics, climate justice and so forth needs to attend to many such ongoing (priestly) tasks and arcane disciplines. We need to read and reinterpret biblical texts with an ecological hermeneutics, and we need to recover some and critique other stories from the history (his-story) of Christianity. We need to engage critically with the content and significance of the Christian faith. We need to explore common ethical categories such as justice, rights, duties, responsibilities, values and virtues, what is good and what is right. We need to engage in critical reflection on ecclesial praxis (liturgies, preaching, eco-congregations, pastoral care, ministries, and so on). And we need to reflect on God's mission in the world, also in seeking common ground through dialogue with other living faiths and indeed with all other sectors of society, including government, business and industry, trade unions and the like. Again, this is both a matter of *ecclesiology* and of *ethics*. All of these are necessary tasks to keep the vision alive. In this sense Christian discourse on sustainability not only needs to be sustained (in the imperative) but in

---

[36] This is not a direct quotation but builds on Tutu's typical sayings. See for example Desmond M. Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Double Day, 2005).

another sense also sustains (in the indicative) the daily praxis of Christian communities and the vocations of Christians in society. These tasks can best be sustained by the recognition that it is God's mercy that nourishes and sustains us forever.[37]

The prophetic task is not always present but needs to be recognized when appropriate. This requires a dialectic between vision and discernment.[38] I suggest that this typically requires 1) a discernment of the *signs of the time* (if you like, the symptoms of the underlying disease), 2) a prophetic critique of ruling powers but also against heresies (a diagnostics of the root causes of the disease),[39] 3) seeking to discern the counter-movements of God's Spirit and discovering the direction in which they lead in order to know and follow God's will (the remediating

---

[37] See Ernst M. Conradie, "Is It Not God's Mercy That Nourishes and Sustains Us … Forever? Some Theological Perspectives on Entangled Sustainabilities," *Scriptura* 116 (2017): 38–54.

[38] This is how Charles Wood uses the term "vision", i.e., to indicate a synoptic understanding of a range of data, a grasp of things in their wholeness and relatedness, a seeing of connections. He contrasts this with the need for discernment, i.e., to gain insight into particular situations in their particularity, to appreciate differences, to distinguish. In this way he seeks to overcome misperceptions regarding the relationship between theory and praxis. He argues that vision and discernment are dialectically related. There is no vision without discernment and no discernment without vision. See Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 67–76.

[39] See my proposal that Christian sin-talk may be regarded, at least from the outside, as a form of social diagnostics. This opens up the possibility of multi-disciplinary conversation on the root causes of ecological destruction since forms of diagnosis are also found in many other disciplines, not just medicine and psychology. Whether sin-talk can be retrieved in the public sphere on this basis requires a more detailed defense. See Ernst M. Conradie, *Redeeming Sin? Social Diagnostics amid Ecological Destruction* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

work of God to address what is wrong),[40] 4) to tell, through Christian witness and theological reflection, the story of God's work moving in that direction, and 5) the expression of a prophetic vision of what the world could be and should be like as a critical comment on how the world has become and now is. Indeed, it is this vision (step 5) that enables a recognition of the signs of the time (step 1) – so that this prompts an ongoing spiral of theological reflection.

The fourth of these theological tasks is in my view crucial but also dangerous – as any attempt to detect the *finger of God* in human history is fraught with the danger of legitimising narrow group interests. This has left a trail of blood and tears throughout the history of Christianity, not least in South Africa.[41] One may retort that there is only one thing that is more dangerous than raising this question of what God is doing – and that is failing to raise it at all. I will refrain from taking up this task here, as I have done so elsewhere.[42]

---

[40] See Ernst M. Conradie, "What Makes the World Go Round? Some Reformed Perspectives on Pneumatology and Ecology," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012): 294–305, building on the discussion on a "hermeneutics of nature" by Jürgen Moltmann in *Sun of Righteousness, Arise: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 189–208. See also the chapter by Denis Edwards on "Discernment of the Spirit" in his *Breath of Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 158–169.

[41] This has always been an extremely dangerous question, as is well recognized by the South African theologian Jaap Durand in an essay on "the finger of God" in history, with reference to apartheid theology. See Jaap Durand, "God in History: An Unresolved Problem," in *The Meaning of History*, ed. Adrio König and Marie Henri Keane (Pretoria: Unisa, 1980), 171–178.

[42] See Ernst M. Conradie, "The Story of God's Work: An Open-ended Narrative," in *T&T Clark Handbook on Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 462–466; also Conradie, "What Is God Really Up To in a Time Like This?".

Telling the story as core to the constructive task

The liturgical vision outlined above is not expressed in any one image or model, but in the form of a narrative. In my view one of the crucial tasks of Christian ecotheology is therefore to find coherent ways (plural) of telling the story of God's work in the world. This requires a juggling act in which at least seven *chapters* of the story are kept alive, namely 1) creation in the beginning, 2) ongoing creation throughout evolutionary history, 3) the emergence of humanity, its rise and fall, 4) providence (common grace), 5) the particular history of salvation, 6) the formation of the church, its upbuilding, ministries and missions and 7) the consummation of God's work.[43] Such a narrative necessarily prompts further reflection on this God's identity and character.

One crucial problem is how to do justice to God's work of creation *and* salvation.[44] Another is to explain whether consummation implies restoration (Reformed), elevation (Roman Catholic), divinisation (Orthodox), replacement (Anabaptist) or recycling (liberalism).[45] There are deep confessional divides here, so this task can only be addressed ecumenically. The task of the juggler is not so much to decide which cone to start with but to keep all the cones in the air. To privilege one is to let the others fall.

---

[43] I have often discussed these seven "chapters", for example in *The Earth in God's Economy* and in an essay "What Is the Place of the Earth in God's Economy? Doing Justice to Creation, Salvation, and Consummation", in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 65–96.

[44] For a more detailed discussion, see my *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on "Re-creation"* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013).

[45] For further discussion, see Chapter 5 of *The Earth in God's Economy*.

In years to come I hope to contribute to ecumenical collaboration in addressing this task through a series of twelve edited volumes with contributions from the Global South and the Global North, the west and the east, involving senior scholars and emerging voices. My hope is that if such a juggling act can be maintained, the seven chapters together may offer an interpretative lens through which the story of our times, of the advent of the Anthropocene, may be told.

Bibliography

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991.

Cloete, Daan, and Dirk. J. Smit, eds. *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church*, 1982. Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1984.

Conradie, Ernst M. *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a New Century.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2005.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Reformed Perspectives from the South African Context on an Agenda for Ecological Theology." *Ecotheology: The Journal of Religion, Nature and the Environment* 10, no. 3 (2005): 281–314.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research.* Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Christianity and a Critique of Consumerism: A Survey of Six Points of Entry.* Wellington: Bible Media, 2009.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Climate Change and the Common Good: Some Reflections from the South African Context." *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 271–293.

Conradie, Ernst M. "What on Earth Is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters." In *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*, edited by David G. Horrell et al., 295–314. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In Search of an Inspiring Vision.* Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2011.

Conradie, Ernst M. "What Makes the World Go Round? Some Reformed Perspectives on Pneumatology and Ecology." *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012): 294–305.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Contemporary Challenges to Christian Ecotheology: Some Reflections on the State of the Debate after Five Decades." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 147 (2013): 106–123.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on "Re-creation".* Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013.

Conradie, Ernst M., ed. *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Views on Worldviews: An Overview of the Use of the Term Worldview in Selected Theological Discourses." *Scriptura* 113 (2014): 1–12.

Conradie, Ernst M. "What Is the Place of the Earth in God's Economy? Doing Justice to Creation, Salvation, and Consummation." In *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current*

Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology, edited by Ernst M. Conradie et al., 65–96. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Conradie, Ernst M. *The Earth in God's Economy: Creation, Salvation and Consummation in Ecological Perspective.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Twelve Theses on the Place of Christian Theology in Multi-disciplinary Conversations." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 375–386.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Is It Not God's Mercy That Nourishes and Sustains Us … Forever? Some Theological Perspectives on Entangled Sustainabilities." *Scriptura* 116 (2017): 38–54.

Conradie, Ernst M. *Redeeming Sin? Social Diagnostics amid Ecological Destruction.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Ways of Viewing an Evolving World amidst Ecological Destruction." *Scriptura* 117 (2018): 1–13.

Conradie, Ernst M. "The Story of God's Work: An Open-ended Narrative" in *T&T Clark Handbook on Christian Theology and Climate Change*, edited by Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, 462–466. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Conradie, Ernst M. "What Is God Really Up To in a Time Like This? Discerning the Spirit's Movements As Core Task of Christian Eco-theology." In *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth*, edited by Louk Andrianos et al., 31–44. Solingen: Foedus 2019.

Conradie, Ernst M., Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond and Denis Edwards, eds. *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current*

Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Conradie, Ernst M., Hans S.A. Engdahl, and Isabel Apowo Phiri, eds. "Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical Theology in Africa." *The Ecumenical Review* 67, no. 4 (2016): 495–497, 498–663.

Conradie, Ernst M., and Hilda P. Koster, eds. *The T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change.* London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Conradie, Ernst M., and Miranda N. Pillay, eds. *Ecclesial Deform and Reform Movements in the South African Context.* Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2015.

Conradie, Ernst M., and Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa. "'Decolonising the Doctrine of the Trinity' or 'The Decolonising Doctrine of the Trinity'?", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 161 (2018): 37–53.

Conradie, Ernst M., Elizabeth Tsalampouni, and Dietrich Werner, eds. "Manifesto on an Ecological Reformation of all Christian Traditions: The Volos Call." In *Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development,* edited by Dietrich Werner and Elizabeth Jeglitzka, 99–108. Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016.

Dahill, Lisa, and James B. Martin-Schramm, eds. *Eco-reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2016.

Durand, Jaap. "God in History: An Unresolved Problem." In *The Meaning of History*, edited by Adrio König and Marie Henri Keane, 171–178. Pretoria: Unisa, 1980.

Eaton, Heather. *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies.* New York: T&T Clark International, 2005.

Edwards, Denis. *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

Gustafson, James M. *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.

Habel, Norman C. "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis." In *The Earth Story in Genesis*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, 34–48. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Habel, Norman C. *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009.

Hall, Douglas John. *The Steward: A Biblical Model Come of Age.* Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Hamilton, Clive. *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Lathrop, Gordon. *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

McFague, Sallie. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens, eds. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for*

the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind. New York: Universe Books, 1972.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Sun of Righteousness, Arise: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Mshana, Rogate, ed. *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Africa: Ecumenical Perspectives.* Geneva: WCC, 2012.

Nash, James A. "Towards the Ecological Reformation of Christianity." *Interpretation* 50, no. 1 (1996): 5–15.

Nolan, Albert. "Theology in a Prophetic Mode." In *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares*, edited by Buti Thlagale and Itumeleng Mosala, 131–140. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986.

Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt.* London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

Pihkala, Panu. *Joseph Sittler and Early Ecotheology.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2017.

Sakupapa, Teddy C., "The Decolonising Content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology: A Decolonial Analysis." *Missionalia* 46, no. 3 (2018): 406–424.

Santmire, H. Paul. *The Travail of Nature.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Snyder, Howard A. *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace.* Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011.

South African Council of Churches, Climate Change Committee. *Climate Change: A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa.* Marshalltown: SACC, 2009.

Swimme, Brian and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Journey of the Universe.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

The Land Is Crying for Justice: A Discussion Document on Christianity and Environmental Justice in South Africa. Stellenbosch: Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, 2002.

The Oikos Journey: A Theological Reflection on the Economic Crisis in South Africa. Durban: Diakonia Council of Churches, 2006.

Tracy, David. "Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God." *Reflections* 3 (2000): 62–88.

Tutu, Desmond M. *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time.* New York: Double Day, 2005.

White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Science* 155 (1967), 1203–1207.

Wood, Charles. *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

4. ECOTHEOLOGY AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY

A RESPONSE TO ERNST CONRADIE

Wilhelm Gräb

Is there a specific contribution of Christian theology and Christian communities partaking in the sustainability transition of global society?[1]

Understanding Ernst Conradie

One the one hand, Christian theology is part of the problem. The Christian doctrine of the *dominium terrae* is based on a specific interpretation of Gen 2:15 and operates for an anthropocentric understanding of nature. Humans do not feel themselves as an integral part of nature and deeply depending on nature but take the position to use it as an instrument for human purposes. The result of this theology is the *dominium terrae*, an anthropocentric theology of ruling the earth and with that at the end the exploitation of the planet.

---

[1] Response to the contribution by Ernst Conradie in the preceding chapter; presented at the conference "Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

On the other hand, since the 1980s initiatives in Christian theology especially through the ecumenical movement contributed very much to a worldwide awareness of the ecological crises and promoted activities to a sustainability transformation of the global society. The slogan of the ecumenical movement "Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation" had a strong impact on the political landscape, including in more secular countries.

Christian theology is part of the ecological crisis, but it is at the same time also one of the most important forces to struggle against it. Ecotheology starts with the critic of placing humans in the centre of God's creation subverting nonhuman nature to selfish human interest. Christian churches need a theocentric theology acting with a liturgy that narrates the story how God reins God's creation. An ecotheology is a theology not only setting humans out of the centre. It becomes a radical theocentric theology "telling the story of God's work in the world".

Agreement with Ernst Conradie

The specific contribution of Christian theology struggling against the ecological disaster lies in telling the story of God's creation. Theology cannot provide any knowledge about the causes of the ecological disaster as the natural sciences do it. Theology cannot invent new technologies to prevent the acceleration of global warming and so on. Theology has no better ideas how humans have to change their behaviour as the global ecological movement spreads them out.

Theology is doing its job explaining what it means and what the practical consequences should be if Christians believe in God the creator. Confronted with the ecological disaster, Christian theology started a process of learning. One of the results of this learning process is what we now call ecotheology. Ecotheology is a critical and constructive

undertaking in the worldwide ecological movement.

Departure from Ernst Conradie

A theocentric Christian theology telling the story of God's work of creation is still addressing the human position. Anthropocentric or theocentric ways of doing theology represent not alternatives in Christian theology. They have to be seen much more in a dialectical relationship.

The Christian God is a God who became human in Jesus Christ. The Christian God will never operate without cooperation with humans. This cooperation must not lead to anthropocentrism in the sense of enhancing human selfishness. Humans can get the consciousness of being creatures who want to live together with all creatures who also want to live.

It is the privilege of human beings to get this consciousness of absolute dependency. The consciousness to be creatures and not the creator of the world is the consciousness of being dependent of given conditions of living, which humans cannot replace and renovate. To underline that a theology of creation reflects on human's dependency remains the true intention of anthropocentrism in theology. It makes humans thankful and humble. At the same time this consciousness of being creatures and not the creator enforces the responsibility of human beings to preserve the unconditional given conditions of life and to act regardful and careful to all other co-creatures. It is a misunderstanding of the anthropocentrism of Christian theology to regard this concept as one of the reasons for the ecological disaster. Even a theocentric theology could not lead to a solution without elaborating its consequences for human activities formatted by human's self-understanding, norms and values. The fact is, if humans are the main cause of the ecological disaster, they also are in charge to do what they can do in order to solve the problem.

One of the most important theological consequences of the awareness of the ecological disaster is a new, ecological understanding of Gen 2:15. This new interpretation points to a changing concept of the relationship between humans and nature with respect to non-human creatures. We as humans do not have to dominate nature. Our obligation is stewardship. Humans understanding themselves as creatures act careful and sustainable for the preservation of the given and not renewable conditions of life – in the language of faith called God's creation.

Not the negation of human's responsibility but its limitation also would come out following the theocentric shift Ernst Conradie is stimulating. If humans understand themselves not as creator but as creatures, they do not have the responsibility for the wholeness of creation. That is, so to say, the job of the creator not of created subjects. Their job is by knowing that they are creatures beside other creatures to deal careful and regardful with the conditions of life given to all creatures from the creator. It is therefore also not theologically correct to say that humans have to preserve the creation. That would be too much for them. Christians who confess that God who created the world express that God still holds the creation in God's hands. Human beings take their responsibility in the limits of creatures. Knowing that they have no power over the wholeness of creation they act with the consciousness of a deep dependency from the God-given creation. They know that they are responsible not for the preservation of the wholeness of creation but for all their intervention in the God-given conditions of life by building up culture and civilizations but most often at the same time destroying the given natural resources.

The awareness of the ecological disaster caused especially by the Global North since the beginning of the industrial era 200 year ago enforces the scientific, economic and cultural sustainability transformation. The main obligation of theology and the specific

contribution of ecotheology to combat the ecological crisis lies in the encouragement to do what humans can do but headed and without panic.

As it is the main challenge of theology to differentiate between what is God's work and what is the work of human beings, what is the ultimate and what is the pre-ultimate, ecotheology can enforce the courage to be and to act with rational fantasy based on goal-oriented negotiations for sustainability transformation in the global village.

Conclusion

What is the specific contribution of Christian ecotheology participating in the worldwide ecological movement?

The contribution of ecotheology is telling repeatedly the unbelievable biblical story that God the creator is at the same time God the saviour. God still reigns over creation and leads it to consummation despite of all the destructive interventions of human beings in the God-given natural conditions of life. Christians who understand their life in the light of the story of God's creative and redemptive work get hope and the courage to act thoughtfully although it seems to be of no avail.

How comes this ecotheology in the minds and hearts of the people?

Here I am referring to Conradie's approach again. That makes the celebration of the liturgy telling the story of God's creation and salvation. The liturgy transforms theology in a human resource of repeatedly getting hope for opportunities of human activities also midst in the distress. Fulfilled with hope Christians can act on the forefront of the sustainability transition of the global society. They can act to promote the awareness of the ecological crises as well as the engagement to struggle with it. They use all scientific knowledge they can get. They investigate the causes of climate change and global warming.

They undertake projects to materialize sustainability transitions using, for example, new sustainable methods of agriculture.

Christians know that they are creatures. As creatures, they do not mean that it is their obligation to save the creation. They know that they are in charge for good stewardship only. Moreover, that includes not to struggle with the ecological problem only. Christians see the connections of the ecological crises with the realization of social justice. As long as in the Global South the most necessary material needs of so many people are not satisfied and the unequal distribution of wealth continues the engagement for the sustainability transition will suffer.

A good ecotheology encourages Christians to believe that God holds his beloved creation still in his hands. Therefore, they have good reasons not to give up hope to find solutions for an effective sustainability transition of the global society. In opposite they enhance their struggle for a sustainability transition in all the spheres of the society. Christian communities fight at the forefront of the ecological movement as agents of civil society searching for best ways of sustainability transition in all spheres of society.

5. ECOTHEOLOGY IN CONTEXT

Loreen Maseno

Introduction

The term *ecotheology* is a shortened form of *ecological theology.*[1] It has been suggested that the words ecological theology was most likely to have been first coined by John Cobb in the mid-twentieth century. Later in 1961, it was given greater attention in by Joseph Spittler to the WCC calling for an earthy Christology with attention to a more cosmic soteriology. Thereafter, in 1963, it grew in popularity in the context of the NCCs Faith-Man Nature Group.[2] Celia Deane-Drummond suggests that the possibility of combining the concerns of the environment and an understanding of God allows for an eco-theology. To her, ecotheology is that reflection on different facets of theology which take their bearings from cultural concerns about the environment and humanity's relationship with the natural world. In general, ecotheology is a particular expression of contextual theology that emerges in the particular context of environmental awareness.[3]

Ecotheology considers ecological practices which have been suggested to include stewarding the land, decrying species loss, recycling,

---

[1] Paper presented at the webinar Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa, Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

[2] James Livingston and Francis Fiorenza, eds., *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2 (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000), 333.

[3] Celia Deane-Drummond*, Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), x.

learning how to love God's creation. By doing these, they all imply humanity may be here for a while and must take a greater responsibility in stewarding earth's ecosystem. One theme within ecotheology is that of creation. A core focus has been to affirm the goodness of creation, that it has integrity as a whole, and that God is implicated, involved, within or a dynamic of creation.

Ecotheology and indigenous communities

Indigenous communities of the world have demonstrated their ability to exercise cultural reflection on the land which is rooted primarily in environmental practice and preservation.[4] Using an example from the Ogiek of Kenya who inhabit one of the largest water catchment area in Kenya, the Mau forest, it is possible to glean their indigenous ecotheology. The Ogieks' life in the Mau, like that of many other African indigenous groups, includes rituals of sacrifices, libations, offerings, prayers, taboos and other forms of sacred acts. These are appropriated by the Ogiek in seeking the intervention of the good spirits in the combat with evil spirits. In their ecotheology, some spirits are propitiated, others are driven away through prescribed rituals. The Mau forest, in its vastness, is to them an object of rituals and sacrifices. It is the space within which they carry out their lived theology.

The Ogiek in Mau have endured for thousands of years without significant biodiversity reductions owing to their praxis of indigenous ecotheology. However, over the years, they have lost their agency as managers of the Mau, which had once enabled them to practise their

---

[4] Loreen Maseno, "The Ogiek Indigenous People, Land Rights and the Environment," in: *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa,* ed. Muhammed Haron and M. Christian Green (Stellenbosch: Africa Sun Media, 2020), 259–271.

spirituality, hunt, gather honey and fruits and use the forest for medicinal use, while at the same time not diminishing the ecosystems.

According to Ogba Kalu,[5] there are dimensions of space theologically perceived by Africans, which, include first, the sky, wherein the supreme being is manifested as the sun, thunder, lightning; second, the earth, with the earth deity responsible for human, plant, and animal fertility; and third, ancestral spirits or the spirit world, in which physical nature such as rocks, streams, and trees are imbued with divine power. All these realms of life are sacralised, and there is nothing in the visible world that has not been predetermined in the invisible realm. This organic worldview in which the three dimensions of space are bound together generates an indigenous theology with a tendency for African communities to seek divine intervention, cure or diagnosis.

Indigenous ecotheology link the living with creation, the earth, the physical nature and the spirit world, as they carry out the various ritual practices in their contexts. It is clear that these rituals and sacrifices allow them to live in peace and harmony with the created order. The Ogiek have continued to live within the Mau Forest, their habitat sustainably, which they call their ancestral home, and also their means of livelihood. This includes the idea that communities and species coexist alongside each other and need each other. This mutual dependence does not allow for total independence.[6]

Ogba Kalu has presented an anatomy of the African religious worldview. It is to be noted that the relationship between indigenous

---

[5] Ogba Kalu, "Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Maps of the Universe," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 2 (2002): 119–122.

[6] Micheal Northcott, "Artificial Persons against Nature: Environmental Governmentality, Economic Corporations, and Ecological Ethics," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1249 (2012): 104–117.

theology and ecology is extensive and that ecology can be geographical, human and cultural.[7] Using a mix of Christianity and indigenous religion, Kalu shows that in real-life situations and in field experience, the process of indigenous assimilation brings to the fore new patterns of congruence, making their religious experiences and ecotheology one that is organic and unified. In my own theorising of the environment, I have made use of what Kalu considers dimensions of space perceived by Africans, including the sky, the earth, and the ancestral spirits or the spirit world.[8] For the Ogiek, the boundedness of these dimensions in the space of Mau forest works to facilitate an indigenous ecotheology and community which is interdependent.

In general, through an indigenous ecotheology, indigenous peoples show us how best we can be citizens in the land community and whose wisdom and knowledge, if taken seriously, can have an impact on the world we live in. Their ecotheology remain a storehouse of knowledge, which we ought to embrace and from which we should learn before what they know is no longer available to us. Like many other indigenous communities, their indigenous ecotheology presents the world in a different way and as such is a prophetic voice against the widespread consumerism that we see in our present society.

Christian ecotheology

According to Conradie and Koster,[9] Christian ecotheology includes a collective response by Christian communities to the environment and

[7] *Ibidem*, 133.

[8] Loreen Maseno, "Prayer for Rain: A Pentecostal Perspective from Kenya," *The Ecumenical Review* 69 (2017): 336–347.

[9] Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster, eds., *Christian Theology and Climate Change* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 336–339.

climate change. Among mainline churches in the Global South, Christian ecotheology is emerging having key roles, some of which include the following:

- First; Addressing the problems of environmental degradation and climate change.[10] Eco-theology when well understood and put in practice within the various Christian communities has the potential of reducing on tree felling, wrong land use and encourage a robust tree planting cycle within the community which in some way has an impact on climate change.
- Second; ecotheology gives the language for which we can speak of God and God activity in creation and the planet within the parameters of God talk. Speech about God and God's care for all creation has to be crafted in human language and able to be disseminated for the good of the environment. It is noted that although theological languages are highly symbolic, there are crucial insights and analyses about greed, sin, integrity, right relations, sacrifice, justice, solidarity, resistance, hope, goodness, beauty, wisdom, wonder and more.[11]
- Third; Ecotheology provides an ethical framework which speaks to and promotes ideas and praxis within the Christian communities. The structure and support for environmental care is ably crafted within.

---

[10] Kate Davies and Ngonidzashe Edward, "A Southern African Response to Todd LeVasseur and Bernard Zaleha," in *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 132–135.

[11] Heather Eaton, "Working with Climate Scientists," in *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 25.

— Fourth; Although ecotheology has not been sufficiently mainstreamed in the Global South, Ecotheology is able to express environmental responsibility, stewardship and caring for creation[12].

In search of a credible ecotheology

Kate Davies and Ngonidzashe Edward[13] propose that a credible Christian ecotheology is that which stands the test on the following front. Such an ecotheology ought to be gauged from the following:

a) Culturally relevant. In this case, any ecotheology is to address the human context applicable in a culture. It therefore, ought to be able to appropriate the cultural artefacts and content in order to be robust and valid.

b) Sensitive to the context of the Christian community. The Christian community has to be taken into consideration in order to be credible. The related Christian tradition ought to inform the understanding of God's work on the planet.

c) Developing such a theology would promote a purposeful ideological orientation for sustainable ecological engagement and praxis, finding expression in public worship, sermons, prayers and pilgrimages.

---

[12] *Ibidem*, 133–135.

[13] Kate Davies and Ngonidzashe Edward, "A Southern African Response".

Diversity of ecotheological thought from different contexts

Since ecotheology is contextual in nature, there are varieties that emerge from various contexts. There is a global variety of the discourse summarised by Deane-Drummond as follows. Ecotheology from the north resists wrongful attachment to technology in the name of progress. It encourages lifestyles attune with the natural world and processes. At the same time, it does not consider global poverty, oppression and the suffering of the planet.[14]

Ecotheology from the south, is embedded in the cry for justice, placing development and ecology in a weight. It challenges modernisation, enlarges the liberation theology agenda so that they capture the indigenous cultural reflections rooted in environmental practice.[15] Considering Ecotheology from the west, simplistically what Deane-Drummond suggests to be those that could be broadly considered *western*, which address individualism and consumerism of the modern life. This Ecotheology weaves together the social and political strands of human life, evolving in dialogue with current political and social disputes. On the other hand, ecotheology from the east borrows a lot from the Orthodox tradition, which places emphasis on a liturgy that is much more conscious of participation by the whole of the created order in its theological reflection. This ecotheology shows the possibility of a life of simplicity and prayer, generating alternative ways of living.[16]

---

[14] Deane-Drummond, "Eco-Theology", 43.
[15] *Ibidem*, 45–55.
[16] *Ibidem*, 67–68.

Varieties of ecotheology

In the past five decades, theologians have picked up the call to reclaim alternative theological traditions in various ways. At the core of this call was developing a closer relationship between the Divine and nature, a matter that is more common in the history of Christianity that today is widely emphasized in ecotheology circles. In Christian ecotheology, there are various theologies which have been developed such as Roman Catholic ecotheology, Orthodox ecotheology, Protestant ecotheology, Protestant/Charismatic ecotheology, Ecofeminist ecotheology, and so on.[17]

This variety is because of a multiplicity of voices, clustered together in diverging schools of thought, within contemporary Christian ecotheology that each recognize insights that are indeed authentically Christian but cannot be readily harmonized with each other. Some of these varieties defend Christian ecological practice and its historical, theological and ecclesial traditions.

Across the decades, we need to be clear that there are various theologies which have been developed such as Roman Catholic ecotheology, Orthodox ecotheology, Protestant ecotheology, Protestant/Charismatic ecotheology, Ecofeminist ecotheology, and so on. It is also because of a multiplicity of voices, clustered together in diverging schools of thought, within contemporary Christian theology (and ecotheology) that each recognize insights that are indeed authentically Christian but cannot be readily harmonized with each other.

In general, nearly half a century since White's critique,

---

[17] A response from the September 2020 webinar was the need to further deepen through a study, to avail the prevalent ecotheologies from the various Christian traditions, see how they speak to each other and how their differences play out.

the ecotheological movement has diversified. With some defending Christian ecological practice and its historical, theological, and ecclesial traditions while others sympathetically echo White's critique. Still other theologians have responded by constructing an ecotheology on a biblical or theological level.[18] This section serves primarily as an overview, examining these trends so as to set a setting the background on the emphasis observable from various traditions.

Conclusion

In this section suffice it to be noted that a summary on ecotheology provides an overview of emphasis as derived from various traditions.

— Roman Catholic theology lays an emphasis on creation theology, the dignity of all creation, and liberation theology of the earth. The *Laudato si'* makes clear the profound view of the human as a radically interrelational creature with all creation and states that the human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures.[19] Here, the human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way they make their own the

---

[18] Loreen Maseno, "Towards an African Inculturated Sophiology: The Case of African Wisdom Traditions from Myths for Ecological Concerns," in *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and Heinrich Bedford-Strohm (London, T&T Clark, 2011), 125–138.

[19] Pope Francis, *Laudato si*' (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 209–210.

Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created

— The Orthodox ecotheology shows us their view of the iconic and sacramental nature of creation. The Orthodox theologian Zizioulas contends that the being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God "It would be unthinkable to speak of the 'one God' before speaking of the God who is 'communion'…"[20] Thus God is found in communion with creation, communities, the trinity and in essence.

— Indigenous ecotheology lays emphasis on how communities and species coexist alongside each other and need each other. Most indigenous peoples demonstrate citizenship in a land community and whose wisdom and knowledge, has profound impact on the world we live in. Indigenous ecotheology serves as a prophetic voice to every generation by presenting the world in a different way.[21]

— Protestant and Evangelical ecotheology emphasized eschatological hope, social zeal, and biblical theology.[22]

— Ecofeminist movements show us the connection between the oppression of earth and the female personhood, ultimately highlighting the need for their co-redemption. It is clear that

---

[20] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 17.

[21] Loreen Maseno, "The Ogiek Indigenous people, Land Rights and the Environment," in: *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa,* ed. Muhammed Haron and M. Christian Green (Stellenbosch: Africa Sun Media, 2020), 259–271.

[22] Loreen Maseno, "Prayer for Rain: A Pentecostal Perspective from Kenya," *The Ecumenical Review* 69 (2017): 336–347.

ecofeminist voices suggest that the logic of domination that is characteristic of patriarchal culture is the same logic of domination at work against females, in modernity and in industrialized capitalism so that patriarchal culture lies at the root causes of anthropogenic climate change.[23]

— Pentecostal ecotheology lays emphasis on the pneuma,[24] a reading of contemporary environmental concern as a response to the prophetic voices of nonhuman nature, and in that sense as a movement of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal pneumatology presents the Holy Spirit as an abiding and active presence in the whole of creation. Further, when humans live in tune with the Spirit's work, they are empowered to live in ways that fosters the flourishing of all created life.[25]

Bibliography

Conradie, Ernst, and Hilda Koster, eds. *Christian Theology and Climate Change*. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Davies, Kate, and Ngonidzashe Edward. "A Southern African Response to Todd LeVasseur and Bernard Zaleha." In *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, edited by Ernst

[23] Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, "Introduction", in *Christian Theology and Climate Change* (London: T&T Clark, 2019): 493–496.

[24] Loreen Maseno, "An African Response to Christopher Vena" In *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster (London: T&T Clark, 2019). See also Aaron J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Green Pentecostal Pneumatology* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011).

[25] Christopher Vena, "Working with Pentecostal and Evangelical Forms of Christianity," in *Christian Theology and Climate Change,* ed. Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

M. Conradie and Hilda Koster, 132–135. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Deane-Drummond, Celia. *Eco-Theology*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008.

Eaton, Heather. "Working with Climate Scientists." In *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, edited by Ernst Conradie and Hilda Koster. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Kalu, Ogbu. "Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Maps of the Universe." *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 24, no. 2 (*2002): 119–122. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700740260388009.

Livingston, James, and Francis Fiorenza, eds. *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Maseno, Loreen. "Towards an African Inculturated Sophiology: The Case of African Wisdom Traditions from Myths for Ecological Concerns." In *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere*, edited by Celia Deane-Drummond and Heinrich Bedford-Strohm. London: T&T Clark, 2011.

Maseno, Loreen. "Prayer for Rain: A Pentecostal Perspective from Kenya." *The Ecumenical Review* 69 (2017): 336–347.

Maseno, Loreen. "An African Response to Christopher Vena." In *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, edited by Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Maseno, Loreen. "The Ogiek Indigenous People, Land Rights and the Environment." In *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa,* edited by Muhammed Haron and M. Christian Green. Stellenbosch: Africa Sun Media, 2020.

Northcott, Michael. "Artificial Persons Against Nature: Environmental Governmentality, Economic Corporations, and Ecological Ethics." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1249 (2012): 104–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2011. 06294.x.

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si*'. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

Swoboda, Aaron J. *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Green Pentecostal Pneumatology*. PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011.

Vena, Christopher. "Working with Pentecostal and Evangelical Forms of Christianity." In *Christian Theology and Climate Change*, edited by Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda Koster. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993.

6. ECOTHEOLOGY IN PENTECOSTALISM

Mangaliso Matshobane

Introduction

In 1986, the World Wildlife Fund convened a meeting with five major world religions to discuss the question of ecology.[1] Out of this a UK based Alliance for Religion and Conservation emerged. There are now nine major religions that are part of this Alliance.[2] This ecumenical dialogue has been ongoing for over 30 years on issues pertaining to the responsibility of religion on ecology. Pentecostals have not been part of these ecumenical conversations because of their ecclesiological differences with the World Council of Churches (WCC), perceiving it as a liberal organization and therefore suspicious of its agenda.[3]

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious group in the world. Anderson gave statistics that by 2012 there were over 612 million Pentecostal/ Charismatics in the world.[4] Recent predictions support this

---

[1] Paper presented at the webinar Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa, Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

[2] Arcworld, "The Assisi Declarations: Message on Humanity and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam & Judaism," Basilica Di S. Francesco Assisi, Italy, WWF 25th Anniversary, 29 Sept. 1986. http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf, accessed 31 July 2023.

[3] Shane Clifton, "Ecumenism from the Bottom up: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 4 (2012): 579–592.

[4] Allan H. Anderson, "Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Asia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 158–170.

stupendous growth, with estimates of 644 million Pentecostal adherents by 2020 and projections of over a billion by 2050.[5]

This number includes independent churches known as neo-Pentecostalism and neo-Charismatics. The greater percentage of Pentecostals comes from the southern hemisphere (Latin America and Africa). There is also a good percentage coming from Asia. "Within the past thirty years there has been an estimated 700 per cent increase in the number of Pentecostal believers, who represent about a quarter of the world's Christian population and two-thirds of all Protestants".[6]

This article will narrate the development of Pentecostalism on ecotheological discourse highlighting some of the challenges Pentecostals have in processing their position on the eco-theological discourse. This is a brief literary analysis that discusses Pentecostal engagement in matters of creation care. The objective of this article is to show a transition of Pentecostal thought from an indifferent position on matters of ecotheology to one that embraces the importance of bringing the subject of creation care to the forefront of Pentecostal discussion. Some of the subjects that pose a challenge to Pentecostal thought are their thinking on dominion, anthropocentrism and their eschatology. These will be discussed within the fourfold tenets of Pentecostal theology as discussed by Dayton, on Christ the saviour, the healer, the baptiser in the Spirit and soon coming king.[7]

---

[5] Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 8–19.

[6] Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers and Cornelis van der Laan, "Introduction," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

[7] Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury, 1987).

Christ the saviour

The traditional view of Pentecostals when it comes to salvation is mostly anthropocentric where the focus is on saving humans more than saving the creation.[8] This anthropocentrism is based on a dominion theology which positions humans at the centre stage of God's creation.[9] Anthropocentrism is at the heart of dominion theology which emanates from the reading of Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2, where humanity is seen as the focus and therefore has dominion over creation. It has created a hierarchy where the saving of the human soul is more valued than the saving of the rest of creation.[10] Pentecostal scholars have started to view salvation as not only anthropocentric but as cosmic, material, social,

---

[8] Aaron J. Swoboda, "Eco-glossolalia: Emerging Twenty-first Century Pentecostal and Charismatic Ecotheology," *Rural Theology*, no. 2 (2015): 101–116; Shane Clifton, "Preaching the Full Gospel in the Face of the Global Environmental Crisis," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 117–134; Matthew Tallman, "Pentecostal Ecology: A Theological Paradigm for Pentecostal Environmentalism," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 135–154.

[9] Paul Maltby, "Fundamentalist Dominion, Postmodern Ecology," *Ethics and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2008): 119–141; Kyle S. Van Houtan and Michael S. Northcott, *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics, and Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010); Emmanuel Kwesi Anim, "An Evaluation of Pentecostal Churches as Agents of Sustainable Development in Africa: The Case of the Church of Pentecost," in *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development,* ed. Philipp Öhlmann et al. (Routledge, 2020), 195–211.

[10] Tallman*, Pentecostal Ecology*, 140–141.

eschatological, family-oriented, ecclesiastical, and personal.[11] Cosmic salvation, among others, is the focus of this article on the salvation of creation. Furthermore, spaces that were traditionally seen as places of sin like cinemas, clubs, and so on, are used as places of worship by most Pentecostal churches meaning that they have transformed spaces from sinful to sacred spaces through the preaching of salvation. If secular spaces can be transformed into sacred places, then creation and ecological sins can be atoned for.[12]

Christ the healer

The traditional position of Pentecostals on healing has always been anthropocentric just as in salvation,[13] it rarely focuses on the social aspect

---

[11] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005); Miroslav Volf, "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989): 447; Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology/Supplement Series*, vol. 25 (A&C Black, 2003); Aaron J. Swoboda, "Tongues and Trees: Towards a Green Pentecostal Pneumatology," in *Tongues and Trees 40* (2013): 192–237.

[12] Brandon Hubbard-Heitz, "The Devil's Suicide: Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics of Space and Their Ecotheological Implications," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and Groans of Creation*, ed. Aaron J. Swoboda (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2014), 22–40.

[13] William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Zondervan, 2000).

of healing, let alone the environment.[14] Pentecostals have realized that healing must also be inclusive of all of creation and not just humans, just as the case is in salvation.[15]

Christ the baptizer in the Spirit

Pneumatic theology upon which Pentecostal theology is anchored has enabled Pentecostals to see the role of the Spirit in all creation and not just in humans, which has been the reason for the paradigm shift among Pentecostals towards an eco-friendly theology.[16] Pentecostals being very keen on biblical theology, noticed references where the Spirit interacts with all of creation and not just with humans as the centre: "…the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2); "You send forth your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth" (Psalms 104:30). Pentecostals place a high value on the baptism

---

[14] Shane Clifton, "Preaching the Full Gospel in the Face of the Global Environmental Crisis," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 117–134.

[15] Harold D. Hunter, "Pentecostal Healing for God's Sick Creation," *Spirit and Church* 2, no. 2 (2000): 145–167.

[16] Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 49–72; Frank D. Macchia, "Tradition and the Novum of the Spirit: A Review of Clark Pinnock's Flame of Love," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 6 (1998), 31–48; Steven M. Studebaker, "The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care," *Zygon* 43 (2008): 943–960; Amos Yong, "Introduction: Poured out on All Creation! Searching for the Spirit in the Pentecostal Encounter with Science," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), xix–xx; Aaron J. Swoboda, "Eco-Glossolalia," *Rural Theology* 9, no. 2 (2011): 101–116.

of the Spirit over the church, realising that the same Spirit also baptises creation, it will therefore take a Spirit baptized church to care of the Spirit baptized creation.[17] Furthermore, the role of the Holy Spirit not only in creation named the pneumatology of creation, but also the role of the Spirit in nature, known as a pneumatology of nature is the theory that is also being advanced within Pentecostal circles as a pneumatology theology of nature.[18] Kenotic pneumatology where the Spirit suffers with creation as he did in the incarnate Christ, as discussed by Jürgen Moltmann[19] is a subject that Pentecostals engage with to shape Pentecostal pneumatic ecotheology.[20] Next will be the discussion on our last tenet of Pentecostal theology: Christ the soon coming king where we look at Pentecostal eschatology.

Christ the soon coming king

The apocalyptic view of eschatology that sees the world as something that will be destroyed by fire, which makes some Pentecostals to view ecotheology with suspicion, asking the question: why care for the earth if it will end in a cataclysmic fashion.[21] This fundamentalist, premillennial

---

[17] Swoboda, "Eco-Glossolalia," 101–116.

[18] Yong, "Introduction: Poured out on All Creation," xix–xx.

[19] Jürgen Moltmann, "A Response to my Pentecostal Dialogue Partners," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2, no. 4 (1994): 59–70.

[20] Peter Althouse, "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit for a Creational Eschatology: A Pentecostal Engagement with Jürgen Moltmann;" in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 155–172.

[21] Francis Bridger, "Ecology and Eschatology: A Neglected Dimension," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 290–301; Scott A. Dunham, "The Ecological Violence

dispensational view has been the popular view for Pentecostals and a major contributor to the neglect of an ecotheology.[22] There are two main views on eschatology which Pentecostals are confronted with: one is the destruction of the earth in order to build a new earth and a new heaven, while the other view speaks of the transformation of the present earth into a new earth and a new heaven. Both views have two distinct ecological responses. The former perceives ecological preservation as futile while the latter sees it as a holy eschatological exercise that brings transformation.[23] Pentecostal tradition tends towards the former. However, Althouse, a Pentecostal scholar, uses the work of Moltmann on transformational eschatology to propose an alternative eschatological view that advocates for the transformation of the earth instead of its annihilation.[24] Transformation is seen in the context of renewal as is the case with the story of the flood where the earth was not annihilated but was renewed, also with the resurrection of Christ, whose body was

---

of Apocalyptic Eschatology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 32, no. 1–2 (2003): 101–112.; Stephen C. Barton, "New Testament Eschatology and the Ecological Crisis in Theological and Ecclesial Perspective," *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010): 266; Aaron J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Pentecostal Ecological Theology*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 40 (Brill, 2019).

[22] Robby Waddell, "Revelation and the (New) Creation: A Prolegomenon on the Apocalypse, Science and Creation," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 30–50.

[23] Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 89–91; Tallman*, Pentecostal Ecology*, 150.

[24] Peter Althouse, "In Appreciation of Jürgen Moltmann: A Discussion of His Transformational Eschatology," *Pneuma* 28, no. 1 (2006): 21–32.

transformed after the resurrection, although he died, he did not perish.[25] This cosmic eschatology proposed by Moltmann is arguably more suited to pneumatic theology where the Spirit breathes life to an ecologically degraded creation to "renew the face of the earth".[26] The engagement with Moltmann's work by Pentecostals indicates their openness to engage with the ecumenical church which has had a head-start on the ecotheological discourse. This engagement will serve to enhance an ecotheological position that will be true to a Pentecostal theology.

Ecotheology emerging among Pentecostals

Jean-Jacques Suurmond,[27] a Dutch Pentecostal pastor and theologian argues for an interconnected ecology at three levels, namely at a personal, ecclesiological, and universal, which he calls a "charismatic ecological lifestyle". He further uses the text of Paul the apostle to show the importance of having a theology of a God who is "over all through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 15:28). All includes humans, the church and the universe in all its diversity. Clark Pinnock,[28] also a Pentecostal scholar, argues that the Holy Spirit plays a critical role in creation. This role was not only significant at the creation point as accounted by the book of Genesis, but the Spirit continues to creatively relate with creation even today. This therefore offers a framework for Pentecostal ecotheology. Pentecostals are beginning to use the subject of

---

[25] Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal – Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006): 449.

[26] Clifton, *Preaching the Full Gospel*, 36.

[27] Jean-Jacques Suurmond, "Christ King: A Charismatic Appeal for an Ecological Lifestyle," *Pneuma* 10 (1988): 26–35.

[28] Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 49–72.

pneumatology to respond to challenges of ecology in our modern world. A significant portion of modern ecotheological writings have to do with the idea of the *Creator Spirit*, the Spirit of God intimately related to the creation and continuation of creation.[29]

The Pentecostal hermeneutic of literal interpretation enables them to develop a pneumatic ecotheological discourse which highlights the metaphorical language in scripture that links the Spirit to creation: "tongues of fire", "rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2,3).[30]

African Pentecostal perspective on ecotheology

African Pentecostalism because of its primal religious nature has a unique relationship with nature and can be a contributor towards crafting an ecotheological practice. African Independent churches (AICs) from Zimbabwe called the Association of African Earth-keeping churches (AAEC), which broadly speaking can be classified as Pentecostal because of their "pneumatic nature" as argued by Frahm-Arp,[31] have developed a liturgy on tree planting which includes a confession on ecological sins, and where Christ is recognized as saviour of the environment.[32]

---

[29] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out,* 31–79; Althouse, "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit," 155–172; Tallman*, Pentecostal Ecology*, 144–149; Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees*, 192–234; John D. Griffiths, "Wonders in the Heavens Above, Signs on the Earth Below: Pacific Islands Pentecostalism, Climate Change and Acts 2," in *Beyond Belief: Opportunities for Faith-Engaged Approaches to Climate-Change Adaptation in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Johannes M. Luetz and Patrick D. Nunn (2021), 329–344.

[30] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, 300; Griffiths, "Wonders in the Heavens Above," 329–344.

[31] Maria Frahm-Arp, *Professional Women in South African Pentecostal Charismatic Churches*, Studies of Religion in Africa, vol. 38 (Brill, 2010).

[32] Tallman, *Pentecostal Ecology*, 144.

In African Pentecostalism, the healing of the world by Christ includes the healing of the environment. This liturgy is performed in a ceremony known as the *maporesanyika.*[33] It is the impact of this AIC practice that inspired Moltmann to develop his pneumatological ecology which demonstrates the leadership of the Global South in ecological discourses.[34] It is also important to note that in African Pentecostalism, the understanding of dominion is not lording over the creation but being stewards of it. Dominion is used in the context of empowering mankind to be better stewards of the creation that God has entrusted in their care.[35] Moltmann's transformational eschatology fits well with the African philosophy of *the living dead*, discussed by Mbiti,[36] which looks at death not as the end or annihilation of existence but as a continuation into a transformed state of life, making the view of a cataclysmic end of the earth not plausible. Caring for the earth is therefore a more attractive view for Africans Pentecostals who for many years before civilization depended on the earth for their survival. There is a need therefore for the Global North to draw lessons from the Global South in crafting a decolonial Pentecostal ecotheological view.

---

[33] M.L. Daneel, "African Independent Churches Face the Challenge of Environmental Ethics," in *Ecotheology Voices of South and North*, ed. David Hallman (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994): 247–263; M.L. Daneel, "African Initiated Churches as Vehicles of Earth-Care in Africa," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, *ed.* Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford Academic, 2006).

[34] Moltmann, "A Response to My Pentecostal Partners", 61.

[35] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "God's Laws of Productivity, Creation in African Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 185–186.

[36] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Waveland Press, 2015).

Conclusion

Pentecostals are new to the ecotheological debate although discussions in the global ecumenical movement have been around for over 30 years. The pressure to urgently attend to the growing threat of climate change has forced Pentecostals to reconsider their indifference towards ecological challenges. This indifference was undergirded by their anthropocentric theology where humans have a self-serving dominion over creation supported by a dispensational premillennial view of the earth ending in a cataclysmic fashion. The realities of climate change have awakened Pentecostal scholars to re-evaluate their theology of creation, salvation and eschatology. Assisted by their pneumatic theology and their literary hermeneutics, Pentecostals are discovering the role of the life-giving Spirit in all of creation and the role of Christ's mandate to save all of creation. The four-fold tenets of Pentecostal theology of Christ the saviour, healer, Spirit baptizer and soon coming king have been used as a theoretical framework that indicates the transition from an indifferent position to that of establishing a Pentecostal position on ecotheology. The use of ecumenical theories are an indication of a transitioning Pentecostal position from a suspicious position to that which embraces views that enhance a Pentecostal ecotheology. The African Pentecostal perspective presents an opportunity for the Global North to adopt decolonial epistemologies of the Global South, in a pursuit of a Pentecostal ecotheology.

Bibliography

Althouse, Peter. *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann*, Journal of Penteocostal Theology/Supplement Series, vol. 25. A&C Black, 2003.

Althouse, Peter. "In Appreciation of Jürgen Moltmann: A Discussion of His Transformational Eschatology." *Pneuma* 28, no. 1 (2006): 21–32.

Althouse, Peter. "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit for a Creational Eschatology: A Pentecostal Engagement with Jürgen Moltmann." In *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation,* edited by Amos Yong. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Anderson, Allan H. "Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Asia." In *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia,* edited by Felix Wilfred, 158–170. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Anderson, Allan H., Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan. "Introduction." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods,* edited by Allan H. Anderson et al., 1–9. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Anim, Emmanuel Kwesi. "An Evaluation of Pentecostal Churches as Agents of Sustainable Development in Africa: The Case of the Church of Pentecost." In *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development*, edited by Philipp Öhlmann et al., 195–211. Routledge, 2020.

Arcworld. "The Assisi Declarations: Message on Humanity and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam & Judaism." Basilica Di S. Francesco Assisi – Italy. *WWF 25th Anniversary*. 29 September 1986. http://www.arcworld.org/

downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf accessed 31 July 2023.

Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. "God's Laws of Productivity, Creation in African Pentecostal Hermeneutics." In *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, edited by Amos Yong, 185–186. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Barton, Stephen C. "New Testament Eschatology and the Ecological Crisis in Theological and Ecclesial Perspective." In *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, edited by David G. Horrell et al., 266. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bridger, Francis. "Ecology and Eschatology: A Neglected Dimension." *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 290–301.

Clifton, Shane. "Preaching the Full Gospel in the Face of the Global Environmental Crisis." In *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, edited by Amos Yong, 117–134. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Clifton, Shane. "Ecumenism from the Bottom up: A Pentecostal Perspective." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 4 (2012): 579–592.

Daneel, M.L. "African Independent Churches Face the Challenge of Environmental Ethics." In *Ecotheology Voices of South and North*, edited by David Hallman, 247–263. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994.

Daneel, M.L. "African Initiated Churches as Vehicles of Earth-Care in Africa." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. Oxford Academic, 2006. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0024.

Dunham, Scott A. "The Ecological Violence of Apocalyptic Eschatology." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 32, no. 1–2 (2003): 101–112.

Frahm-Arp, Maria. *Professional Women in South African Pentecostal Charismatic Churches.* Studies of Religion in Africa, vol. 38. Brill Publisher, 2010.

Hubbard-Heitz, Brandon. "The Devil's Suicide: Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics of Space and Their Ecotheological Implications." In *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and Groans of Creation*, edited by Aaron J. Swoboda, 22–40. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick.

Hunter, Harold D. "Pentecostal Healing for God's Sick Creation." *Spirit and Church* 2, no. 2 (2000): 145–167.

Griffiths, John D. "Wonders in the Heavens Above, Signs on the Earth Below: Pacific Islands Pentecostalism, Climate Change and Acts 2." In *Beyond Belief: Opportunities for Faith-Engaged Approaches to Climate-Change Adaptation in the Pacific Islands.* (Climate Change Management Beyond Belief, 2021): 329–344.

Macchia, Frank D. "Tradition and the Novum of the Spirit: A Review of Clark Pinnock's Flame of Love." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 6 (1998): 31–48.

Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religion*. Waveland Press, 2015.

Menzies, William W., and Robert P. Menzies. *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience*. Zondervan, 2000.

Moltmann, Jürgen. "A Response to My Pentecostal Dialogue Partners." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2, no. 4 (1994): 59–70.

Moo, Douglas J. "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment." *Journal – Evangelical Theological Society* 49. no. 3 (2006): 449.

Petersen, Douglas W. *Not by Might Nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America*. Regnum, 1996.

Pinnock, Clark H. *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit.* Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1996.

Studebaker, Steven M. "The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care." *Zygon* 43 (2008): 943–960.

Suurmond, Jean-Jacques. "Christ King: A Charismatic Appeal for an Ecological Lifestyle." *Pneuma* 10 (1988): 26–35. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1163/157007488X00037.

Swoboda, Aaron J. "Tongues and Trees: Towards a Green Pentecostal Pneumatology." In *Tongues and Trees*, 192–237. Brill Publisher, 2013.

Swoboda, Aaron J. "Eco-glossolalia: Emerging Twenty-first Century Pentecostal and Charismatic Ecotheology." *Rural Theology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 101–116.

Swoboda, Aaron J. "Tongues and Trees: Towards a Pentecostal Ecological Theology." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* 40 (2019).

Van Houtan, Kyle S., and Michael S. Northcott, eds. *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics, and Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

Volf, Miroslav. "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989): 447.

Volf, Miroslav. *Work in the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Waddell, Robby. "Revelation and the (New) Creation: A Prolegomenon on the Apocalypse, Science and Creation." In *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, edited by Amos Yong, 30–50. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Yong, Amos. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Baker Academic, 2005.

Yong, Amos., ed. *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

Zurlo, Gina A., Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing. "World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South." *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 8–19.

7. ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY AS A TOPIC OF REDEMPTION WITHIN THE THEOLOGY OF THE ZION CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Barnabas E. Lekganyane

Introduction

Kgotso ga ebe le lena.
Vrede vir julle.
Peace be unto you.

It is an honour to have Humboldt University Berlin and the University of Pretoria inviting us as the Zion Christian Church to present the keynote for this conference.[1] This is really a new beginning, as it marks closer engagement between ourselves as a church and academic institutions. We would like to commend the conference organizers for arranging discussions that are not only current and relevant, but also require serious engagement and collective effort in coming up with solutions. The theme of religion and sustainable development, which was the main discussion for the July conference in Berlin, is an issue that is very close to our heart as the Zion Christian Church. However, ecological sustainability is the foundation of life, and therefore discussions of sustainable development can take place only after ecological sustainability is guaranteed. Therefore, it is really good to note that you saw it fit to arrange a

[1] Keynote address presented at the conference "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" at the University of Pretoria, 29 October 2019. First published in *The ZCC Messenger* 105, December 2019.

conference that will focus specifically on the matter.

Peace be unto you.

The Bible teaches us that God first created the heavens and earth, the land, water, and all plants and animals on earth and in the seas. It is only after that, that human beings were created. Nature is really the first gift of God to people. Even though we are spiritually a creation of the Almighty, our lives can never be sustained outside nature. It is long overdue for churches to emphasise the sacred relationship between people and nature. There are two factors that I need to highlight. First, the theme of this conference seems particularly related to the sermon that I delivered for our New Year celebrations on the first of September this year. Secondly, while it might not be apparent to an outside observer, the theology of the Zion Christian Church emanates from an outlook that assumes a respectful attitude towards nature.

Peace be unto you.

As leaders of churches in Africa, we are in a very privileged position. The Eurocentric foundation of identity is based on the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). The philosophical foundation of identity among communities in southern Africa is based on Botho. This is a concept that is often difficult to translate and interpret. The Nguni version Ubuntu seems to be more generally used. The word has two aspects, Ubu- which is to be without any definite form; and -ntu which is the form that is attainable in our existence. The being needs the form, and also the form cannot exist without the being.

As stated by one African philosopher, Ubuntu is humanness that obliges one to be humane, respectful and polite towards others. “The obligation to be humane towards others is an ethical imperative based on the principle that one ought always to promote life and avoid

killing . . . What is critical then is 'to prove oneself to be the embodiment of ubu-ntu because the fundamental ethical, social and legal judgment of human worth and conduct is based upon Ubuntu'". Therefore, when you kill and destroy God's creation, you will run short of something essential to your being. While you may continue to exist, you will not earn the worth of being -ntu, and thus will lack the human form aspect of your existence.

Please note that the obligation to be humane towards others is not limited to those close to you in space and time. That means a sense of identity is not based only on those who are human beings, here and now. To be a human, and humane in the context of Ubuntu actually stretches to as far in space as there is distance, and as far in time as there is existence. Further, in order for an existence to form completely, it requires community. The being becomes out of relations. Hence it is said "Motho ke motho ka batho".

Peace be unto you.

The community includes those who exist, where they exist, and how they exist. This community is deeply embedded in the natural environment that allows communities to form in the first place. Thus, the obligation is to be humane to all those who have ever been, and to those who will ever become, here and everywhere. The relationships that are the foundation of identity are perpetual.

When we accept this outlook, you realise that being harmful to the ecology causes harm to one's own self, and to everyone else. It is destructive. It takes away our -ntu, which is the human aspect of being. When you take away that aspect, it takes away what you can be as a person. This also means you take away what others have been, and what others can ever become. When we preach the message of peace, the peace we pray for is that which includes the whole of the community.

The community that is currently here, and the communities to come in perpetuity. This includes the human, animal and plant populations that together form the one whole community.

Peace be unto you.

The theme of my sermon in the New Year celebrations was, "Creating a Legacy". One of the key aspects of my sermon was to remind my congregation that we are the legacy of God. I reminded them that treating nature with disrespect, especially through pollution of the earth, was a serious disregard of the legacy that has been bestowed upon us. I reminded them that we have an obligation to protect the legacy of God on earth, and that our obligations are from the ones who came before us, for the sake of those who will come after us. Let us heed the call of Saint Paul when he writes to the Corinthians in the first series of letters "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor 4:2).

Therefore, it becomes clear that the use of natural resources needs to be limited by our current needs as much as by the requirement for the future generations to be able to attain their own needs. The environment and the earth need to be preserved to meet those future needs in whatever form they become, because we must accept that needs are dynamic. Again, remember that when I talk about needs of future generations I do not limit that only to human generations. I am talking about generations of communities.

Peace be unto you.

Preaching ecological preservation in the time of degradation

When we visited Humboldt University in Berlin, I outlined the history of the Zion Christian Church. From there you might remember the rural origins of the Zion Christian Church. There were a number of difficulties affecting the preaching of a message of peace in the early days of the church. While the church would have been seeking to convert people to Christianity, the same people were experiencing the continued mass dispossession of their livelihoods. More and more rural black communities were being deprived of the land on which their living was exclusively reliant. Since their community included the natural environment, their sense of self was definitely offended by dispossession of such an aspect of their being. That was no doubt a removal of a big portion their Ubu. I believe that this breakdown in the relationship between people and their natural environment and destruction of that community with nature affected the relationship that the disposed people had with nature.

Peace be unto you.

On the other hand, economies of the world developed on the basis of exploitation of the natural environment. That by itself did not cause a challenge. However, the main problem arises when such exploitation seems to know no limits. It is quite ironic that people pride themselves as being able to learn more than any other creation on earth, but it is apparent that not enough was done to mitigate the detrimental effects of environmental exploitation when we became aware of the effects thereof. To exploit without limit destroys the environment. This in turn destroys the ability of all of us and others to become; in the full Ubuntu sense.

Peace be unto you.

When I spoke in Berlin of the historical development of the South African economy, I mentioned the intricate link that existed between politics, economics and religion. I also indicated that the spread of the gospel in South Africa was tainted by that link. The effect was that instead of countering prevailing and unfair policy outlooks and practices, religion joined economics and politics in perpetrating the unfairness. I also stated that, those factors are some of the reasons that we always need to state as a church that we are above politics.

We know that peace cannot be attained if there is no peaceful coexistence between people, and between people and nature. When we speak about peace, we include what have been called environmental and social justice. When we pray for peace, we are very much aware that human conflicts are borne of contestations for natural resources. Therefore, within the message of peace we preach for peaceful and responsible sharing and usage of natural resources.

Peace be unto you.

In the scriptures, the book of Hebrews 13:16 teaches us that doing good includes sharing with each other. It is sharing that pleases God. Our message of peace is linked with values of Ubuntu. When sharing is framed within the broad values of Ubuntu, we will be required to be fair and equitable as members of a community. That requires fairness in dealings between humans, and fairness in how nonhuman nature is treated.

Ecologically sustainable economies: The need for everyone to take a stance

The book of Numbers 35:33-34 teaches us that we must not pollute the land where we are. Even though we are the youngest of God's creations, we as humans have had the greatest impact on the natural

environment. Michael Williams states that for more than six thousand years many changes in the natural vegetation were a reflection of nature's adjustment to human disturbances. Originally, the disturbances were brought by increasing density and spread of populations, the use of fire, cultivation of certain plant species and the introduction of grazing animals.

These disturbances were proximate to where people lived. Since then, no part of the world has been left untouched. We have polluted the depth of oceans with micro-plastic. We are melting mountain and polar glaciers as a result of increased heat being trapped within the atmosphere. This reminds me of the book of Jeremiah 2:7 which reads "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable" (NIV). Ladies and gentlemen, we have a problem.

Peace be unto you.

Human activities, especially related to industrialization and the increasing consumption culture, are causing serious damage to the balance of life on a scale greater than any other recorded in history. Tarusarira states that "increasing global temperature, rising sea levels, acidifying oceans, and other climate change impacts are seriously affecting coastal areas and low-lying coastal countries". The poor are the most drastically affected by the impact of climate change. In the recent years we have witnessed extreme weather conditions, especially droughts and floods. It is really sad that the conversation has moved so much, that we can no longer talk about how nature ought to sustain us as human beings. Now we have to urgently take steps to conserve nature. When you look at the melting glaciers in the arctic, when every day you count fewer of indigenous species, we have a problem. When African white lions can no longer be spotted in the wild, this is not a sign of nature's vulnerability.

This is a sign of human destruction and unsurpassed greed. It is almost as if we answered the question in Ezekiel 34:18 in the affirmative. Therein the question is posed "Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?".

Peace be unto you.

The time for action has come. No one can sit behind and watch. We all have to take a stance. We encourage our governments to make and implement policies that encourage ecological sustainability. We can no longer rely on fossil fuels for our energy. It is sad that even in African countries, where there is plenty of sun and wind, our energy reliance is still primarily on fossil fuels. Businesses need to actively invest in technologies that are not detrimental to our ecology. Conversations on respecting nature need to take place in all aspects of our lives. Communities need to be encouraged to get involved and contribute in all manners that they can. I call upon all church leaders to keep the conversation alive. Let us preach to our congregations and remind them about the sacred nature of ecology.

When I spoke earlier about taking away people's livelihoods, it is something that I personally witness every day. In the rural areas, where I am based, the unpredictability of weather patterns has effectively wiped away subsistence agriculture. The drought that we are hardly recovering from has claimed so much of people's livelihoods, killing livestock and rendering fields infertile. It does not have to be like this. We can be redeemed. But our redemption is dependent on our ability to show that we can take care of what God has entrusted upon us. In the book of Leviticus 26:3-44, we are assured that the Lord shall return us to a peaceful coexistence. "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments

and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit".

Peace be unto you.

Conclusion

The New Year celebrations of the Zion Christian Church takes place in a time that was known as a marking of the beginning of the rainy season. It is through the seasons that God's creations remind us of the Majesty of the Lord. It is through the seasons that God talks to us as human beings and God's creations. When we alter seasons through detrimental impact on the biosphere, we are dismissing the messages of the Almighty.

Peace be unto you.

I encourage each and every one of you present here today to take a stance. Let us remember the basic principles of Ubuntu and the need to be respectful to others; and to nature.

May the Peace of the Lord be with you.

8. RESPONSE TO BISHOP LEKGANYANE

Coenie Burger

Thank you very much chairperson, honoured guests and colleagues for the opportunity to respond to Bishop Lekganyane's paper.[1] May I start by thanking Bishop Barnabas, for gracing our meeting with his presence and for the powerful message he presented to us. We know that he is a man of few words and therefore we appreciate his coming to our conference.

Can I also, friends, voice my appreciation for what he and his father and grandfather accomplished in little more than a hundred years, building a large and remarkable church that has played a constructive and a strong stabilizing role in our country. I have huge admiration, Bishop, for what you have done. It speaks of extraordinary leadership and character.

I listened to what you said, and I know a little bit about the central values and aims of your church and again I must commend you. Your clear commitment to peace, to respect for all peoples and all persons, your commitment to education and development and the economic upliftment of your people and your deep respect for nature are admirable. But above all of this, as a fellow believer, I appreciate your commitment to God and to Jesus Christ and to a solid, deep understanding that human

---

[1] Response to Bishop Dr B.E. Legkanyane's Keynote Address presented at the conference "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" at the University of Pretoria, 29 October 2019. First published in *The ZCC Messenger* 105, December 2019.

being are spiritual beings who long for a relationship with the living God.

Thank you for that. You have encouraged me today with what you said. We are having this conference, Bishop, as you said yourself on the eve of a new era in our history. We are still facing many of the old problems, but a couple new ones were added. Not least the ecological crisis that we are discussing this week.

I believe with you that the church's first responsibility is to Jesus and to the Gospel. But because of that—not in spite of that, but because of that! —we need to attend to these massive social challenges. We must do it because Jesus cared for people, for the land and for societies. We need to play our role as churches because these issues are too important to leave to politicians and business people. And in this respect Bishop, I believe, you have a crucial role to play—a leadership role.

I must share a story with you. I had a friend that some of you might know or know about, Dr Peter Berger. He was an academic, a sociologist, and a very knowledgeable and wise man. He invited me in 2000 to Boston where he taught to work on a project with them. During that time we had many conversations also about SA which he knew quite well, and cared about. He believed that the churches will have to play a vital role if we want SA to succeed because, he said, the churches could, through their common faith in Jesus, supply the cohesion that we otherwise do not have in the country. And he added more than once: If you want the new South Africa to work you will have to connect to the African-initiated churches and especially the Zion Christian Church. Because the ZCC members will be the foot soldiers of President Mandela's new South Africa. I believe this Bishop, now even more than 20 years ago. I want to conclude with a request Bishop to you.

I really believe that the churches can play a vital role in the way we deal with the difficult challenges facing our country in the next ten or twenty years: developing our people, eradicating poverty, caring better

for the earth, becoming a more just society. The churches can play a vital role. But our power will be in our unity, in our coming together. The missiologist Andrew Walls often spoke about the Ephesians moment when Christians from different cultures and different worlds come to together to discover anew what God can do, what the Gospel is really about. We need the ZCC and we need you bishop to play a leading role, not only in the ZCC but also with and through the ZCC in the wider Christian church and community. May God bless you and your church — and our country.

9. PERSPECTIVES OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS ON ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY: BOLOBEDU

Cosmo Mapitsa

In Bolobedu traditional structures play an important role in the daily lives of members of the community.[1] Every village is under the leadership of a traditional leader who is a local representative of the Queen. Traditional healers play the role of priests of traditional religion. However, the importance of these factors in daily lives of community members have been shifting with a number of factors. The primary data for this research was collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted with a total of eighteen participants, consisting of nine traditional leaders and nine traditional healers. The key informant sampling method was used, wherein participants were selected based on their role in traditional religion, through being a healer or a custodian of traditional systems as a traditional leader. The area in Bolobedu that was focused on is the part of the region which falls under the Greater Letaba Local Municipality, which encompasses the original and older Bolobedu villages. Data collection was limited by the availability of potential participants within the timeframes of the research fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted in the period between October 2020 and January 2021.

Ecological sustainability is viewed as intrinsically integrated with all aspects of Bolobedu life. Traditional leaders expressed that ecological

---

[1] Paper presented at the webinar "Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa", Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

sustainability was progressively being lost, as part of the general diminishing role of traditional values and lifestyles. Three main factors are highlighted as contributing to the erosion of traditional values, and with it the promotion of ecological sustainability. First, the loss of traditional values, which are symbolised and embodied within the concept of *Kheila* (which is a set of rules that forbid actions by certain persons, either in specific circumstances or generally). Secondly, governance issues, relating specifically to the vision of governing authority between traditional leadership structures and municipality structures make traditional leadership less relevant to people's daily needs. As a result, rules set by traditional leaders, such as rules aimed at reducing the cutting down of trees, over-hunting or destruction of wetlands, are not adhered to. Lastly, socio-economic factors, poverty and population growth make the policing of behaviour more difficult.

The concept of *Kheila* consists of rules of forbidding specific behaviours akin to the setting of taboos. These include not hunting or foraging in forests or part of forests that are held as sacred. Animals and fruits that are in those parts are both symbols of spirits of ancestors and considered a *home* and *food* of the ancestors. The *Kheila* comes in to ensure that individuals don't break these rules even when not seen, because if it is *Kheila* and you do it anyway, something bad will befall you. While discussing these practices specifically in their African Traditional Religious spirituality context, leaders who participated in the study also highlighted the role of these *reserves* in ensuring that ecosystems can be self-replenishing. *Kheila* also operated outside sacred forests. In a normal forest, and even in the village itself, it is forbidden to cut down a fruit tree or an old/big tree. Custom dictated that there was no hunting or cultivating after the very first rain of the rainy season. It is a possibility that these rules allowed for foraged plants and hunted animals to be replenished prior to being utilised by the community.

Traditional leaders generally held a view that gradually, and with increasing intensity as time went on, the role of traditional values have been diminishing in daily lives of people. Participants used the example of *Mefoko* as an example of disappearing practices. *Mefoko* is a rainmaking ritual that involved a group of people dispatched from the royal village to go around the whole Bolobedu area, and going house to house performing a ritual. This occurred at a similar time with other rituals that formed part of rainmaking ceremonies. While some participants indicated that they were not sure why these were no longer done, most participants pointed out that it has become impractical, as it cannot involve every household as it might be offensive to some members of the community.

Ordinarily, traditional leaders are the custodians of cultural practices and customs. However, the constitutional arrangement in South Africa are that legislative and executive authority of the local sphere of government rests with municipalities. These are run by elected representatives who represent local areas (wards). On the other hand, land (often the most valuable asset at local level) in rural areas such as Bolobedu cannot be individually owned, but is controlled by traditional councils on behalf of members of the community as a collective. Municipalities have to consult with traditional leaders, who have *ex officio* representation in local municipalities. These factors contribute towards dynamics that are seen by participants as contributing to the diminishing role of traditional leadership structures. Participants indicated that the actual constitutional arrangements were well suited to ensure best local government through cooperation, but lamented failures in implementation.

Lastly, factors that were indicated by participants as influencing the applicability of African Traditional Religious values in ecological sustainability can be categorised as socio-economic. In particular, participants pointed to the fact that practices that were conducive to

ecological sustainability worked best in Bolobedu traditional villages, which were spaced out households (akin to farms), with large spaces for cultivation and forests for foraging between villages. This could no longer be practical, according to participants, not least because of the significant population growth that has occurred. Another factor pointed out is that, while population density has meant that cultivation and foraging are no longer practical as means of maintaining livelihoods, there have been fewer replacement economic activities. Poverty, traditional leaders pointed out, meant that traditional rules forbidding the destruction of ecosystems by cutting down trees, mining sand and over-hunting could not be enforced as people did everything they can to have a livelihood.

In conclusion, traditional leaders that participated in the study expressed views that traditional values that encouraged ecological sustainability worked best in traditional settings, and the applicability of such values were becoming less in significance in the daily lives of Balobedu people, following the pattern of other traditional religious values and practices. However, they pointed out that there is room to ensure the applicability of such values, and lessons can be learnt that are more widely applicable. This required approaches that dealt with a number of social factors, including the management of poverty, ensuring actual participation of traditional religion representatives in local government and encouraging the learning of ATR values even for people who were not necessarily adherents of traditional religion.

10. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY: A BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE

Tahirih Matthee

Overview

The teaching of unity in the Bahá'í Faith is its hallmark feature and it constitutes the paradigm in which the global Bahá'í community is guided by its Holy Writings to respond to all societal issues, and in this instance, ecological sustainability.[1] The vision of the Bahá'í Faith is world embracing and it is focussed on contributing to an ever-advancing civilization. Given the reality of the interconnectedness of all things on the planet, particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a heightened consciousness has emerged that all human actions impact on all other life on our earthly home. Therefore, it is an imperative to live in balance with nature for sustainable co-existence.

In this paper, ecological sustainability is presented within a unity paradigm, presenting foundational concepts such as creation and beauty and the oneness of humanity. In this conceptual framework of unity, principles such as the harmony of science and religion, stewardship of the earth, the worth of diversity, kindness to all beings, responsible uses of

---

[1] This paper was prepared based on a presentation at the webinar "Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa", Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020. The panellists were asked to respond to the question: How can religious actors become active for ecological sustainability in their contexts?

science, moderation in all things, and the alleviation of poverty form the basis of caring for the environment and responding appropriately and with urgency to the ecological challenges of our time. In pragmatic responses underpinned by spiritual principles, Bahá'í communities across the world focus on community building activities and localised action in addressing the current environmental crises, which not only strengthen collaboration and resilience but also give hope. The mode of operation within the Bahá'í community is consultation, planning, action and reflection, which encourages continuous learning not only within the Bahá'í community but also in collaboration with all protagonists and promoters of this paradigm in addressing the environmental challenges confronting humanity. In brief, the Bahá'í community is urged to carry out its stewardship role of the environment espoused in its teachings and to exemplify such practices as individuals, families and communities across the globe. At this time, the global Bahá'í community is in a process of learning with itself and in collaboration with others to accomplish this imperative in non-adversarial ways.

The Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, namely, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi each paid attention to environmental issues during their lifetime. One environmental response is mentioned from each of their lives, and to this day serves as inspiration and encouragement to emulate. When Bahá'u'lláh lived in the prison city of Akká, he was instrumental in influencing the governors of the city to restore an aqueduct which had fallen into disrepair for a number of years, so that water could flow to this city again. During that period, it was considered a major environmental achievement in light of the sanitation needs of the people and it was actually celebrated by the officials with 100 cannon shots being fired off. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, anticipating the conflict, which would lead to World War I, worked with villagers in three areas and grew large amounts of wheat and corn, which were stored until the

time it was required toward the end of the war during the great famine from 1914-1918. For this insightful service ‘Abdu’l-Bahá received the title of Knight of the British Empire (KBE), yet he never used it. As a young man, Shoghi Effendi retreated to the mountains in Switzerland after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to regain his health and energy in carrying out his responsibilities as the appointed Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith; and also laboured tirelessly in the construction and beautification of the gardens around the Shrine of the Báb, in Haifa, a heavenly solace for our souls and a gift for all humanity, continually receiving accolades of appreciation from all around the world.

The Bahá’í community strives to honour in word and deed the exhortations in the Bahá’í writings calling us to our stewardship obligation to nature. The teachings of the Bahá’í Faith clearly indicate that it has the responsibility to educate its adherents about the teachings of stewardship and caring for the environment; and to exemplify actions that demonstrate that we appreciate all that God has created by exemplifying right living with nature. With regard to the discourse on ecological sustainability and its related social action, the Bahá’í community continues to strive with others to be a part of the solution for ecological sustainability.

A unity-based paradigm for ecological sustainability

The Bahá’í belief is that our true nature is spiritual, and it also recognizes our material needs as we live in a physical realm, our common earthly home with other life forms. At the core of our spiritual identity, is the fundamental belief in the oneness of God, the oneness of religion and the oneness of humanity as the central spiritual teachings of the Bahá’í Faith, which form the overarching unity framework for all discourses and social action. Embedded in this unity based paradigm in responding to the

question on how religious actors can become active for ecological sustainability in their contexts, are concepts and principles such as creation and the attributes of God; creation and God's beauty; the unity of humanity; and environmental stewardship, each regarded as essential, and particularly so in a time of ecological crisis, in striving to bring about effective action to address ecological challenges such as global warming and climate change with the resultant life threatening disasters as witnessed in, for example, increased flooding and raging fires in different regions across the globe; the destruction of marine life not only through over fishing but also through plastic and other chemical forms of pollution; and toxic air pollution in several major cities around the world to mention a few. All of this environmental degradation can stop with the application of a unity-based paradigm in realising the common good.

Creation and God's beauty

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, states that "every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge…".[2] A further explanation to this statement reveals that the reality of God is beyond the understanding of any mortal mind, whilst in every created thing we may find expressions of his attributes. The Bahá'í view of religion is that over many centuries God has sent a number of Divine Educators, known as Manifestations of God, each One revered and respected in the Bahá'í writings, to guide and educate humanity, with the potential of awakening capacities which contribute to an ever-advancing civilisation, which includes a wholesome relationship with the environment.

---

[2] Bahá'í Community, n.d. "God and His Creation". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/, accessed 7 September 2023.

God is the all-powerful creator of the universe and all its creatures. Every creature has been given one of the attributes of God, hence we see the signs of God in all that he created. Similarly, God has given his attributes to humans, who he has commanded to be the custodians of the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh affirms us as the recipients of God's knowledge:

> "From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favour and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation."[3]

Our noble station as recipients of God's mercy and grace is also emphasised by Bahá'u'lláh as follows:

> "All praise to the unity of God, and all honour to Him, the Sovereign Lord, the Incomparable and All-Glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, has created the reality of all things, Who, from naught, has brought into being the most refined and subtle elements of His creation, and Who, rescuing His creatures from the abasement of remoteness and the pearls of ultimate extinction, has received them into His kingdom of incorruptible glory. Nothing short of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness

[3] Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah," CXXIV, translated by Shoghi Effendi. www.bahai.org/r/384219536, accessed 7 September 2023.

> to have acquired by itself the worthiness and capacity to emerge from its state of non-existence into the realm of being?"[4]

Humanity has been endowed with a unique capacity to know and love God. Underlying this distinctive capacity is the responsibility to care for God's creation as conveyed in the Bahá'í writings as follows:

> "Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation…Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing, He has shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He has focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone, of all created things, man has been singled out for so great a favour, so enduring a bounty."[5]

All of God's beauty is manifest in all of creation.

The principle of the oneness of humanity

The oneness of humankind, a fundamental teaching of the Bahá'í is a profound principle for the advancement of humanity, as it guards against all forms of prejudice and division, calling for "a wider loyalty, for a

---

[4] Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh," XXVII, translated by Shoghi Effendi. www.bahai.org/r/859083361, accessed 7 September 2023.
[5] Baha'u'llah, "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh," XXVII, translated by Shoghi Effendi. www.bahai.org/r/859083361, accessed 7 September 2023.

larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race". Succinctly, Bahá'u'lláh states that "the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens".[6] Bahá'ís across the world believe that acceptance of this principle by the majority of the peoples of the world is a precondition for the unity of thought and global cooperation required for the advancement of environmental stewardship.

In unpacking the significance of this principle for global affairs, Shoghi Effendi, the appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith emphasised that

> "The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men . . . Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. . . It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."[7]

Bahá'ís are of the view that this organic change in the structure of society in which the principle of unity is manifested is required to address the current environmental challenges. In embracing this principle it also highlights the recognition that the resources of the earth are the common heritage of all its peoples. For this very reason there has to be just and

---

[6] Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh," 87, 127–128, 167. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/tablets-bahaullah/.

[7] Shoghi Effendi, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh," 42. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/world-order-bahaullah/.

equitable access to all the earth's resources. Nothing short of a unified global response is required in a commitment to honouring humanity's stewardship of the earth and its collective well-being.

Actions are manifest after thoughts. The Bahá'í writings proclaim that "unity of thought in world undertakings" is an essential requirement of this age.[8] The transnational problems we experience can only be solved through conscious, united, global determination. Environmental problems clearly provide a crucial example of the compulsion to achieve global unity in solving environmental problems. It is well noted that environmental threats traverse the global terrain, paying no attention to political borders. Similarly, the nations of the world have to adopt such a strategy for ecological sustainability. No nation can solve environmental challenges on its own. In this regard the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith thus refers to the pressing need in this time for "global cooperation of the family of nations in devising and adopting measures designed to preserve the ecological balance".[9]

Guiding principles for humanity's relationship with the natural world

"Nature," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "is God's Will and is its expression in

---

[8] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," 32. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/1#324741256.

[9] The Universal House of Justice, "Conservation of the Earth's Resources." Quoted in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Compilation of Compilations, Volume 1 (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), 85.

and through the contingent world".[10] It is the embodiment of God's name, "the Creator." A number of principles in the Bahá'í writings relate either directly or indirectly to our relationship with the natural world. These include:

Humans are the stewards of the earth: God has given all of His attributes to humans and has commanded us to be the custodians of the earth. This is a vital principle underpinning Bahá'í conduct towards the environment. Bahá'u'lláh reinforces this teaching by stating, "there is no glory for him that committeth disorder on the earth after it hath been made so good".[11] 'Abdu'l-Bahá has lovingly repeated this teaching emphasising that the earth should be tended with "the care of a skilful gardener".[12]

This principle of stewardship is also associated with the understanding that the physical universe is a matrix for the refinement and the development of the human soul, and likened to the womb of the mother being the matrix for the child's initial physical development.[13] In this regard, Bahá'u'lláh states that God has "ordained for thy training

---

[10] Bahá'í Community, n. d. "Nature". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/nature/.

[11] Bahá'u'lláh, "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf," 24, translated by Shoghi Effendi. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/epistle-son-wolf/1#804716281.

[12] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," 290. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/1#324741256.

[13] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," 170–171, 177, 185. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/1#324741256.

every atom in existence and the essence of all created things".[14] An aspect of training, therefore, is learning stewardship of the earth. Thus, in this light, the Bahá'í teachings associate stewardship of the earth with one of the purposes of human life—namely, spiritual training and development.

Sustaining human civilisation requires material resources, therefore 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that humanity will be "constantly taking out of nature's laboratory new and wonderful things".[15] It will become necessary for humanity to learn how best to utilise the earth's raw materials in order to advance civilization, whilst becoming conscious of our attitudes towards the source of our sustenance and wealth. It should be noted that the Bahá'í teachings do not call us to worship nature. It views the natural world as a divine trust for which all members of the human family—as the stewards of the planet's vast resources —are responsible.

In aligning the spiritual and material dimensions of our being, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith states that "we need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped if human salvation is to be secured".[16]

The worth of diversity: An important aspect of stewardship is the recognition given to diversity, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá states is "the essence of perfection and contributes to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of

---

[14] Bahá'u'lláh, "The Hidden Words," 32, translated by Shoghi Effendi with the assistance of some English friends. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/hidden-words/1#623891128.

[15] Bahá'í Community, n.d. "Nature". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/nature/.

[16] Bahá'í Community, n.d. "Nature". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/nature/.

the whole".[17] This clearly points to the responsibility to preserve genetic and biotic diversity, an issue of great concern in current environmental discussions.

All beings to be treated with kindness: Closely associated with the principle of stewardship of the earth is kindness to all beings. This means that it is not only fellow human beings that must be treated with mercy and compassion but loving kindness must be shown to all living creatures.

Religion and science in harmony: The Bahá'í Faith states that science and religion by their very nature are in agreement and in reality reveal harmonising aspects of one truth. Religion is the promoter of truth and as such should not oppose scientific knowledge. However, religion without science takes on the characteristics of superstition and science without religion depicts materialism. Whilst scientific pursuit is encouraged, the Bahá'í writings proclaim that its application should be morally guided.

Moderation in all things: There is a caution in the Bahá'í writings to heed moderation in all human activity. Moderation has a bearing on every aspect of humanity's relation to and impact on the natural world. This principle of moderation should be the standard that guides our patterns of consumption, waste and accumulation of material possessions. A simplistic lifestyle and treading lightly on the earth are options and considerations for each individual, family and community in contributing to reducing consumption, waste and the accumulation of goods.

Alleviation of Poverty: Huge segments of the world's peoples live in poverty lacking the means to sustain themselves, often with resultant degradation of the environment such as in deforestation, desertification and air pollution in large areas of the planet. Hence, environmental

---

[17] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," 291. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/1#324741256.

degradation is closely linked to human social and economic conditions. Both, poverty and excessive wealth exert a negative impact on the environment. The Bahá'í community is encouraged to focus on poverty alleviation as one of the practical mechanisms for the betterment of society and the environment. Education is a significant aspect of its response to alleviating poverty.

These selected principles above provide a guide to the Bahá'í community in its collective response to living in a stewardship relationship with the environment.

A community-based response to the ecological challenges

The approach that the international Bahá'í community has adopted in learning about the environment and addressing ecological challenges is to focus on community building activities, which include children's classes, junior youth groups, institute courses, and devotional gatherings. All of these activities are open to all people in a spirit of collaboration. Learning and carrying out acts of service with others are the central aspects of these community building activities.

It is in this spirit of learning that the children acquire knowledge of our stewardship role towards the environment in their children's classes and are provided with opportunities to serve in this capacity. As young members of society they are helped to make choices that are good for ecological sustainability. Similarly, for the junior youth, ages twelve to fifteen, they learn about their innate capacities which enable them to contribute to the betterment of the world. Often these junior youth identify the ecological needs in their local communities and create service projects which present opportunities for groups of people to work collaboratively on such issues. Junior youth groups and their animators who are senior youth facilitating the learning material, for example, in some instances are

the initiators in cleaning up littered streets, canals, riverbeds and creating community gardens. Not only are service projects focussed on the environment likely to emerge when consulting in the children's classes and junior youth groups, but these classes also present opportunities to exemplify eco-friendly ways of conducting these activities. Serving healthy snacks and educating the children about good farming and healthy diets; using water sparingly given water shortages in many parts of the world due to the impact of global warming; and eliminating the use of plastic given the crisis particularly for marine life, all practical steps in educating about a range of ecological challenges confronting humanity at this time.

Similarly, in the institute courses which are facilitated by tutors in study circles the questions posed in the exercises of these courses provide the opportunity for the participants to learn about God and our stewardship role; in addition, each participant's reflection on the learning in these courses may increase acts of service that inspire each one to respond positively for the environment as individuals in their homes, streets, work places and other spaces. This is a bottom-up organic approach in learning with others about our role as custodians of the environment and to work in a unity-paradigm across the planet in our choices of social action.

Prayer and meditation is a significant component of nourishing our souls, hence devotional gatherings in many spaces, be these homes, the shade of a tree, community centres, Bahá'í centres and Houses of Worship, and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic devotional gatherings in cyberspace platforms such as Zoom and Teams, form a significant part of the Bahá'í community serving our spiritual needs. And again, in these sacred spaces opportunities are provided to become educated about our stewardship role towards the environment through the reading of sacred texts which draw attention to these exhortations to

act as custodians of the Earth.

Typically community building activities such as children's classes, junior youth groups, institute courses facilitated in study circles and devotional gatherings serve as inclusive learning spaces for spiritual enrichment and they provide opportunities to learn about God's love for us and all of creation and to adopt a way of life that helps us to live by the principle that appreciates the unity of the human family and align our lives to ecological sustainability. These community building activities could be viewed as walking the spiritual path with practical feet and spurring communities into action in responses to prayer and action.

In other efforts to address the issue of the importance of ecological sustainability, the International Environmental Forum (IEF), a Bahá'í-inspired professional organization for environment and sustainability, shares and upholds the principles and ideals of the Bahá'í Faith and supports its efforts to establish and promote peace, the unity of the human race, and an ever-advancing world civilization that preserves the ecological balance of the plane.[18] The IEF was founded in 1997 with more than 400 members in over 70 countries on five continents. The forum is accredited by the United Nations in the science and technology major group, collaborating with the International Science Council (ISC) and participating in international conferences on sustainability (World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg 2002; Rio+20 2012) and on climate change (COP15 Copenhagen 2009; COP21 Paris 2015).

[18] International Environment Forum, n.d. "About IEF". https://www.iefworld.org/aboutief.htm.

In describing its membership base and focus on behavioural change the IEF states

> "The IEF is largely composed of scientists, academics, experts and educators working in relevant fields. What then does it mean to be Bahá'í-inspired? The IEF draws on the ethical and spiritual principles of the world's religions, in particular the Bahá'í Faith, as a complement to scientific knowledge in addressing the challenges of environmental management and sustainable development. A scientific understanding, by itself, is usually not sufficient to change human behaviour. Motivating change, either in individual lifestyles and consumption patterns, or collectively in communities, enterprises and government, requires a commitment to moral principles or values and some vision of social improvement that science, by itself, does not provide. It is this interface between ethics and science that the IEF addresses."[19]

In South Africa, the Bahá'í community over many years has worked closely with a number of interfaith structures, including the South African Faith Communities Environmental Institute on a range of environmental issues. In the spirit of collaboration, and where possible Bahá'ís are joining hands with others in paying attention to and actively addressing the environmental issues confronting humanity.

Lastly, it would be apt to mention that although not a Law of the Bahá'í Faith a plant-based diet is encouraged as a lifestyle conducive to good health. Given the serious global warming threats confronting humanity and the impact of animal farming in its association with methane gases for example, it would be wise to adopt a plant-based diet

---

[19] International Environment Forum, n.d. "International Environment Forum". https://www.iefworld.org/brochure.html.

with its focus on berries, pulses, fruit, vegetables and nuts. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly awakened this insight in the generality of the peoples of the world to give serious consideration to enacting this option.

Conclusion

In summarising the approach to the question on how religious actors can become active for ecological sustainability in their contexts, the Bahá'í writings present a unity paradigm in its overarching response. All that we need God has provided for us in nature. In short, our collective responsibility is to live in harmony with nature for ecological sustainability.

From the Bahá'í writings is clear that we do not worship nature but the exhortations regarding our stewardship role towards nature elevates our relationship to one of custodian of the environment. The Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith exemplified in their own actions the importance of ecological sustainability, thus encouraging a pattern of life which manifests the principles and guidelines associated with stewardship.

The current ecological crisis confronting humanity can only be solved with a united response from all the nations to save both people and planet. In the Bahá'í Faith, the global establishment of community building activities such as children's classes, junior youth groups, study circles in the institute courses and devotional gatherings all present opportunities to learn about the stewardship role towards nature and to carry out acts of service, some of which will include initiatives addressing ecological sustainability.

In addition, the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith continue to guide the Bahá'ís to address the requirements of the age and as such have provided communications calling for an urgent response to climate change more

than a decade ago. Certainly, one of the roles of faith communities is to educate their followers, to take the science on environmental issues seriously, and to implement practices aligned to stewardship of the environment. Our interconnectedness compels us to live in harmony with nature, as stated below:

> "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."[20]

There has to be a commitment to moral principles or values associated with social improvement for lifestyle changes to occur with regard to consumption patterns that destroy our environment. As a faith community, the Bahá'ís are endeavouring to play a positive role in behavioural change for ecological sustainability.

Bibliography

'Abdu'l-Bahá. "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá." https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/1#324741256.

Bahá'u'lláh. "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf." Translated by Shoghi Effendi. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/epistle-son-wolf/1#804716281.

---

[20] Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, "Conservation of the Earth's Resources", Compilation of Compilations, Volume 1 (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), 84.

Baha'u'llah. "Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah." Translated by Shoghi Effendi. www.bahai.org/r/384219536.

Bahá'u'lláh. "The Hidden Words." Translated by Shoghi Effendi with the assistance of some English friends. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/hidden-words/1#623891128.

Bahá'u'lláh. "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh." https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/tablets-bahaullah/.

Bahá'í Community. n.d. "God and His Creation". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/.

Bahá'í Community. n. d. "Nature". https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/nature/.

International Environment Forum. n.d. "About IEF". https://www.iefworld.org/aboutief.htm.

International Environment Forum. n.d. "International Environment Forum". https://www.iefworld.org/brochure.htm.

Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. "Conservation of the Earth's Resources". *Compilation of Compilations* 1. (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991).

Shoghi Effendi. The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/world-order-bahaullah/.

11. ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES ON THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PRESERVATION OF WATER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Muhammad Ridwaan Gallant

Introduction

Water is a gift from Allāh (TA) to all living organisms on planet earth. We must use our water resources sustainably so that the future generations can benefit from it. This chapter will deal with the importance and significance of water and the way we must preserve it in terms of sustainable development and how it is reflected in the Islamic sources and how we can deal with it taking Islamic principles into consideration.

The importance of water in the Qur'ān

Allāh speaks about the importance of water in the Qur'ān. Allāh (TA) says: "And We send down water from the sky (rain) in (due) measure, and We give it lodging in the earth, and verily, We are Able to take it away".[1] Allāh (TA) mentions His innumerable blessings to His servants, whereby He sends down rain in due measure, meaning, according to what is needed, not so much that it damages the lands and buildings, and not so little to be insufficient for crops and fruits, but whatever is needed for

[1] Qur'ān, 23:18.

irrigation, drinking and other purposes. Allāh (TA) causes the water to settle in the earth and also causes the earth to absorb the water. The seeds in the earth are then nourished by it. In the same verse Allāh (TA) says that He can cause the rain not to come down on a specific place or Allāh (TA) can divert the rain to the wilderness and wastelands. Allāh (TA) can also make the water salty so that humankind will not be able to use it for drinking or irrigation purpose. Allāh (TA) can also cause the rain not to be absorbed by the earth or the water can sink so deep into the earth that humankind will not be able to reach it. Through the grace and mercy of Allāh (TA) He causes the water to be sweet and fresh, it settles into the earth and it causes rivers and lakes and humankind use it for drinking and cleansing purposes and they irrigate their crops and fruits and they give water to their cattle to benefit from it. Therefore, humankind should show their gratitude towards their Creator.

Water as the source of life

The origin of every living thing on earth is in water. Allah (TA) says: "And We have made from water every living thing"[2] Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) said: "Everything was created from water".[3]

Allāh sends the water as sustenance to his creation. Subsequently man and beast will benefit from the vegetation like the staple food wheat, barley, corn and rice, as well as the different kinds of fruit and vegetables, as well as the different kinds of trees and plants as stated in the Qur'ān: "It is He Who sends down water from the sky; and with it We produce

[2] Qur'ān, 21:30.

[3] Ibn Hanbal, Ḥadīth no. 9996. Imām Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥanbal, *Musnad Imām Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal* (Riyadh: Darussalaam Publishers, 2012).

vegetation of all kinds".[4] The precipitation is a blessing and provision for the servants of Allāh, it is a relief and means of survival for His creatures and it is a mercy for His creation.

It is a matter of fact that life on earth will not be possible without the presence of water. Humankind only realizes the value of water when there is a shortage. The Qu'rān describes how water resuscitates the earth. "And Allāh sends down water from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death".[5] Without the rain the earth is lifeless. When the rain comes the earth becomes alive. Plants start to grow, flowers begin to bloom, humankind and animals can quench their thirst and it is a benefit for the plants. A whole life cycle starts to bloom.

Humankind does not appreciate the preciousness and the benefits of water. If the water would have been salty, sour, bitter it would have been unfit for drinking purposes as well as for the growing of plants. The Dead Sea in the Middle East is a good example where no plant or animal life is possible due its high salt content. Allāh says in the Qur'ān: "See you the water which you drink? Do you bring it down (in rain) from the clouds or do We? If We willed, We verily could make it saltish. Then why do you not give thanks (to *Allāh*)?"[6]

Allāh (TA) sends the winds before the rain which is clean for consumption and cleaning purposes. The rain revives the dead land and enables the vegetation to grow and therefore both humankind and the animals benefit from it. The relief that rain brings is a reminder for humankind to remember their Creator. Allāh says in the Qur'ān

> "And it is He Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His Mercy (rain), and We send down pure water from

[4] Qur'ān, 6:99.

[5] Qur'ān, 16:65.

[6] Qur'ān, 56:68–70.

> the sky, That We may give life thereby to a dead land, and We give to drink thereof many of the cattle and men that We had created. And indeed We have distributed it (rain or water) amongst them in order that they may remember (the Grace of Allāh), but most men (refuse to accept the Truth or Faith and) accept nothing but disbelief or ingratitude."[7]

Every living species on the earth must have a right to water. The Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) declared: "Three things cannot be denied to anyone: water, pasture and fire".[8] The water refers to running water like a river or spring. If a person builds a pond or digs water for a well or install a pump then he must share the water with those who cannot afford these facilities then, although he/she has the first right to use these facilities. In Islām it is not permissible to withhold excess water where there are others who have need of it. The Prophet (SAW) declared: "Excess water should not be withheld so that the growth of herbage may be hindered"[9]. The fields and gardens which are nearest to the flowing water have the first rights to the water, but the owners of those nearby fields are not allowed to stop the water flowing to the adjacent fields and gardens. If water is withheld, then it will hinder the growth of herbage which is important for the fodder of animals. Excess water should also not be withheld from usage by animals.

---

[7] Qur'ān, 25:48–50.

[8] Ibn Mājah, Ḥadīth no. 2473: Imām Muḥammad bin Yazīd Ibn Mājah Al-Qazwinī. *Sunan Ibn Mājah,* vol. 3 (Riyadh: Maktaba Darussalaam, 2007), 415.

[9] Muslim, no. 1566: Imām Abul Ḥussain Muslim bin al-Ḥajjaj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3A (Beirut: Dar El Fikr, 1993), 38.

Islamic guidelines on the use of water

In the life of a Muslim, water also has a socio-religious function in that it is used for ritual purification. In preparation for your daily prayers you perform wudu. Allāh says in the Qur'ān: "O you who believe! When you intend to offer *As-Salât* (the prayer), wash your faces and your hands (forearms) up to the elbows, rub (by passing wet hands over) your heads, and (wash) your feet up to ankles".[10] The verse also further says: "If you are in a state of *Janâba* (i.e., after a sexual discharge), purify yourself (bathe your whole body)".[11]

Extravagance in using water is forbidden; this applies to private use as well as public, and whether the water is scarce or abundant. The Prophet (SAW) emphasized the proper use of water without wasting it. The Prophet (SAW) taught humankind how to use water sustainably. When the Prophet (SAW) saw Sa'd performing wudu (ablution) he said: "What is this? You are wasting water." Sa'd replied: "Can there be wastefulness while performing ablution?" The Prophet (SAW) replied: "Yes even if you perform it in a flowing river"[12].

In addition to encouraging water conservation, the Prophet (SAW) himself set the example; for instance it is narrated by Anas: "The Prophet (SAW) used to take a bath with one Sa'a or up to five mudds of water (2.6 litres) and used to take ablution with one Mudd (0.66 litres) of water"[13]. Imam Al-Ghazzali said that if one were to have a bath one should not keep pouring water continuously, but should restrict oneself to

---

[10] Qur'ān, 5:6.

[11] Qur'ān, 5:6.

[12] Ibn Mājah, Ḥadīth no. 425: Imām Muḥammad bin Yazīd Ibn Mājah Al-Qazwinī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Maktaba Darussalaam, 2007).

[13] Al Bukhārī, Ḥadīth no. 201. Imām Muḥammad bin Isma'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Darul Kutb, 1986), 135.

the amount needed.[14]

Wise use of our natural resources, keeping in mind the preservation of the common good, is thus a key principle of natural resource management in Islām. Humankind is accountable for the use of all resources, including water. By misusing water, a vital resource, through pollution or misuse, we are in fact tampering with its function as the source of life, leading to disease, sickness or even death of life itself.

Water was generally regarded as common property, to be shared, allocated and managed for the collective benefit of all. This was put into practice by such great leaders as Sayyedinaa Uthmaan (RA) the third Khaliph, who established a precedent by purchasing a well and making it freely available for public use.[15] Water is most often regarded as public (rivers, springs and wells). However, where a private landowner invests labour into digging a well on his/her property, the rights to that water rests with the landowner. However, a number of conditions still govern this private use, for example in times of stress, water should be shared. There is thus strong disapproval of practices where water is controlled for individual benefit, thereby causing hardship and shortages for others. Water is thus regarded as a public concern and practices that result in pollution, wastage and misuse of water is not permitted.

Conclusion

If humankind wants to benefit from the water resources on planet earth, then we must implement sustainable development in terms of

[14] Al-Ghazzāli: Imām Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭūsiyy al-Ghazzāli, *Ihya Ulum Id Din*, vol. 1 (Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1995), 139.

[15] National Awqaf Foundation of South Africa, "The Caliph Uthman Bin Affan (R.A) and the Well." https://awqafsa.org.za/the-caliph-uthman-bin-affan-r-a-and-the-well/, 17 August 2020.

sharing and preservation of our water resources. We can learn from the Islamic principles the methodology how to achieve it.

Bibliography

Al Bukhārī. Imām Muḥammad bin Isma'īl. *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī.* Beirut: Darul Kutb, 1986.

Al-Ghazzāli. Imām Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭūsiyy al-Ghazzāli. *Ihya Ulum Id Din*. Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1995.

Ibn Hanbal. Imām Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥanbal. *Musnad Imām Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal*. Riyadh: Darussalaam Publishers, 2012.

Ibn Mājah. Imām Muḥammad bin Yazīd Ibn Mājah Al-Qazwinī. *Sunan Ibn Mājah*. Riyadh: Maktaba Darussalaam, 2007.

Muslim. Imām Abul Ḥussain Muslim bin al-Ḥajjaj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirūt: Dar El Fikr, 1993.

National Awqaf Foundation of South Africa. "The Caliph Uthman Bin Affan (R.A) and the Well." 17 August 2020. https://awqafsa.org.za/the-caliph-uthman-bin-affan-r-a-and-the-well. Accessed October 2020.

Khan Muḥammad Muhsin, and Al Hilālī Muḥammad Taqi-ud-Din. *The Noble Qur'ān in the English Language.* Madīnah: King Fahd Printing Press, 2010.

ECOLOGICAL BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND BEYOND

12. THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES: WORKING TOWARDS ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION, FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

John Njeru Gichimu

The Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) is an Association of African Independent Churches founded in 1978 in Cairo.[1] The OAIC serves its member churches through the Program for Theology and Ministerial Formation, the Livelihoods Program, the Just Communities Program and the Community Health Program.

The Program for Theology and Ministerial formation is in place to reach out to the thousands of ministers in the member churches with appropriate theological education. Through the Just Communities Program the OAIC is involved in the mobilization and organization for Social Accountability, aimed at enabling churches to play a role in enhancing the civic competencies of the citizenry. The Community Health Program works to empower congregations in the rural settings and informal settlements of urban centres to provide leadership on responding to health issues in communities. Finally, through the Livelihoods Program, the OAIC is involved in the rural settings, currently implementing a food security project aimed at reaching 400,000 households and over 1,000 congregations and farmers' organizations in

[1] Paper presented at the conference "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

East Africa. The program will also have a wider outreach to other regions of Africa. The process focuses on improving agricultural production at household levels. The church congregation is at the center of implementation of the program. The Process involves community mobilization and organization for improved production (with sustainability at the center), nutritional outcomes, improved household incomes, post-harvest management, collective marketing and influencing public policy.

Background of livelihoods and food security

The mantra of the Organization of African Instituted Churches strategic plan "visions for better world, abundant life for all in community" entails that as followers of Jesus Christ we are called to respond firmly to poverty, poor health, and the breakdown of African cultural and social systems. Jesus' own first public utterance "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore He has sent me to bring good tidings to the poor …" (Luke 4: 18-19) invites us to take such action. Again, in the parable of the last judgement we are told that we will be judged according to how we responded to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the stranger amongst us (Matthew 25: 31).

The OAIC has a long experience of working with rural church congregations of member churches and farmers' organizations at community level. It has the capacity to reach the small-holder famers to enable them to increase their production hence better access to adequate food and enhanced financial incomes. The Livelihoods Program originally begun with providing capacity on HIV/AIDS, by strengthening the ability of congregations and community-based organizations in the provision of care and support services for those infected or affected by the scourge. Currently, the Livelihood Program's scope covers a wide

range of agro-activities such as food production, livestock rearing, bee keeping and fish farming.

Ecology

African agriculture relies heavily on ecosystem resources, making these resources critical assets to the survival of agricultural communities. It is important that global agreements and their implementation mechanisms set up in response to climate change recognize this sensitivity of African agriculture to negative climate events. On the other hand, African farmers have a duty of care for the environment and in particular to mitigate the factors that lead to these negative climate events. Abuse of ecosystem resources through inappropriate crop and animal husbandry and other practices as the clearing of tree cover and reclaiming wetlands can lead to serious land degradation. Declining yields in turn leads to new cycles of abuse of ecosystem. To strengthen farming, the organization works to enable member churches and community-based organizations to promote farming methods that are eco-friendly.

This is done by integrating farming with planet husbandry practices. In particular, emphasis is placed on the following aspects. Firstly, farmers' knowledge and practice of using farming activities to take good care of natural resources and the planet, including soil conservation, increased on farm tree cover and water conservation. Secondly, a clear understanding by smallholder farmers of the sustainable use of natural resources and the wellbeing of current and future generations. Thirdly, model farms and farmer organizations should specifically set out to achieve the goal of securing food and nutrition while aiding natural resource and environment regeneration.

Farmers' resource persons: voices and experiences

OAIC builds the capacity of national farmers' resource persons, who are trained as experts and key multipliers of knowledge. They are drawn from congregations of member churches and community farmer organizations. Through a multiplier effect, they train other farmers' resource persons and form a national team of farmers' resource persons. The team trains lead farmers and lead farmer in turn train agricultural households from the congregations and the community. Farmers' resource persons, lead farmers and households jointly model farms for demonstration during training.

Examples from Uganda

In order to mitigate levels of environment degradation and associated adverse effects on climate change for rain-fed agriculture, the farmers' resource persons work with farmers on the following:

— Empowering and building the capacity of farmers on plants which can fix nitrogen in soils.

— Agroforestry by planting trees which can encourage bee keeping, for cross pollination especially OPVs open pollinated varieties.

— Emphasis on use of green manure.

— Plants which fix nitrogen in soils and also act as fodder for animals.

— Encouraging farmers to practice soil and water conservation on their lands in order to avoid soil erosion.

— Planting long term fruit trees, which produce fruits for income generating and conservation of the environment.

Examples from Tanzania

When the climate is unstable it affects the growing of crops and the rearing of livestock, thus resulting to food insecurity. The OAIC program in Tanzania seeks to train farmers on ways of managing climate change. This includes the education of communities on effects of climate change. Moreover, farmers are for instance trained to practice agroforestry and to preserve natural and planted forest as well as on measures needed to minimize climate change.

Examples from Kenya

The work of the Farmers Resource Center in Gambogi Vihiga operates based on the recognition that ecological transformation is a tremendous opportunity to reinvent farming in line with principles of social justice and care for the environment. Solidarity and earth-friendly activities must be developed to jumpstart and sustain this transition, which a necessary step forward. Humanity must restore balance between human activities and caring the creation. Food security is primarily associated with to socioeconomic and as well as environmental conditions of ecosystem. Therefore, for instance, farmers are discouraged from burning charcoal that results in decimating the population of trees in the area. Farmers are encouraged to apply conservation farming principles such as early planting, minimum tillage, soil cover after planting, crop rotation, digging small holes before planting filled with a mixture of compost manure and ash before planting seeds, preparing compost manure of green leaves and dry residues after harvest. Specific advice is provided in

accordance with specific plants. When for example planting fruit trees to prepare recommended holes depending on the type of the tree (e.g., a Mango tree one should have a hole of 1 meter x 1 meter and space of 5 meters from one tree to the other).

Agroforestry plays a crucial role in sustainable livelihood activities implemented by the OAIC. Farmers are encouraged to sign a commitment form of agreement to promise how many trees they will plant every season. They are advised to have their own small tree nurseries in order to cut the cost of buying tree seedlings. Trees can serve as boundaries, to be used as fences when necessary. They can be grown around the homesteads as wind breakers and for shade use. Specific trees can serve to protect against soil erosion in river banks, catchment areas, terraces and slope areas. Napier grass and other grass can be used for animal feeds and to further prevent soil erosion. All the above are important for the *c*onservation of moisture, the improvement of soil structure, the control of soil erosion, the provision of plant nutrients and the retention of nitrogen in the soil.

The basis of the OAIC's engagement with sustainable livelihoods

1. The fact that many African Initiated Churches hold worship services under trees is a clear indication of how they understand ecology to be a resource given by God.
2. God's creation is furthermore appreciated as a source for livelihoods. That is the reason the soil is cared for. Using environmental resources, for example the various types of plants that can be used for soil health and as natural pesticides, is an appreciation and celebration of what God has provided in his creation.

3. The establishment of community seed banks is a response to the need for re-plantable seeds and consequently a form of agriculture that relates to the order the churches affirm – which is God's order where seeds are re-planted and seeds are shared within a community (and not owned and commercialized by multinational companies).
4. African Initiated Churches' theologies deeply inform their engagement in sustainable livelihoods. Their visions for a better world constitutes a motivating factor for their action towards the transformation of families and communities. The congregation at the local level thereby serves as a structure for mobilizing communities.

13. ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE FUTURE OF FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: A RESPONSE TO JOHN GICHIMU

Dietrich Werner

I want to suggest 10 points in response to the excellent paper presented by the Ven. John Gichimu on the work of OAIC in the area of food security and sustainable agriculture:[1]

Pioneering role of AICs in rural settings

The presentation has underlined again that African Instituted churches play a vital role for development particularly in rural settings. AICs reach out to rural and vulnerable populations, which often are not reached by mainline Christian churches. Their added value and benefit as a facilitator for rural development is amply presented and shown in the Livelihood and Farmers Resource Persons Program, which combines spiritual empowerment, farmer's training and concrete instructions on eco-sensitive agriculture and is supported by Bread for the World.

[1] Response to John Gichimu's contribution in the previous chapter, presented at the conference "Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

Food sovereignty and right to food as key concerns both of rural churches and of ecumenical partners

Christian development actors like Bread for the World have long had a key interest and mandate to work on issues around food sovereignty and right to food as broad based development efforts depend on the ability to produce and properly distribute food to all people, particularly vulnerable populations.[2] According to the UNEP Synthesis Report on "Agriculture at the Crossroads"[3] the crucial factor is not just increased agricultural productivity at all costs, but that food and the means of its production are available where they are needed and locally owned. This is best achieved through smallholder structures, which are addressed and qualified through programs like OAICs program on Livelihood and Farmers Resource Persons.

Theology of bread and theology of soil to be brought together

Food security today, and this has been illustrated by the work of OAIC as well, is a complex and interrelated issue as not only distribution and production, but also the availability of fertile soil and climatic conditions as well as good structures of local ownership and collaboration are at stake. We need a good theology of bread, but at the same time in relation

---

[2] See Francisco Mari, "Food Security – Secure Food Supply through Agroecological Farming," accessed 28 August 2023, https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/en/bread-for-the-world/our-topics/food-security/.

[3] International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) and United Nations Environment Programme, *Agriculture at a Crossroads: Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report* (2009), https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/7880, accessed 28 August 2023.

to a good theology of soil which deals with the complex issues of land ownership as well as the rapid processes of soil degradation due to over-usage, drought or the use of pesticides. Strengthening the self-reliance in food production is a key mandate of churches which are under the dual mandate of bringing good news to the (rural) poor (Luke 4:18-19), to join with the daily prayers of the faithful "to give us our daily bread" as well as the critique of destructive lifestyles of consumerism and aggressive forms of industrialized agro-business which takes up the other line within biblical tradition and is expressed in Mathew 4:1-4, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God".

Interrelatedness of food security and climate change

Climate change has adversely affected and influenced food security in many regions of Africa. This was clearly emphasized in the recent IPCC special report on "Climate Change and Land" which should be a key reference document for further work of African churches on issues of soil degradation and food security.[4] Key insights from this IPCC report include:

— *Land is both a source and sink of CO2 emissions,* playing a crucial role in combating climate change. However, better land-use alone will not stop climate change. Delaying decarbonisation and shifting mitigation to the land sector will increase the risk of climate impacts and food insecurity.

---

[4] Greenpeace International, "Deforestation, Meat Production Driving Climate Crisis," 8 August 2019, accessed 28 August 2023, https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/23685/deforestation-meat-production-driving-climate-crisis/.

— Climate change, including the increased frequency and intensity of extremes, has *adversely impacted food security and land ecosystems* while also contributing to desertification and land degradation.

— Our food system, fresh-water systems and biodiversity are being pushed to the brink and we need to change course now through the strict protection of intact carbon-rich ecosystems such as primary forests and peatlands.

— *Ecological restoration* of used forests, lost forests and other managed carbon- rich lands should be given clear preference over large-scale afforestation with tree plantations or other monoculture crops for bioenergy generation given their massive benefits to biodiversity, the permanence of CO2 sequestration, water, soils and local livelihoods.

— *Meat and dairy production and consumption* are driving an increase in human greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation and deforestation and there is an urgent need for dietary change, particularly in high-income societies.

— *There is a limited amount of land available to mitigate and adapt to climate change* to ensure food security and must make a choice. We cannot use land twice. This report points policy makers towards *no regrets* solutions that free up pressure on land and do not need more land for mitigation (e.g., forest protection and restoration, reduce meat and dairy demand, reduce food waste and loss)".[5]

[5] *Ibidem*.

Choices to be made with regard to the type of farming

Important expert studies have clearly identified and stated that small-scale organic farming is best suited to curb climate changes.[6] The results of global studies on proper forms of agriculture, mitigation of climate change and protection of fertile soils need to be urgently translated into national agricultural strategies and long-term scenarios in African countries.[7] Mechanization of agriculture is not the only and a blunt and easy way of preparing African's agriculture for the future, but it needs to be done carefully, with contextual and culturally adapted methodologies and with ecological awareness.[8] One key challenge is to attract young African people to work in small-scale farmers cooperatives and to invest in agriculture instead of leaving the rural spaces and trying to seek their fortune all in urban centres.[9]

---

[6] IFOAM EU Group, "Organic Farming, Climate Change Mitigation and beyond Reducing the Environmental Impacts of EU Agriculture," accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/ifoameu_advocacy_climate_change_report_2016.pdf.

[7] California Environmental Associates and Climate Focus, *Strategies for Mitigating Climate Change in Agriculture*, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/reports/strategies-for-mitigating-climate-change-in-agriculture/.

[8] World Economic Forum: Ethel Sennhauser, "What is the Future of Agriculture in Africa?" accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/11/what-is-the-future-of-agriculture-in-africa/.

[9] FAO e-agriculture article 13 June 2018, "The Future of Africa's Agriculture Rests with the Youth," accessed 26 August 2023, http://www.fao.org/e-agriculture/news/future-africa%E2%80%99s-agriculture-rests-youth.

Choices to be made with regard to the kind of food produced: the interrelation between health-food and malnutrition

The quality of food and the health standards realized within food production is another crucial issue not to be forgotten. Due to excessive meat production and diary production, the unhealthy food standards propagated by modern media and urban culture some health parameters within African populations are gradually deteriorating. Malnutrition and obesity nowadays are as acute a problem in some African cities as they are in some centres of western countries. "Obesity rates in sub-Saharan Africa are shooting up faster than in just about anywhere else in the world, causing a public health crisis that is catching Africa, and the world, by surprise. In Burkina Faso, the prevalence of adult obesity in the past 36 years has jumped nearly 1,400 percent. In Ghana, Togo, Ethiopia and Benin, it has increased by more than 500 percent. Eight of the 20 nations in the world with the fastest-rising rates of adult obesity are in Africa, according to a recent study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington"[10]. The issue of the health quality of food therefore, the amounts of fat, sugar and meat taken in by average African populations is a serious matter, which cannot be ignored any more.

[10] *The New York Times*, In Kenya, and Across Africa, an Unexpected Epidemic: Obesity, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/27/world/africa/kenya-obesity-diabetes.html.

Sustainable food trade and supply chains between rural and urban centres

Another issue at stake is how to strengthen regional supply chains between rural and urban settings in terms of trading food. Independence needs to be strengthened from big multinational companies trying to dominate national and regional markets and weakening local distribution and trade channels and systems. Churches need to become aware of major challenges which will confront them in the decades to come: "More than half of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) population could be living in urban areas by 2050 posing huge challenges for poor towns and cities, which already face challenges such as poverty and inequalities. These are coupled with growing levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in a context of high vulnerability to climate change." The initiative for a South and East African City-to-City (CtCi) Food Systems meeting, which brings together several cities from Namibia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and the host country, South Africa, for "discussing how they would guarantee durable food systems that ensure a healthy and nutritious diet for all, while making a sustainable use of natural resources in light of the added pressure of increased food demand" are recommended for the churches to be accompanied and supported.[11] Feeding African growing cities in the twenty-first century and providing not cheap and low quality, but high and organic quality of food to the masses of the urban poor is one of the major key challenge for the decades

[11] FAO Regional Office for Africa, "African Cities Tackle Food and Nutrition Security Challenges", 18 April 2018, accessed 16 August 2023, http://www.fao.org/africa/news/detail-news/en/c/1118444/.

to come.[12]

Developing critical awareness and resistance about GMO related technologies in agriculture

Another major issue of concern are the huge promised which are commercialized and circulated by big agro-business and pharmaceutical cooperations praising the introduction of genome-editing technologies as the key solution for solving the world food crisis in the twenty-first century. This demands more attention and detailed expertise than can be provided in this limited paper. The most recent type of gene-editing technologies is called CRISPR/CAS9 (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats/CRISPR Associated Protein9).[13] CAS9 cuts the DNA at a specific location. Afterwards DNA is inserted, deleted or otherwise altered at this location. The method is more precise and more effective as methods of GE 1.0. A special method of GE 2.0 is the so-called gene drive. This is a strategy to override the principles of genetic heredity and aims at introducing certain genetic properties in a complete population in very few generations of breeding. Projects aim for instance at the extinction of insects that carry tropical diseases (e.g., malaria, dengue, and zika) or to modify weeds that have developed herbicide resistance so that the agro-industrial system consisting of herbicide resistant cash crop and herbicides can be used again. More worrying is the idea to protect biodiversity by wiping out invasive species (including

[12] See the African research initiative "Feeding African Cities in the 21st Century", accessed 16 August 2023, https://www.urbanafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Food_ENG.pdf.

[13] Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, „CRISPR-Cas9 – Eine Schere aus Enzym und RNA", accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.mpg.de/11018867/crispr-cas9.

plants and mammals) or to develop concepts for biological weapons on the basis of gene drives.

Huge commercial interests and pressures are accompanying this advanced and accelerated form of genome editing (GE). Plants and animals which have been genetically engineered can be patented and then declared a legal property of the bio-companies which have created them, thereby obligating breeders and farmers to pay royalties to the patent holders when purchasing the patented seeds or animals. Against this trend to disown local farmers and indigenous cultures of natural seeds and biological resources, the FAO developed the "International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture" (ITPGRFA), which went into effect in 2004. The Seed Treaty, as it is often called, aimed at securing unhindered access of local farmers to seeds and plants available in their natural environments. A general framework agreement on farmers rights on plant genetic resources was agreed and decided upon in the FAO in 2009, the discussion however on the actual implementation of the farmers rights to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture is still not finalized and severe lack of implementation can be observed in several countries.[14]

Education in alternative ecological agro-cultures and sustainable farming

Issues of ecology and food security need to play a bigger role in

[14] For specific information, see internal draft paper, Gudrun Kordecki, Stig Tanzmann and Dietrich Werner, "Genome Editing Will Not Solve the World Food Crisis! Towards a Common Ethical Statement on Genetic Engineering", The Future of Global Food Safety, Agriculture, and Biodiversity from Christian Perspectives, Berlin 2019 (not published).

general higher education as well as in theological education. A recent global research report[15] found out that there are still major shortcomings in terms of available resources for eco-theological sensitization, curriculum models and well-trained educators, which can bring together updated resources for increasing understanding, knowledge and practical skills in the areas of care for creation and ethics of sustainability. To strengthen and enhance eco-theological reflection from and within African resources, bringing together traditional African wisdom traditions, insights from biblical tradition and churches traditions as well as putting them in dialogue with insights from advanced natural scientists from both African background as well as international research networks is an important challenge, but also promising task. It cannot be fulfilled by one tradition alone and by remaining only in denominational isolated pockets of self-reference. Instead, it is a joint task, which needs more dialogue both between mainline churches, African Independent churches as well as between Charismatic/Pentecostal churches in the African continent.

Code of conduct for global agro-business corporations

What is going on in the field of food security, trade and marketing of food and crops on the African continent as well as beyond, cannot be solved just by African players alone. It needs global and ecumenical cooperation. It would be worth trying to push ecumenical agencies to embark on a joint process to develop an Ethical Code of Conduct for big

---

[15] Elisabeth Jeglitzka and Dietrich Werner, eds., *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development*, (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), in: https://repository.globethics.net/handle/ 20.500.12424/156830.

global agro-business players, which seem to dominate regional markets and production chains. What is an ethical framework churches together with other players in civil society can suggest to these international cooperations to adhere to either voluntarily or by legal obligations? Crucial actors like ACT Alliance Africa and African ecumenical bodies have continued the exploration whether it would be feasible to propose such a process, at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe in September 2021.

Bibliography

African Urban Research Initiative. "Feeding African Cities in the 21st Century", accessed 16 August 2023, https://www.urbanafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Food_ENG.pdf.

California Environmental Associates and Climate Focus. "Strategies for Mitigating Climate Change in Agriculture," accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/reports/strategies-for-mitigating-climate-change-in-agriculture/.

FAO Regional Office for Africa. "African Cities Tackle Food and Nutrition Security Challenges," 18 April 2018, accessed 16 August 2023, http://www.fao.org/africa/news/detail-news/en/c/1118444/.

FAO. "The Future of Africa's Agriculture Rests with the Youth," 13 June 2018, accessed 26 August 2023, http://www.fao.org/e-agriculture/news/future-africa%E2%80%99s-agriculture-rests-youth.

Gettleman, Jeffrey. "In Kenya, and Across Africa, an Unexpected Epidemic: Obesity". *The New York Times*, 27 May 2018, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/27/world/africa/kenya-obesity-diabetes.html.

Greenpeace International. "Deforestation, Meat Production Driving Climate Crisis," 8 August 2019, accessed 28 August 2023, https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/23685/deforestation-meat-production-driving-climate-crisis/.

IFOAM EU Group. "Organic Farming, Climate Change Mitigation and beyond Reducing the Environmental Impacts of EU Agriculture," accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/ifoameu_advocacy_climate_change_report_2016.pdf.

International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) and United Nations Environment Programme. "Agriculture at a Crossroads: Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report" (2009), https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/7880, accessed 28 August 2023.

Jeglitzka, Elisabeth, and Dietrich Werner, eds., *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development*. Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016, https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/156830.

Kordecki, Gudrun, Stig Tanzmann, Dietrich Werner. "Genome Editing Will Not Solve the World Food Crisis! Towards a Common Ethical Statement on Genetic Engineering."

The Future of Global Food Safety, Agriculture, and Biodiversity from Christian Perspectives, Berlin 2019 (not published).

Mari, Francisco. "Food Security – Secure Food Supply through Agroecological Farming," accessed 28 August 2023, https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/en/bread-for-the-world/our-topics/food-security/.

Max-Planck-Gesellschaft. „CRISPR-Cas9 – Eine Schere aus Enzym und RNA", accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.mpg.de/11018867/crispr-cas9.

World Economic Forum: Ethel Sennhauser. "What is the Future of Agriculture in Africa?" accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/11/what-is-the-future-of-agriculture-in-africa/.

14. ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE FOREST IN THAI BUDDHISM

Robekkah Ritchie

Discussions on Buddhism and the environment[1] span over a wide range and Payne notes that "the relation between Buddhist thought and contemporary environmental and ecological concerns has become one of the most important dimensions for the development of Buddhist thought as applied to contemporary issues"[2]. In the 1980s in Thailand, an environmental movement, led by monks (sometimes called *development monks* or *ecology monks*) emerged to become a widespread action, using creative methods to curtail deforestation, such as tree ordinations.[3] Specifically in regard to nature and environmentalism in contemporary Thai Buddhist contexts Seeger notes that there is "a large number of diverse, and often complexly intertwined, shifting and ambiguous factors that have not only generated changes in Thai views of nature, but also informed and motivated environmental action and perspectives"[4].

---

[1] Paper presented at the webinar Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa, Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

[2] Richard Payne, "Buddhism and the Environment," *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, Last Modified September 2010.

[3] See Susan Darlington, *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Avery Morrow, "Tree Ordination as Invented Tradition," *ASIA Network Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19 (2012): 53–60; Lotte Isager and Søren Ivarsson, "Contesting Landscapes in Thailand: Tree Ordination as Counter-Territorialization," *Critical Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 395–417.

[4] Martin Seeger, "Ideas and Images of Nature in Thai Buddhism: Continuity and Change," in *Environmental and Climate Change in South and Southeast Asia: How Are Local Cultures Coping?* ed. Barbara Schuler (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 73.

These factors include

> "the charisma of (individual) Buddhist monks and the Thai monarchy, intervention by the state, Buddhist-animistic rituals, (decreasing) belief and awe in the supernaturality of nature, teachings of Buddhism as a 'green religion', Buddhist soteriology (through the re-enactment of the spiritual quest towards awakening), increasingly widespread scientific understanding of the ecological system, Western-influenced environmentalism, views of forest as a place for recreation and leisure . . . and also, unfortunately, the too obvious dire results of the overexploitations of nature."[5]

This passage reveals the complexity of understanding relationships to nature and the environment in contemporary Thai contexts.[6] There are many roads one can take towards a deeper understanding of

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] For further discussions on Thai Buddhism and environmentalism, see Martin Seeger, "Ideas and Images of Nature in Thai Buddhism: Continuity and Change," in *Environmental and Climate Change in South and Southeast Asia: How Are Local Cultures Coping?* ed. Barbara Schuler (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 43–74; Pierre Walter, "Activist Forest Monks, Adult Learning and the Buddhist Environmental Movement in Thailand," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 26, no. 3 (2007): 329–345; Michael J.G. Parnwell, "Eco-Localism and the Shaping of Sustainable Social and Natural Environments in North-East Thailand," *Land Degradation & Development* 17 (2006): 183–195; Søren Ivarsson, "Man, Nature and Environmentalism in Thailand: The Role of Buddhism," in *Forest in Culture – Culture in Forest: Perspectives from Northern Thailand*, ed. Ebbe Poulson et al. (Tjele: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, 2001), 33–54; Susan Darlington, "Not Only Preaching—The Work of the Ecology Monk Phrakhru Nantakhun of Thailand," *Forest, Trees and People Newsletter* 34 (1997): 17–20; Philip Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees: Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996).

the intersecting of Buddhism and environmentalism in Thailand, and this brief exploration focuses specifically on Thai forest monks and their relationship to the forest.

Historically monastics have either practiced in the forest or have lived in monasteries closer to or within villages.[7] In Thailand wandering monks have had a long history of practicing in the forest and it was this kind of lifestyle that inspired the creation of the Thai Kammaṭṭhāna Forest Tradition around 1900CE by Ajahn Mun (Ajahn Mun Bhuridatta Thera, 1870–1949) and his mentor, Ajahn Sao Kantasīlo (1861–1941).[8] Monks from both official Thai linages can be part of the Thai Forest Tradition, which is known as a particularly austere branch with emphasis on closely following the *vinaya* (monastic code of conduct), meditation, and ascetic *dhutaṅga* practices.[9] The Forest Tradition, not without past

---

[7] Early monastic practice was often grouped together and contrasted to the lifestyle of lay persons, however as was explored by Reginald Ray, this fails to encompass the complexities and differences within monastic lifestyle. Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[8] For further reading on the Thai Forest Tradition, see: Zhi Cai, "Doctrinal Analysis of the Origin and Evolution of the Thai Kammaṭṭhāna Tradition with a Special Reference to the Present Kammaṭṭhāna Ajahns" (PhD diss., University of the West, 2014); Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Jim Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-state: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); Stanley Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Brooke Schedneck, "Forest as Challenge, Forest as Healer: Reinterpretations and Hybridity within the Forest Tradition in Thailand," *Pacific World Journal* 13 (2011): 1–24.

[9] *Dhutaṅga* (*Thudong* in Thai) consists of thirteen ascetic practices, ranging from eating one meal a day, seclusion and living without shelter.

tensions, now has a harmonious relationship with the Thai *Saṅgha*, and has become well known—especially as a number of forest monks are revered by many in Thailand as *arahats* (someone who has attained awakening) and are popular subjects for amulets.[10] The Forest Tradition has spread internationally, in part due to the influential monk Ajahn Chah (1918–1992) who founded an international monastery in northeastern Thailand where a number of westerners ordained and practiced.[11] Arguably the greatest challenge to monastics practicing in the forest has been the widespread deforestation in Thailand in recent decades, which has impacted and altered the forests, physical landscapes, and the relationship to the forest.

As with the changing forests in Thailand, various aspects of Buddhist practice, belief, and dialogue have also shifted and transformed in the last century—and the influences of the emergence of a globalized world and modernity is often discussed under the term "Buddhist modernism"[12].

---

[10] For further reading on the Thai Forest Tradition and amulets see Stanley Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[11] Ajahn Chah's teachings have spread to Europe, North America, and Australasia with nearly 30 branches or associated centres, according to forestsangha.org.

[12] Buddhist Modernism is also called "Protestant Buddhism," or "modern Buddhism" has been explored in depth by various authors, see Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* (Berlin: Alfred Metzner, 1966); Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East"* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon, 2002); Stephen Berkwitz, ed., *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006); David McMahan, *Buddhism in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

These changes have informed how monastics, or more broadly, Buddhists, relate to the natural world (among other things) and is argued by McMahan to be largely in part caused by the "considerable influence of Romanticism—along with its successors transcendentalism, metaphysical religion, and later forms of spiritual eclecticism"[13]. McMahan explains some of these elements as follows:

> "Many staples of Buddhist modernist literature—the exaltation of nature, the idea of spiritual experience as identifying with the natural world or a universal spirit, the emphasis on spontaneity and creativity through the cultivation of an interior experience, the transcendence of conventional morality through an intuitive and interior source of ethics, the reverence of the simple and the rustic over the complex and technological—owe much to the intertwining of Buddhism and the Romantic-Transcendentalist stream of thought. This intertwining also ushered the dharma into the narratives of suspicion toward the mechanized worldview of scientific rationalism… Romantic and Transcendentalist influences drew Buddhism into the orbit of hope for a reenchantment of the disenchanted, industrialized, and materialist West with help from the supposedly more spiritual East."[14]

Though a complex and multifaceted exploration of overarching subjects, patterns begin to emerge in more specific cases and studies to reveal how this may be translated into a lived religious experience.

Schedneck follows McMahan's assertions and delves more specifically into how the forest was depicted in the Pāli Canon and by

---

[13] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 77.
[14] *Ibidem*, 76–77.

early practitioners of the Forest Tradition, and how the relationship to the forest has shifted:

> "The Pāli canon writings of the forest and the forest tradition of Thailand already contained the qualities of escaping the distractions of the world and meditating in solitude, but through interactions with discourses of modernity such as Romanticism, this is accentuated. The forest becomes a place to escape modernity. It is a challenge to twenty-first century living, instead of just a challenge to the mind, and becomes a symbol of anti-modernism against materialism and narratives of progress and development. Forest monasteries were always places of natural surroundings and solitude, but this meaning is extended for contemporary interlocutors. Nature itself becomes entwined with the teachings of the Buddha. These reinterpretations show the range of expressions present from which to draw in the Buddhist tradition. The reinventions are not radical changes but are developed and finessed to fit new contexts and discourses of debate about modernity and globalization."[15]

These transformations, broadly explained by concepts of Buddhist Modernism, bring to light many considerations of the interweaving of thought and practice, the continual shifting and sharing of ideals, and how these aspects in turn shape modern religious life on a smaller scale, as seen in the example of the Thai Forest Tradition.

One of these well-known shifts is the development of tree ordinations. One of the foremost researchers on tree ordination, Darlington, mentions

---

[15] Brooke Schedneck, "Forest as Challenge, Forest as Healer: Reinterpretations and Hybridity within the Forest Tradition in Thailand," *Pacific World Journal* 13 (2011): 19.

that this movement "is not about trees per se, but the monks and the people with whom they live and work who must deal with the direct consequences of the environmental destruction"[16]. The creation of this ritual began as a way to raise awareness of deforestation and combat it with reforestation, and it has developed into a broader movement that has also spread into neighbouring countries. Many of these rituals include animist aspects, along with the chanting of texts from the Pāli Canon and applying pieces of saffron fabric to the trees, representing the robes worn by monastics. Monk's robes are a deeply imbedded and important aspect of material culture and conveyor of meaning not just for the monastic themselves, but in wider social contexts as well. This is seen in Thailand where the saffron colour signals monasticism (even when it is not being worn by monks) or the significance of rituals and ceremonies surrounding offering robes to monks. The importance of monastic-coloured cloth as part of material culture is seen not only as robes are worn on the bodies of ordained persons, but also when used to clothe Buddha statues or 'ordain' trees for example.[17]

Tree ordinations have also become linked with the king and the state as well as asserting a sense of "Thainess" for ethnic and religious

---

[16] Susan Darlington, *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 4.

[17] For further discussion on tree ordination, see Jim Taylor, "Social Activism and Resistance on the Thai Frontier: The Case of Phra Prajak Khuttajitto," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25 (1993): 3–16; Nicola Tannenbaum, "Protest, Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of Political Ritual," *Ethnology* 39, no. 2 (2000): 109–127; Lotte Isager and Søren Ivarsson, "Contesting Landscapes in Thailand: Tree Ordination as Counter-Territorialization," *Critical Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 395–417; Kevin Brown, "Spectacle as Resistance: Performing Tree Ordination in Thailand," *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* 5, no. 2 (2006): 91–103.

minorities as the ritual entered the mainstream in the mid-1990s.

> "In 1997, the king officially endorsed the practice, and asked Thai citizens to ordain 50 million trees in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of his accession. With the assistance of Phrakhru Pitak and national NGOs, this proclamation became an active campaign, the "Program for the Community Forest Ordination of 50 Million Trees in Honor of the King's Golden Jubilee," which involved outreach to hundreds of villages. Not only did this legitimize tree ordination as a mainstream practice, but it also allowed groups whose Thainess had fallen into question to perform tree ordinations in order to reassert their citizenship as Thais."[18]

These interwoven aspects of the tree ordination ceremony point to the deep complexities within religious, political and social realms in Thailand. Darlington points to various "interrelated and contested discourses" that also arise within this dialogue: the relationship between Buddhism and modernity (how it can and should be used); environmental actions/goals and how humans relate to it; the "meaning of 'development,' and the related tensions between material growth and spiritual progress" as it relates to Thai persons and the improvement of their lives; "concepts of power and knowledge, and the construction and appropriation of new forms of knowledge, including interpretations of Buddhism itself.

As seen from a brief description of Buddhist Modernism, newly developed rituals, and the complexity of the relationship between Buddhism and the environment, the concept of nature is connected with striving towards a *true* or *original* Buddhism but there are also newly

---

[18] Avery Morrow, "Tree Ordination as Invented Tradition," *ASIA Network Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19 (2012): 58.

created practices to address modern problems. The Thai Forest Tradition is relevant within this discussion because as Swearer notes, "various permutations of the Theravada Forest Tradition considered to be closer to the ideals of 'pure' Buddhism have influenced the shape of Buddhist reformism and revitalization in Southeast Asia."[19] As seen above through exploration of the transformations within the Thai Forest Tradition, and the development of new rituals, even branches of Buddhism considered closer to these pure ideals also are subject to shifts and change, and themselves are a product of larger transformations.

Bibliography

Bechert, Heinz. *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*. Berlin: Alfred Metzner, 1966.

Berkwitz, Stephen, ed. *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

Brown, Kevin. "Spectacle as Resistance: Performing Tree Ordination in Thailand." *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* 5, no. 2 (2006): 91–103.

Darlington, Susan. "Not Only Preaching—The Work of the Ecology Monk Phrakhru Nantakhun of Thailand." *Forest, Trees and People Newsletter* 34 (1997): 17–20.

Darlington, Susan. *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

[19] Donald Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany: SUNY, 2010), 164.

Hirsch, Philip. *Seeing Forests for Trees: Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996.

Isager, Lotte, and Søren Ivarsson. "Contesting Landscapes in Thailand: Tree Ordination as Counter-Territorialization." *Critical Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 395–417.

Ivarsson, Søren, "Man, Nature and Environmentalism in Thailand: The Role of Buddhism." In *Forest in Culture – Culture in Forest: Perspectives from Northern Thailand*, edited by Ebbe Poulson et al., 33–54. Tjele: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, 2001.

King, Richard. Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East". New York: Routledge, 1999.

Lopez Jr., Donald S., ed. *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West*. Boston: Beacon, 2002.

Lopez Jr., Donald S., ed. *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

McMahan, David. *Buddhism in the Modern World*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Morrow, Avery. *"*Tree Ordination as Invented Tradition.*" ASIA Network Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19 (2012): 53–60.

Parnwell, Michael J.G. "Eco-Localism and the Shaping of Sustainable Social and Natural Environments in North-East Thailand." *Land Degradation & Development* 17 (2006): 183–195.

Payne, Richard. "Buddhism and the Environment." Oxford Bibliographies Online, Last Modified September 2010.

Ray, Reginald. *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Schedneck, Brooke. "Forest as Challenge, Forest as Healer: Reinterpretations and Hybridity within the Forest Tradition in Thailand." *Pacific World Journal* 13 (2011): 1–24.

Seeger, Martin. "Ideas and Images of Nature in Thai Buddhism: Continuity and Change." In *Environmental and Climate Change in South and Southeast Asia: How Are Local Cultures Coping?*, edited by Barbara Schuler, 43–74. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Swearer, Donald. *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. Albany: SUNY, 2010.

Tambiah, Stanley. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Tannenbaum, Nicola. "Protest, Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of Political Ritual." *Ethnology* 39, no. 2 (2000): 109–127.

Taylor, Jim. *Forest Monks and the Nation-state: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.

Taylor, Jim. "Social Activism and Resistance on the Thai Frontier: The Case of Phra Prajak Khuttajitto." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25 (1993): 3–16.

Tiyavanich, Kamala. Forest Recollections: *Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

Walter, Pierre. "Activist Forest Monks, Adult Learning and the Buddhist Environmental Movement in Thailand." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 26, no. 3 (2007): 329–345.

Zhi Cai, "Doctrinal Analysis of the Origin and Evolution of the Thai Kammaṭṭhāna Tradition with a Special Reference to

the Present Kammaṭṭhāna Ajahns." PhD diss., University of the West, 2014.

15. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, WATER SECURITY AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Esper Jacobeth Ncube and Seulaule Calvin Mokgaditse

Introduction

Water security is essential to humankind[1] as it supports public health.[2] This entails providing safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene as fundamental human needs. The assuring of water security also enables economic growth (with income generation and poverty alleviation heavily relying on water availability for agriculture, energy production, transportation and other livelihoods activities). Other spheres include environmental sustainability (with natural ecosystems relying on water and deteriorating when deprived of natural flows), political stability (when communities do not receive basic needs it can lead to social unrest) and disaster risk reduction. The later includes the disasters such as floods, droughts, tsunamis and harmful algal blooms which have been seen to be catastrophic events that claim lives, affect local communities and may multiply due to climate variability and change. Recent global trends have

---

[1] Revised version of a paper presented at the conference "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability," Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

[2] USAID/SWP, "Improving Water Security, a process to address 'too little, too much, too dirty, too erratic'", Toolkit # 1, 2012. https://winrock.org/document/toolkit-1-improving-water-security/.

seen demand for water outstripped by water supply due to population growth, urbanization and failure of members to respond to the effects of climate change. In most countries in southern Africa, water resources have always been very limited, and with increased population, the demand for water has also increased. The main question has been "What are the roles played by religious communities in ensuring water security and ecological sustainability in the region?" In order to answer this question, one has to unpack three critical concepts: the concept of religious community, water security, and sustainability.

What is a religious community and what happens in a community?

According to Agrawal and Gibson, in a community, "individuals give up some of their individuality to behave as a single entity to accomplish goals"[3]. The vision of small, integrated communities using locally-evolved norms and rules to manage resources sustainably and equitable is powerful. However, because it views community as a unified, organic whole, this vision fails to attend to differences within communities and ignores how these differences affect resource management outcomes, local politics, strategic interactions within communities as well as the possibility of layered alliances that can span multiple levels of politics. Figure 1 summarizes the important aspects of communities and relationship with resources. For the purpose of understanding the role of religious communities, in this article the concept will be understood as both gatherings of individuals who have common religious beliefs, habits,

---

[3] Arun Agrawal and Clark C. Gibson, "Enhancement and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation," *World Development* 27, no. 4 (1999): 629–649, 635.

and practices and ideologies that allow them to manage resources sustainably by giving up some of their individuality to behave as a single entity to accomplish goals. Religious communities are part of the bigger society and experience has shown that most of the time they form the majority of these social setups.

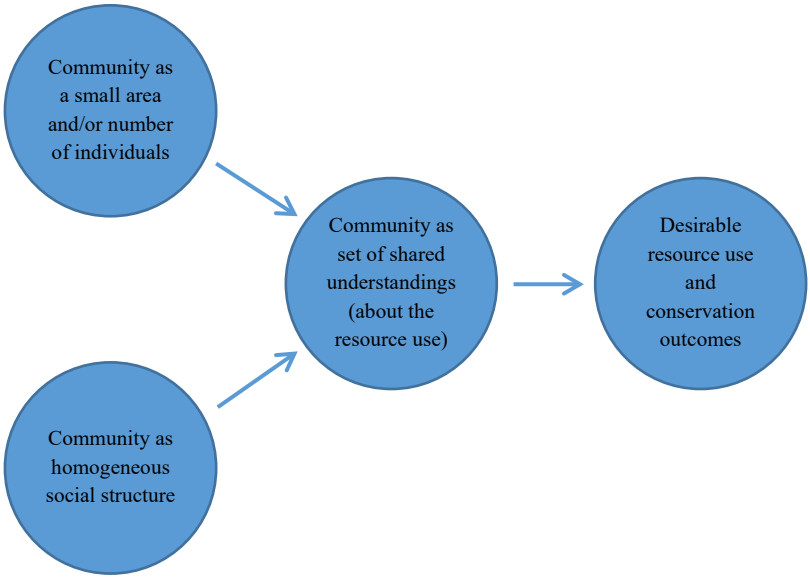


Figure 1: A conventional view of the relationship between a community and conservation, courtesy of Agrawal and Gibson, 1999

It is the nature of connection of religious communities with water resources that define their roles. The church must play its role as agent of life in its fullness in the secular sphere with dedication. Preserving the natural environment especially water resources should be considered as part of an investment in our future generations and should be a commitment by each member of society.

Religious communities and connection to water resources

Water is an important factor in every sphere of human activity needed for the survival of life on this earth, but how one defines and perceives this natural element sets the stage for how one obtains, uses and shares water.[4] In traditional societies, water was not readily available in taps and in packaged plastic bottles, it was mostly gathered and used as needed, maybe retrieving it from a distant location or requiring walking to a natural source. This resulted in encouraging a connection between people and the environment, enhancing local knowledge about the quality of the natural sources in their area, where to locate them, and their cycles of change.[5] The spiritual character of water is largely ignored in the development, interpretation and analysis of water law. Water is mentioned a total of 722 times in the Bible, more often than faith, hope, prayer, and worship. However, water as a religious symbol, is as universal as faith itself. The spiritual character of water is an inconvenient coreligionist with the objective analysis of the economics of water supply and demand and the science involved in water quality protection.[6] Additionally, the spiritual character of water poses a miasma of legal complications. The legal challenges associated with the relationship between water and worship is particularly complex for indigenous communities, in part because of the spiritual connection many indigenous communities have with their traditional lands and rivers. This unique relationship between faith and geography blends complex questions of the

---

[4] Kireet Kumar, *Water Management in Himalayan Ecosystem: A Study of Natural Springs of Almora* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1996).

[5] Juliet Risko, *Sacred Springs: Perceptions of Religion and Water in Village Communities of Uttarakhand*, Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 2852.

[6] B. Rhett Larson, "Holy Water and Human Rights: Indigenous Peoples' Religious-Rights Claims to Water Resources," *Arizona Journal of Environmental Law & Policy* 2 (2011): 81.

scope and meaning of the right to life with similar questions of property rights, religious rights, and sovereignty rights.[7]

According to Larson, water, perhaps more than any other natural resource, has profound religious meaning: in ceremonial uses, as a spiritual symbol and as an object of worship. As such there is a strong connection between religious communities and water resources as sources of water. The author goes on to emphasize that "water as sacred symbol or ceremonial source is as universal as faith itself"[8]. Religious communities are the majority in most communities, need water for domestic and non-domestic uses, for food security as well as for the various faith-based beliefs and practices such as baptisms, holy water, culture as a system of shared beliefs, values, behaviour and symbols enables societal processes closely intertwined with water religion, for recreation and enjoyment and means of transportation in communities. Religious communities also need water security which is understood as "the availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods, ecosystems and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water-related risks to people, environments and economies"[9].

Indigenous communities have often made spiritual uses of water that precede all other known uses, thereby combining religious rights with claims of prior appropriation rights and questions of reasonable and beneficial use of water resources. Essentially, the first person to make use of water resources has a superior claim to all other subsequent uses of water from that source, so long as the use is "reasonable and beneficial." Indigenous communities' historical use of water could support a "prior

---

[7] *Ibidem*.

[8] *Ibidem*.

[9] David Grey and Claudia W. Sadoff, "Sink or Swim? Water Security for Growth and Development," *Water Policy* 9 (2007): 545–571, 569.

appropriation" claim superior in priority to all other water users, which would limit or preclude water-resource development if the indigenous community's religious uses of water (including in-stream uses) constitute reasonable and beneficial use of limited water resources.[10]

Figure 2 below shows the various uses of water by religious communities as witnessed by the authors.



Figure 2: Connection of religious communities to water resources

The spiritual character of water is also a troublesome from a legal perspective and is related to traditional knowledge and ecological conservation ethics, frequently embodied in indigenous religious practices, which are often essential to effective resource management and conservation in the watershed. Additionally, indigenous peoples' religious practices often play an important role in preserving the local

[10] Frank J. Trelease, "The Concept of Reasonable Beneficial Use in the Law of Surface Streams," *Wyoming Law Journal* 12, no. 1 (1957), 6–7.

ecology.[11] It is important for lawmakers and jurists to take special care so that it is not assumed that religious claims made by indigenous peoples to water resources are solely cultural or spiritual concerns, but instead recognizes that religious claims to water and religious water uses potentially represent knowledge and practice essential for sustainable resource management. Water is indeed regarded as the resource most vulnerable to the tragedy of the commons.[12] However, indigenous communities have developed solutions to the tragedy of the commons, which are implemented and enforced by religious teachings and norms. For example, certain indigenous groups in Indonesia manage crop irrigation and pest management through *water temples*, where priests assign complementary roles of water diversion priority and pest control over the watershed, while village delegates meet at the temple to receive assignments and develop a sense of community with other users on the watershed. This ceremony, along with the reciprocal nature of watershed responsibilities, helps avoid the tragedy of the commons indigenous communities make use to religious arguments not only to preserve their culture and access to adequate water supplies, but also to validate and promote effective resource management tools developed and adapted by these communities as part of their religious worship.[13]

In most cases, indigenous religions centre their spirituality within the context of the natural world and on particular geographic features,

---

[11] Cathleen Flanagan and Melinda Laituri, "Local Cultural Knowledge and Water Resource Management: The Wind River Indian Reservation," *Environmental Management* 33 (2004): 262–270.

[12] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–1248.

[13] J. Stephen Lansing, "Balinese 'Water Temples' and the Management of Irrigation," *American Anthropologist* 89 (1987): 329–330.

including water bodies unlike many of the world's major religions.[14] Some such religious practices have become widespread in certain river basins, such as the sacred nature of the Ganges River in the Hindu faith; whereas other river basins of equal economic and ecologic significance are sacred to only a small minority of communities within the watershed, for example, the Amazon River to the indigenous tribes within that watershed.[15] Religious water use is thus a delicate matter of political economy in that indigenous communities with religious beliefs shared or valued by the majority of society are able to gain greater traction in religion-based resource claims, while indigenous communities with marginalized religious beliefs may struggle to assert such claims where the mainstream culture does not share the same place-centric form of worship or the same reverence for water or a particular watercourse.

What is water security and what role do religious communities play?

In order to start the debate and sensitize the global arena, the United Nations defined water security as,

> "[t]he capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-

[14] Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Durango: Kivaki Press, 1994), 42.
[15] Brij Gopal, "Holy Ganga and the Mighty Amazon," *Amazonian* 16 (2001): 337–348, 338.

related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability."[16]

This definition is all compassing and calls for the intervention of religious communities in all spheres of life, namely public health protection, economic development, environmental sustainability, climate of peace, political stability and disaster reduction. Some other definitions are summarized in Table 1 below. Climate change and natural variability in the distribution and occurrence of water further complicate the sustainable development of our water resources.[17]

Besides climate change and its effects, other factors affecting water resources security include the following:

— population growth, particularly in water-short regions,

— movement of large numbers of people from the countryside to towns and cities;

— demands for greater food security and higher living standards;

— increased competition between different uses of water resources; and

— pollution from factories, cities, and farmlands.

---

[16] United Nations, *UN Water Water Security and the Global Water Agenda, A UN-Water Analytical Brief* (United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment & Health, 2013). https://www.unwater.org/sites/default/files/app/uploads/2017/05/analytical_brief_oct2013_web.pdf, vi.

[17] Green Facts, Facts on Health and the Environment, https://about.greenfacts.org/donate.htm, accessed 7 November 2020.

Table1: Water Security Definitions
(as extracted from Zeitoun et al., 2016)[18]

Definition of Water Security	**Emphasis**	**Source**
Ensuring that freshwater, coastal and related ecosystems are protected, that sustainable development and political stability are promoted, that every person has access to enough safe water at an affordable cost to lead a healthy and productive life and that vulnerable are protected from the risks of water related hazards.	Equity and the environment	The Hague Ministerial Declaration, 2000
The availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods, ecosystems and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water related risks to people, environments and economies.	Acceptable risk	Grey and Sadoff (2007:569)
Reliable access to water of sufficient quantity and quality for basic human needs, small-scale livelihoods and local ecosystem services, coupled with a well-managed risk of water-related disasters.	Narrowed to small scale livelihoods	WaterAid (2012: 6)
Sustainable and equitable access to water of appropriate quantity and quality for all users (e.g., for drinking water & sanitation, agriculture, energy, industry and ecosystems) whilst reducing the impacts and costs of water shocks and stresses	Maintains the component of equity	Penrose (Penrose, 2012)

[18] Marc Zeitoun, Ana Elisa Cascão, Jeroen Warner, Naho Mirumachi, Nathanial Matthews, Rebecca Farnum and Filipoo Menga, "Transboundary Water Interaction III: Contesting Hegemonic Arrangements," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 17 (2017): 271–294, published online 11 May 2016.

including floods, droughts and pollution to an acceptable level.		
An intrinsically relational, political and multi-scale issue of both water access and control that takes shape in contexts of unequal power relations.	Divergent water securities	Boelens/Seemann (2014: 3)
The sustainable availability of adequate quantities and qualities of water for resilient societies and ecosystems in the face of uncertain global change.	Directly tackling complexity and uncertainty, an adaptive management perspective	Scott et al. (2013).

Water security challenges in Southern Africa and the role of religious communities

The Southern African Development Corridor is generally water scarce and water stressed region with few of its members regarded as having adequate water resources to sustain future generations. Drought is an ever-present threat to the agricultural sector and is likely to increase due to climatic variability and change. This calls for community structures to come together and develop resilient and sustainable approaches The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a health biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters and clear air. The response of the religious communities to this call for biological protection is the principle of *respect* for the rich diversity of life and the ecosystems that support life. Without such respect environmental exploitation will continue and we may irreversibly damage the ability of ecosystems to renew themselves.

The effect of natural disasters and the role of religious communities

There is strong evidence that the intensity, if not the frequency of cyclonic storms is increasing and is likely to grow as sea temperatures

increase.[19] Experience has also shown that the periods of drought and floods are increasing. The Southern African Development Corridor (SADC) experienced the devastating effects of Cyclone Idai. The cyclone had devastating effects on Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi. Families went missing, misplaced and lives were lost. Infrastructure was also destroyed. The region has experienced El Niño and El Niña as alternating events in the last decades. Religious communities worked together with the various government entities to respond to the devastating effects. This was interpreted by many as God's anger and viewed as contradictory to the beliefs of most Christians as water is always connected to blessings, providing life. Global Ministries and the Council of Churches across the region worked together to provide clothes, blankets, medicine, drinking water, psycho-social support and tents for temporary shelter. It was expressed that "Indeed everyone is still in a state of panic and confusion arising from the devastation of Cyclone Idai. . . We keep asking God why, given that God's word says God will not destroy God's people with water again". This natural disaster confirmed once more the strategic role of religious communities in disaster risk reduction. The religious fraternity was active in response and recovery activities during this time. Experience has shown in events like these, often immediate search, rescue and assistance in disasters is provided by loved ones, neighbours and passers-by.[20] The local faith institutions are among these first responders, hence the response of the United Church of Christ in Mozambique as observed. However, in unity all structures across the globe responded to the disaster including other non-

---

[19] Ben Wisner, "Untapped Potential of the World's Religious Communities for Disaster Reduction in an Age of Accelerated Climate Change: An Epilogue & Prologue," *Religion* 40 (2010)*:* 128–131.

[20] *Ibidem*.

governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors.

Drought and the role of religious communities

Limited access to water and sanitation is a risk to health, dignity, and ability to engage in occupations. Wrisdale and co-authors argue that "supply systems must enable people to easily access more water than is essential for survival, so that people can participate in meaningful and productive occupations"[21]. Drought is an ever-present threat to the agricultural sector and is likely to increase due to climatic variability and change. This calls for community structures to come together and develop resilient and sustainable approaches. These trends overlay a pattern of increased urban growth, much of it unplanned and under serviced, and much of it in unsafe locations such as low-lying coastal areas, flood plains, and steep slopes.[22] Water has great cultural and religious significance and this is often reflected in rituals, stories and religious beliefs. For example, in Japan a ritual prayer is held each spring at the Shrine of Takaokami, the God who brings rain. Many religions highlight the importance of water and the link between cleanliness and godliness both in their rituals and their religious texts.[23]

---

[21] Laura Wrisdale, Michael Mokoena, Lutendo S. Mudau, Jo Geere, "Factors That Impact on Access to Water and Sanitation for Older Adults and People with Disability in Rural South Africa: An Occupational Justice Perspective," *Journal of Occupational Science* 24, no. 3 (2017): 259–279.

[22] Ben Wisner, "Untapped Potential of the World's Religious Communities for Disaster Reduction in an Age of Accelerated Climate Change: An Epilogue & Prologue (Aon-Benfield Hazard Research Centre, University College London & Environmental Studies Program, Oberlin College, 2020).

[23] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), "Water and Cultural Diversity towards Sustainability of Water Resources and Cultures" (Washington D.C.: World Water Council, 2002).

Experience has shown for decades that religious communities call on their faith and beliefs that water is a gift that comes from God. This is usually demonstrated in the mobilization and unity among religious communities to pray for rain even during normal flows. When one was young and growing up in the rural areas (in the 1970s and 1980s) food was abundant despite the lack of economic infrastructure and opportunities. Subsistence farming produced enough food to last the better part, if not the whole year. Religious communities came together to pray for rain. This was an annual event. When they went to the sacred mountain to pray for the rain, it was known that when they left to go back to their villages the rain was going to follow them. Rivers will fill up and that was a sign that God had responded positively to their prayers. As children we knew that on that day we had to run back home before the rivers are flooded and we could not risk drowning and losing our lives. This was regarded like a cultural event. The community regarded it as a system of shared beliefs, values, behaviour and symbols that enabled societal processes closely intertwined with water religion. Water from the first rain was used for a number of uses as it was viewed as a blessing from God. Many religious texts describe water as a gift from God emphasizing an imperative to look after water resources. This is often reflected in the belief that water should be available to everyone and not bought and sold as a commodity.

This practice is not a practice of southern Africa alone. According to *The Washington Post*, the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple in Lanham Maryland held a rain prayer session for 10 days in the drought-stricken mid-Atlantic region. The ceremony in the name of Satha Chandi Homam, praises the Devi, the Mother Goddess and was the first of its kind held in the United States. The requirement of the ritual was the services of at least 10 specially trained priests from India. During the 10 days, rain appeared three times, but the priests did not take the credit. According to

Shanmugam Sivacharia (one of the 11 priests who led the ceremony), it was God's holiness that gives the rain or the sun. Ironically, the ceremony was planned months before the drought in order to give spiritual support for the growing Hindu population in the Washington, D.C. area and aid in the construction of a rajagopuram for the temple. When the priests arrived in the United States, they felt the need to pray for rain. Other religious communities in the area also prayed for the rain. Roman Catholic parishes in Southern Maryland prayed for the rain during the weekly intention at Sunday Mass. Area mosques have been concluding their Friday services with the *salat al istiqa*, which is the Islamic drought prayer.[24]

Religious communities and natural resource management

It has been well-established that communities of natural resource users can play important roles in natural resource management.[25] According to Spaling and co-authors three sustainability factors—water supply, regulatory policy and local management—affect the sustainability of a community water supplies.[26] This was derived from a project conducted in Kenya. The changing rainfall patterns and additional withdrawals from new projects were also viewed as threatening available water supplies. The complex nature of our global environment crisis is increasingly

[24] Ernst M. Conradie, "Praying for Rain: Reformed Perspectives from the Southern African Context," *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 3 (2017): 315–326.

[25] Joshua E. Cinner and Shankar Aswani, "Integrating Customary Management into Marine Conservation," *Biological Conservation* 140 (2007): 201–216. Ghazala Shahabuddin and Madhu Rao, "Do Community-conserved Areas Effectively Conserve Biological Diversity? Global Insight and the Indian Context," *Biological Conservation* 143 (2010): 2926–2936.

[26] Harry Spaling, Geoffrey Brouwer and Jesse Njoka, "Factors Affecting the Sustainability of a Community Water Supply Project in Kenya," *Journal of Development in Practice* 24, no. 7 (2014): 797–811.

evident as a result of more severe weather patterns, endangered and extinct species and the use of non-renewable resources such as oil, depletions of forests and fisheries, pollution and scarcity of water. The large-scale problem of climate change is now more visible to a larger public, while the massive extent of species extinction still remains invisible to most people. According to Tucker, these two global challenges suggest that rapid increase in our population and industrializing presence is altering not only the face of the planet and its climate, but also the process of natural selection itself.[27]

Many religious communities have been involved in efforts to mitigate poverty, hunger, and disease, but now they are recognizing this cannot be done adequately without attention to the rapid deteriorating environment. Sufficiency of food, shelter and health for humans depend on a thriving biosphere to support life for the Earth community.[28] Prayer for environmental and developmental problems is well known, but what is becoming ever more self-evident is that they cannot be solved by science, technology, law, politics, or economics alone. That is because we are more aware that environmental and development issues are, in large measure, social issues. Thus *fixing* the environment through technology or regulating development through legislation will not be sufficient. The community is being pressed to see the linkage between environment and people, between healthy ecosystems and healthy social systems, between environmental protection and poverty alleviation. The challenge is then being creating the whole communities, where humans are not dominating nature, but rather recognize their profound dependence on the

---

[27] Mary Evelyn Tucker, *World Religions, the Earth Charter and Sustainability* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
[28] *Ibidem*.

larger community of life.[29]

The most controversial aspect is what should be the correct interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis:

> "God blessed them (humans), saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth'. God also said, 'Look, to you I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food. And to all the wild animals, all the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that creep along the ground, I give all the foliage of the plants as their food and so it was'." (Genesis 1: 28 -30)

The same assurance is given in Genesis 9:1. Obviously, a literal interpretation would justify the exploitation of resources for the benefit only of humans, but several Christian exegetes have supported a different interpretation, since the dominion concept is not absolute in the Jewish tradition, but rather a delegate mandate (similar to the Israel King's mission to govern his people). In spite of this milder interpretation, it is fair to recognize that the Judaeo-Christian tradition includes many other references to this clear pre-eminence of human beings over the rest of the Creation. All sectors including religious communities are aware that the rapid population growth and expansion into cities is negatively impacting on the availability of water resources.

The environmental crisis has been well documented as a plural reality in its various interconnected aspects of resource depletion and species extinction, pollution growth and climate change, population explosion and overconsumption. Thus, while we are using the term *environmental*

---

[29] *Ibidem*.

crisis in a singular form, we recognize the diverse nature of the interrelated problems. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about. These changes will require the special assistance and commitment of those in the religious community. Indeed, the document calls for the cooperation of natural and social scientists, business and industrial leaders and also religious leaders. It concludes with a call for environmentally sensitive attitudes and behaviours, which religious communities can help to articulate. Religious leaders and laypersons are increasingly speaking out for protection of the environment. The Dalai Lama has made numerous statements on the importance of environmental protection and has proposed that Tibet should be designated a zone of special ecological integrity.

Religious communities and community-based resource management

While community-based resource management (CBRM) systems frequently include religious beliefs, little has been done to explore and document the role that religion plays in traditional CBRM. A water-centric approach to embrace the water-food-energy nexus in the context of climate change for the southern African region is crucial and religious communities need to be part of the agenda going forward. Table 2 summarises examples of CBRM in parts of southern Africa.

Table 2: Selected countries in which community based natural resources management is being used as a strategy.

Country	Nature of CBNRM Programme
Botswana	Natural Resources Management Project-NRMP/Community-Based Natural Resources Management CBNRM
Mozambique	Tchuma Tchato 'Our Wealth' and Chipande Chetu programs in Mozambique
Zambia	Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMADE)
Namibia	Communal Conservancy Programme, Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE)
Zimbabwe	Communal Areas Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE)

Religious communities have been a strategic stakeholder in the implementation of projects although this has been mostly informal and less formalised. Growing up one would see the Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Zionists and other churches participate in groundwater supply through borehole installations, standpipes and cleaning around main water bodies like rivers, lakes, wetlands, and springs. The elements of community participation and management as viewed by Harvey and Reed are witnessed during these activities where religious communities

although faced by limitations such as lack of sustainability, mechanisms to replace the wisdom and skills of strategic individuals, lack of funding for operations and maintenance of schemes, poor institutional arrangements and communication, among other factors were observed.[30]

One observation has been that most traditional African practices are consistent with modern day conservation ethics. Elders would only tell you that there were water bodies, forests or mountains that it was forbidden to climb, play at or swim. This included fishing at particular lakes. The ascription of supernatural and psychic powers to a portion of the environment and protecting such resources through taboos, laws and totemic believe helped in conserving and protecting the environment and its resources. The African beliefs and taboos helped in enforcing rules and regulations for environmental preservation because people refrained from using resources carelessly, especially as it is related to sacred places. This has been used by religious communities too in the name of receiving blessings from God although not widely documented.

Conclusion

"The church must play its role as agent of life in its fullness in the secular sphere with dedication"[31]. As Fana Marutla, president of SAICE, remarks, "Preserving the natural environment especially water resources should be considered as part of an investment in our future generations and should be a commitment by each member of society". It is recommended that governments take into consideration the strategic

[30] Peter A. Harvey and Robert A. Reed, "Community–managed Water Supplies in Africa: Sustainable or Dispensable?" *Oxford University Press and Community Development Journal* 42, no. 3 (July 2006): 365–378.

[31] Attie van Niekerk, "A Centre for Community Life in Its Fullness," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 3, Art. #1448, 6.

role and importance of religious communities in water resources planning, source water protection by tapping into their wisdom and the governance experience of their religious leaders.

Bibliography

Agrawal, Arun, and Clark C. Gibson. "Enhancement and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation." *World Development* 27, no. 4 (1999): 629–649.

Boelens, Rutgerd, and Miriam Seemann. "Forced Engagements: Water Security and Local Rights Formalization in Yanque, Colca Valley, Peru." *Human Organization* 73 (2014): 1–12.

Cajete, Gregory. *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Durango: Kivaki Press, 1994.

Cinner, Joshua E., and Shankar Aswani. "Integrating Customary Management into Marine Conservation." *Biological Conserv*ation 140 (2007): 201–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2007.08.008.

Conradie, Ernst M. "Praying for Rain: Reformed Perspectives from the Southern African Context." *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 3 (2017): 315–326.

Flanagan Cathleen, and Melinda Laituri. "Local Cultural Knowledge and Water Resource Management: The Wind River Indian Reservation." *Environmental Management* 33 (2004): 262, 269.

Gopal, Brij. "Holy Ganga and the Mighty Amazon." *Amazonian* 16 (2001): 337–348.

Green Facts. "Facts on Health and the Environment". https://about.greenfacts.org/donate.html. Accessed 7 Nov. 2020.

Grey, David, and Claudia W. Sadoff. "Sink or Swim? Water Security for Growth and Development." *Water Policy* 9 (2007): 545–571.

Hardin, Garrett. "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–1248.

Harvey, Peter A., and Robert A. Reed. "Community-managed Water Supplies in Africa: Sustainable or Dispensable?" *Oxford University Press and Community Development Journal* 42, no. 3 (Jul 2006): 365–378.

Kumar, Kireet. *Water Management in Himalayan Ecosystem: A Study of Natural Springs of Almora*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1996.

Lansing, J. Stephen. "Balinese 'Water Temples' and the Management of Irrigation." *American Anthropologist* 89 (1987): 326–341.

Larson, B. Rhett. "Holy Water and Human Rights: Indigenous Peoples' Religious-Rights Claims to Water Resources." *Arizona Journal of Environmental Law & Policy* 2 (2011): 81.

Penrose, J.-P. "Delivering Water Security: The Challenges and Opportunities for DFID." Presentation given for Oxford Water Security Network. Department for International Development, Oxford, 2012.

Risko, Juliet. "Sacred Springs: Perceptions of Religion and Water in Village Communities of Uttarakhand." Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, 2018: 2852.

Scott, Christopher A., Robert G. Varady, Francisco Meza, Elma Montaña, Graciela B. de Raga, Brian Luckman, and Christopher Martius. "Science-policy Dialogues for Water Security: Addressing Vulnerability and Adaptation to Global Change in the Arid Americas." *Environment* 54 (2012): 30–42.

Shahabuddin, Ghazala, and Madhu Rao. "Do Community-conserved Areas Effectively Conserve Biological Diversity? Global Insight and the Indian Context." *Biological Conservation* 143 (2010): 2926–2936.

Spaling, Harry, Geoffrey Brouwer, Jesse Njoka. "Factors Affecting the Sustainability of a Community Water Supply Project in Kenya." *Journal of Development in Practice* 24, no. 7 (2014): 797–811.

Trelease, Frank J. "The Concept of Reasonable Beneficial Use in the Law of Surface Streams." *Wyoming Law Journal* 12, no. 1 (1957): 1–21.

Tucker, Mary E. *World Religions, the Earth Charter and Sustainability*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). "Water and Cultural Diversity towards Sustainability of Water Resources and Cultures." Washington D.C.: World Water Council, 2002.

UN Water "Water Security & the Global Water Agenda, A UN Water Analytical Brief". United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment & Health, 2013. https://www.unwater.org/sites/default/files/app/uploads/2017/05/analytical_brief_oct2013_web.pdf.

USAID/SWP. "Improving Water Security, a Process to Address 'Too Little, Too Much, Too Dirty, Too Erratic'", Toolkit #1. 2012. https://winrock.org/document/toolkit-1-improving-water-security/.

Van Niekerk, Attie. "A Centre for Community Life in Its Fullness." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 3 (2015): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i3.1448.

WaterAid. "Water Security Framework." London: Water Aid, 2012.

Wisner, Ben. "Untapped Potential of the World's Religious Communities for Disaster Reduction in an Age of Accelerated Climate Change: An Epilogue & Prologue." *Religion* 40 (2010)*:* 128–131.

Wrisdale, Laura, Michael Mokoena, Lutendo Mudau, and Jo Geere. **"**Factors That Impact on Access to Water and Sanitation for Older Adults and People with Disability in Rural South Africa: An Occupational Justice Perspective." *Journal of Occupational Science* 24, no. 3 (2017): 259–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2017. 1338190.

Zeitoun, Marc, Ana Elisa Cascão, Jeroen Warner, Naho Mirumachi, Nathanial Matthews, Rebecca Farnum, and Filipoo Menga. "Transboundary Water Interaction III: Contesting Hegemonic Arrangements." *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 17 (2017): 271–294. Published online 11 May 2016. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10784-016-9325-x.

16. ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: PERSPECTIVES OF A CHURCH AND COMMUNITY LEADER IN THE TOWNSHIP OF KAALFONTEIN, SOUTH AFRICA

Siboniso Ngobese

The relevance of ecological challenges for our religious community

In our Christian religion we believe that Godliness is next to cleanliness.[1] In simple terms, the Earth belongs to God and the humans are stewards in charge of its care. Humans have the role of protecting all created things, not abusing or destroying them. Ecological challenges affect our theology because we know that the Bible teaches us that we must take care of the environment and the bible also says it is a sin if you know what to do and you do not do it. We see the world full of ignorant religious communities who disobey God by not taking care of the environment. And it challenges us to be more involved in issues of ecology and be trained in theology of ecology.

Because of ecological challenges like unstable weather and abnormal seasonal patterns, it makes it difficult for us in planning for future religious community events whereby we visit different houses for prayers, delivering of food parcels, home based care as well as public prayer

[1] Paper Based on presentations at the conference "Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019, and the webinar "Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa", Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

events for example on the occasion of elections, school examinations, road safety campaigns and others. It also affects our mind that what kind of earth will our children inherit from us in years to come if we do not start now to learn to take care of our earth.

While *ecological problems* are today mostly used to describe different environmental problems, I personally believe the term is misleading, as *ecological problems* are everyone's problems, and we must all contribute towards coming up with solutions to mitigating destructive patterns.

The effect of ecological challenges on our community

One core ecological problem in our community is the problem of waste and waste management. It is a problem which Kaalfontein shares with many South African metropolitan areas. South African townships are plagued by the volumes of solid waste being illegally disposed in open spaces along road verges as well as in streams.

This is aggravated by the fact that most landfills lack proper on-site waste management thereby contributing to additional threats to the environment. In the long-term, landfills leak and pollute ground water and other neighbouring environmental habitats making waste management very difficult. This leads to land degradation and causes numerous health risks.

These health risks are among other things the following:

1. In informal businesses and informal settlements fires are a common source of energy due to the lack of electricity infrastructure in many areas. This causes lots of smoke in the air and reduces the air quality, which may lead to smoke, and this may lead to respiratory illnesses.

2. Contaminated water is also another challenge we face as a community. Most of our water streams are not fully hygienic. This also causes major health problems, but the main problem is wastewater resulting from reckless and improper management.

3. Environmental pollution through illegal dumping of waste is our biggest challenge, as it makes the areas risky and hazardous places for kids to play in.

4. While climate change is a global challenge, we also experience it first-hand through crop and habitat losses. We have for instance been experiencing heat waves that damage plants and vegetation.

5. Another key challenge is also a lack of environmental education in the communities. Many people resort to cutting trees, burning bushes without reason, throwing garbage in the street and burning discarded waste in every corner of our streets. Much of this happens because of lack of awareness and knowledge of pro-environmental attitudes.

Gilgal Bible Church's engagement with ecological challenges in the community

As religious community, Gilgal Bible Church runs community outreach programmes where we engage in gardening to save and retain our plants and cleaning of our parks and grounds.

Moreover, we advocate for elimination of illegal dumping, minimization of harmful chemicals and proper management waste as well as proper management of scarce resources such as water. We promote the implementation of recycling habits into everyone's daily lives, as we know that this can effectively help lessen landfill waste, conserve natural resources, save habitats, reduce pollution, cut down on energy

consumption, and slow down global warming.

We have working relationships with different organizations that deal with issues of environment and other issues. Making sure that we organize workshops and dialogues to train our religious community and the community at large. We also working with schools encouraging them to start planting trees and this is happening mostly at the beginning of the year and the recycling that is happening daily in the schools. And we have started to engage with faith-based organizations to start encouraging churches to be involved in the taking care of the environment.

Solutions to these ecological challenges

There are of course many solutions to ecological challenges that can be implemented. They range from replacing disposable items with reusables, reducing paper waste, conserving water, using solar power for electricity, buy locally sourced goods, implement recycling systems and many others.

Ecological education is very important. In my view, leaders of faith need to start using their platforms in the church (sermons, bible study groups, conferences, compose songs) to teach about ecological sustainability and solutions to ecological challenges. Faith-based organizations, communities and other stakeholders like government institutions must work together in dealing with solutions to ecological challenges. In this, we must use platforms like social media, television, radio, newspapers to educate our communities at large about taking care of the environment. Religious leaders have a crucial role in this, but there must also be further training such as workshops and dialogue formats for the leaders themselves, as they are important multipliers.

It is my hope that when we all work together, we can change this world, and that our future generations will inherit the world that is healthy

to live on. So that we may take care of the earth as it was given to us by God for us to live in.

In the future, Gilgal Bible Church would like to implement environmental education workshops, possibly in partnership with government and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure that the community at large is well educated in terms of ecology and will engage in minimising the challenges arising from it.

17. EDUCATION FOR ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY (AMONGST ALL FAITH COMMUNITIES)

Kate Davies

Introduction

Building agency to mobilize ecological transformation cannot happen without people understanding the human behaviours that are fuelling the ecological crisis.[1] However, possessing knowledge and *being aware*, doesn't guarantee action. Drawing on the underpinning value systems of our deep-seated faith convictions could be key to radical and permanent behaviour change.

At the start of this conversation, I choose to talk about *learning* rather than *education,* which appears in the title I was given. Education is a formal term that implies the transfer of knowledge through an institutionalised process with a fixed agenda, syllabus and outcome for a defined cohort of those being taught. In many contexts, Christian churches have used a didactic *educational* approach. This has too often entrenched patriarchy and control over members of congregations, particularly women and young people.

Learning, on the other hand is an open-ended, shared and respectful process that we do together in small groups and communities. It involves an ongoing cyclical process of mapping, planning, acting and reflecting.

[1] Paper presented at the conference "Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

In a subtle way, *learning together* more deeply acknowledges the contexts, life stories and epistemologies of all participants and, because of this, it empowers and encourages agency.

Churches are deeply rooted in local communities. They are ideally situated to encourage and support active participation in a process that would support life-long and life-affirming learning about ecological sustainability.

Why should churches and faith organizations get involved in earthkeeping and learning for sustainability?

We are finally waking up to the fact that there is an ecological crisis. With nearly 8 billion people in the world, we cannot expect our finite planet to supply all our human needs without something collapsing. Ecosystems are degraded and planetary boundaries have been breached. Unjust global economic systems benefit the already rich and perpetuate a widening poverty gap which disadvantages the majority of humankind. The Earth and the community of life she supports bears the brunt of our heavy human footprint.

The Abrahamic faiths worship a Creator God. We recognise that all that God made is VERY GOOD, yet if we take the blinkers off our eyes, we see a world around us that we have spoiled and violated.

The sacred texts of all the major world religions recognize the value of nature and refer to elements like water, rain, trees, seeds, mountains, deserts and droughts and floods, as metaphors and symbols of healing, blessing, nourishment, restoration and also, punishment. We have become infatuated by consumerism and are often deaf to this message.

From a practical point of view, South Africa's formal education system has failed the majority of the population, both under Apartheid and since the dawn of democracy in 1994. This also applies in other parts of

the continent where colonial education systems have been inadequate and discriminatory. Ecological learning should have been embedded in school curricula, but it wasn't. Children should have learnt about sustainability, but they haven't. Children and adults have fallen through the cracks of formal school systems in Africa.

Churches and faith-based organizations are ideally placed to become centres that provide lifelong informal learning

People meet regularly, at least weekly, in a trusted and familiar environment. Faith communities are embedded in every community and are by far the most widely networked of any civil society organization. Ninety percent of all Africans belong to a faith community of one kind or another. Africa has traditionally been an oral society – so adult learning takes place through storytelling and sharing of ideas and actions. This is an ideal context for participatory learning about earthkeeping.

Faith leaders are generally better trusted than most political and civic leaders. They are trained to lead and to teach. In addition, faith communities are founded on value systems and ethical principles that follow the golden rule to "treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves". This reference to *others* should, but frequently doesn't, include nature. They work for good and don't, or shouldn't, have vested interest in power, status and money.

— If churches and faith communities are so well-placed to be centres of life-long learning about sustainability, why have they been silent?

— Why has ecotheology not been embraced by the churches?

— Why have ecological literacy and action not been mainstreamed?

The Abrahamic faiths set 'man' apart from and above nature – espousing an anthropocentric theology and even worse, an andro-centric world view. This must be challenged. Until we recognize that all humans are inextricably part of and dependent on the web of life, we cannot hope to live in harmony with each other and creation. Once women and all creation are equally valued and respected caring for the earth should follow.

For long, there has been no mandate from church structures or leadership to mainstream earthkeeping behaviours. Social and economic injustice is considered to be more urgent and takes centre stage.

In many Christian churches there is a greater emphasis on a salvation narrative than stewardship or custodianship of God's gifts and creativity.

There is a genuine lack of environmental knowledge amongst faith leadership, which leaves priests, preachers and pastors uncertain about the underpinning science and reluctant to address the topic.

Ecologically informed lay members are sometimes seen as a threat to church leadership rather than a source of information. Given support and encouragement, eco-champions in congregations have the potential to lead on a new earthkeeping movement, but the leadership need to have the confidence to give them the space to operate.

In South Africa *green* ecological concerns have been construed as white middle-class issues while most black people deal daily with social and economic injustice. This understanding is changing as climate change, food, health, land use, energy, waste and water challenges have become cross-cutting issues for everyone.

What have the faiths to offer? The rationale behind the formation of SAFCEI, the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute

With emerging knowledge and understanding of the growing ecological crisis, a small group of Christians and people from a variety of faiths in southern Africa have for several decades now, been acknowledging that the religious sector is a missing role-player in caring for the planet. Yet as Christians, and people of faith, we share value systems that have much in common with environmental justice organizations.

We encourage simplicity: Live simply that others may simply live. We support the principles of sufficiency and sustainability – the earth has material limits and we do not need to accumulate more than we need. We reject consumerism and wastefulness valuing relationships over possessions. We encourage sharing and caring for the community of vulnerable and voiceless (poor and nature). We are urged to appreciate the beauty of creation. Values of humility, gratitude and hope are embedded in our faith praxis. We are interconnected and dependent on the whole community of life. The values espoused by the concept of Ubuntu should apply to the whole earth community, not just to humans.

SAFCEI was born out of these underpinning values. It is a multi-faith organisation which supports and encourages eco-justice learning, action and advocacy amongst the religious sector of the region.

SAFCEI's approach to learning for ecological transformation: How do we encourage faiths to embrace ecotheology and become earthkeeping communities?

SAFCEI has used a two-pronged approach.

Working with senior faith leadership: Over many years, SAFCEI has challenged and encouraged senior faith leadership to speak out and advocate for eco-justice, and called for ethical leadership amongst politicians and the corporate sector to ensure the wellbeing of people and planet before profits.

However, senior faith leaders are busy people with many and diverse calls on their time. With a dualistic approach that separates science and religion and little historic precedence to care for the earth and her creatures, it has only been a few champions who have owned and promoted the sustainability agenda.

At the turn of the century, ecological justice rarely got a mention in churches. Over time, this has begun to change. Most major faith groups and mainline churches have now issued statements and adopted resolutions about climate change, economic and ecological injustice, wastefulness and other ecological concerns even if these are not acted upon. Examples of these include: The Earth Charter; The Kairos and Oikos documents from Diakonia Council of Churches in South Africa; The Accra Confession – Covenanting for Justice in the Economy of the Earth, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2004; Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* published in 2015 – Caring for the earth, our common home; the Wuppertal Declaration – Kairos for Creation calling for the WCC to declare *a decade for the healing of creation*; and statements by The Ecumenical Patriarch, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other collectives.

In spite of these efforts, there is not yet a tipping point and the majority

of churches only pay lip-service to earthkeeping. Visionary ecological leadership is still generally lacking amongst global faith leaders.

Working with grassroots eco-congregations

SAFCEI has long supported and encouraged local eco-congregations to become centres of sustainability and to set themselves up as examples in their communities. Using a grassroots approach, congregations have helped develop worship materials and been guided on how to manage their resources. SAFCEI has helped congregations undertake participatory ecological audits, learning to measure energy, water, and land use and waste, as well as to review and reduce their ecological footprint. Congregations have also been encouraged to participate in local and global eco-advocacy and action.

The eco-congregation initiative was only successful when it was driven by local congregational eco-champions. The eco-congregation would only flourish where there was endorsement and support from the church leadership and institution. Resource materials, shared newsletters, shared ideas and activities with clusters of congregations still wasn't mainstreaming learning for sustainability.

SAFCEI didn't have the staff capacity to support a large number of individual congregations in their different contexts and church structures have not yet taken on this responsibility.

The global Anglican Communion and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa church have been pioneers in the field and taken a lead with a number of initiatives including:

— Developing a fifth Mark of Mission: *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth;*

— Formulating numerous statements and resolutions;

— Appointing environmental co-ordinators at global and diocesan levels;

— Appointing a full-time environmental coordinator in Southern Africa and in every diocese;

— Set up a lively *Green Anglican* network encouraging actions at the local level.

However, even with all this in place, eco-action has not been mainstreamed in Anglican churches.

Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT)

Reflecting on why learning for sustainability wasn't being mainstreamed and how to raise the level of faith-based eco-justice action to another level, SAFCEI embarked on FLEAT, a new initiative in 2014. This work has largely replaced intensive support for individual congregations because it has a wider reach and multiplies itself.

FLEAT focusses on congregational and faith organization leaders, and not specifically senior ordained clergy. The programme includes training, learning and follow-up with faith leaders who are selected for their interest and desire to develop an eco-faith approach with their faith communities. The programme strives to enhance the capacity of faith leaders to engage with their communities in responding to difficult situations brought about by environmental degradation and climate change and to develop advocacy tools for eco-justice. When different faiths come together to address common challenges, they are able, through interaction and partnerships, to work effectively towards co-creating greater climate resilience.

Leaders of faiths have a special platform from which to speak out against socio-ecological and socio-economic injustices, particularly those facing Africa. Through advocacy training, FLEAT aims to build a network of change agents of faith across southern Africa, who are positioned to effect positive changes in their communities. The FLEAT programme cultivates a space for mutual respect, where different ways of doing things are understood to be opportunities for learning.

While we wait for ecotheology and eco-ethics to be mainstreamed into formal theological training, the FLEAT approach to learning if filling the gap. Using a participatory learning model and working together in a supportive environment, FLEAT has become an effective model to multiply communities of eco-practice.

What have we learnt?

Science, religion and indigenous wisdom need to be hearing each other. Science has taken the world apart, but we need a moral compass that touches people's hearts and guidance from the wisdom of the elders. Well-informed and open-minded faith communities can provide space for learning, dialogue, and action.

We need urgently to provide eco-stewardship training for our priests, preachers and pastors. Senior leadership must give the authority and mandate to pastors and preachers in the congregations, but it is this local leadership who own *social power* and are change agents and who can give champions in congregations the permission, agency, and freedom to act.

No one size fits all. Our faiths, our churches all have different contexts. While we can learn how other churches embrace sustainability and operate, through participatory conversations and consensus, we must navigate the best and most appropriate way for our own faith group to respond to the ecological crisis.

The emphasis should be on *learning together* rather than *education and teaching*. In a faith community context, participatory and active learning approaches are more effective than behaviourist, preach and teach methodologies. We must take life-long learning seriously.

Africa has an oral tradition, but in spite of this, written resource materials are often a first line of response. These may be inappropriate and a wasted investment. Informed and contextual community participation, planning and decision making is essential if the movement is to be owned by the community of faith.

Ecotheology and learning for sustainability has the potential to breathe new life into our churches and communities. Over the centuries we have come to embrace a variety of theologies including, more recently, liberation theology, black theology and feminist theology. Now it is time for us to mainstream ecotheology which draws together all these threads to promote and ensure the wellbeing of people and the earth community. It will bring both care and justice to the whole community of life and future generations.

18. HOW CAN RELIGIOUS ACTORS BECOME ACTIVE FOR ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILTY IN THEIR CONTEXTS? LESSONS FROM THE GREEN ANGLICANS MOVEMENT

Rachel Mash

Introduction

Green Anglicans is the name of the Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, consisting of six countries (South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique).[1] The movement has spread to the Anglican Province of Central Africa (Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia) and to the Anglican Church of Kenya (GAM – Green Anglicans Movement of Kenya) as well as DRC Congo and Rwanda.

This paper looks at the methodology used by the Green Anglicans movement, the key stakeholders that we seek to reach, the growth of the movement, and finally, attempts to identify some of the reasons that have enabled the Green Anglicans to move from an organisation to a movement.

---

[1] Paper presented at the webinar "Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa," in Berlin, Germany, 1 September 2020.

Methodology of the Green Anglicans movement

The Green Anglicans movement believes that there are three levels of developing environmental ministry; start with spirituality, act local, and advocacy.

Level one: start with spirituality

The Green Anglicans movement is part of the global Anglican Communion Environmental Network. The fifth mark of mission was added to the Marks of Anglican Mission in 1990: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth."

It is very tempting to jump straight into environmental action and the danger is that you end up with the same church – just with a recycling bin outside. The DNA of the church has not changed, there may be a small *green team* or group pushing the ecological *agenda* but there has been no internal transformation. What happens then is that the small team burns out or loses a member and fades away. The church itself becomes complacent, because they consider themselves to be a *green church*.

So therefore, it is important to start with an environmental spirituality. In the Anglican Church of Southern Africa one of the key things for us has been to embrace the Season of Creation, from 1 September to 4 October (Feast of St Francis), when for those five weeks we encourage churches to preach, pray and act for Creation. The Season of Creation was first adopted as part of our liturgical calendar at a Provincial Synod eight years ago and has now become an established part of the church year for many parishes.

St Francis day was an established day in the church year, when traditionally people have a blessing of the pets, but we have tried to encourage people to consider the wider issues of biodiversity on this day.

Other key ways that we have used to challenge the spirituality of

the church has been through clergy workshops, delving deep into the Bible, looking at what the scriptures teach us. In 2023 we ran an online course looking at what the Old Testament and New Testament tell us about care for Creation.

For the last five years we have embraced the idea of a Lenten fast for the Earth. Lent has traditionally been a time when we abstain from certain things such as alcohol or chocolate, but we have encouraged people to abstain from damaging the planet, by reducing their use of plastic, water, meat, fuel, and energy. This has been a very popular event and has been adopted by other denominations.

Other key days where we provide materials such as sermon ideas, dramas for the young people, song and hymn suggestions, Sunday school ideas and more, include World Environment Day, World Water Day, Earth Day and so on.

We also encourage people to hold services outside – church in Creation, whether it be at the local park, in the church garden, or creating a whole fun day out with church at the beach or on the mountain.

Another important aspect has been organising eco-retreats for clergy and developing the idea of holy hikes for young people – a hike that connects young people with nature but also incorporating space for them to connect with environmental spirituality.

Level two: local action

The second stage is to encourage churches to get involved in local action and greening their churches. Depending on their context they might focus on waste (recycling or clean ups); water saving (audit and water harvesting); tree planting; vegetable growing; solar geysers, or reducing their use of plastic, paper and electricity.

With all these actions it is important to speak the language of faith. Former president Nelson Mandela said, “When you speak to a person in

a language they understand, you speak to their head, when you speak in their mother tongue, you speak to their heart". So let me share some examples:

Water. As Christians we are baptized into the family of God through the sacred waters of baptism. So therefore, water is our sacred element, we need to save water because it is precious, not just to reduce the municipal bill. We all know that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, but most of us think that the water used for our baptism came from a tap – so we need to connect that water with the river it originated from. When the church connects to a local river as *their "Jordan River"* they will be more likely to maintain a sustained presence doing clean-ups and planting on the river banks.

Waste. We are reminded in the story of the feeding of the 5000 that Jesus said, "let there be no waste" and before starting any composting or recycling project it is important for people to see it as a way of following Jesus' model of assuring that there is no waste.

Gardening. We partner with an organization called "God's way of farming" which helps participants in home gardening courses see that just as it is part of our Christian ministry to care for the sick, it is also our ministry to heal the sick earth. God was the first gardener, he placed Adam and Eve in a garden to till it, and so gardening is very much a spiritual endeavour.

Tree planting. There are so many passages in scripture which refer to the importance of tree planting, but a powerful one is Rev 22:2 "the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations". Many dioceses have now incorporated tree blessings into their big events, where bishops bless trees of confirmation candidates, and young couples bless a tree on their marriage day. Trees are planted for funerals, for baptism and to celebrate

important patronal festivals. This ensures that we move from planting trees for a photo shoot (which are likely to die) to growing trees, as people take ownership and see the tree growing as a spiritual act.

We have found that it is helpful to use faith language rather than technical environmental language. People say, "When I hear about the environment, I think of school studies". So, we have chosen to use words such as 'care for Creation' rather than 'environment', renewing of rivers, God's way of farming, and so on.

Level three: advocacy

This is the hardest level to achieve. Whenever we have a Provincial Synod (our highest level of decision making) we put forward motions and have been successful on getting resolutions passed to divest the Church's money from fossil fuels, to call for a ban on fracking and nuclear expansion, and to call for a green new deal moving rapidly from coal to green energy.

One of the key achievements has been to *green the canons* which means that we have adapted the canons of the church to include environmental sustainability in the role of parish councils, building regulations and liturgical reform.

We have taken part in many marches, petitions and activities such as Fridays for Future, climate justice, anti-nuclear, anti-fracking, and campaigns around plastic pollution. With advocacy it is important to get involved with partnerships with secular organizations and interfaith groups.

Key stakeholders

We have identified our key stakeholders including children, youth and clergy.

Children. We prepared the Ryan the Rhino Sunday School book and other one-off materials such as *oceans of plastic*. We have conducted Sunday School teacher training in dioceses and archdeaconries. We have also organised Sunday School festivals and fun events for World Environment Day.

Young people. This was our key constituency, so we conduct training for key leaders. We have discovered that when you have environmental conferences or workshops you only get *the converted* so we moved to asking for slots at regular youth events such as diocesan events or events of organizations such as the Anglican Students Federation or Servers Guild, for example. We also prepared a youth manual called Care for Creation, which has a series of six sessions to be used with youth groups or confirmation candidates. Hikes have been a very important part of building relationships and a love for nature as you will not protect what you do not love. We also have eco-camps (though these are expensive) which have been very effective.

We have identified *movers and shakers* who we resource and get together for mutual inspiration and encouragement.

Social media has been a very important way to grow the movement and we have a large reach. Our Facebook page Green Anglicans has over 50,000 members and our Twitter account has 5000 followers.

Clergy. Here the focus has been on clergy training, and we have managed to reach almost all of the 29 dioceses, though not all the clergy attended the training. The focus here was on the biblical basis for creation care, creation care and liturgy, and the impact of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution in Africa. We have tried to get an environmental coordinator for each diocese and most of them now have one, though some of them are not very active. We have focussed also on providing materials, every year we provide a booklet for the Season of

Creation, liturgical materials for World Environment Day and other key days.

Bishops. It is more difficult to make an impact on the bishops, but we have been able to run a workshop on the environmental SDGs with all the bishops present. One of the important activities has been *eco-bishops* where our environmental bishops from the Anglican Church of Southern Africa met with eco-bishops from other provinces to share ideas and inspiration.

Growth of the movement

From the six countries of the Province of Southern Africa, the movement has spread to now include 12 countries across Africa. How has this occurred?

Central Africa. A key Conference was held in Lusaka, with young representatives from ACSA (Southern Africa) and CPCA (Central Africa – Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana). The young people travelled together by bus, crossing different countries to get there and this was a great bonding experience – the friendships have held! It was important to realize that the movement is bigger than one small region, as environmental challenges cross all borders. It was also important for our South African young people to hear firsthand about the impact of climate change on countries such as Malawi. The Archbishop of Canterbury visited the young people which made them feel very proud and affirmed.

Kenya and the DR Congo. The Conference of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) organized a youth conference as which the young people of southern Africa shared the vision of Green Anglicans. It was interesting to see the importance of *branding* as the t-shirts they wore raised awareness in a visual way. Later on, people referred to them as being

the "missionaries of the green movement".

Lutheran Church. In Eswatini the Anglican and Lutherans have started working together and have formed a movement called Green Lushe (Lutherans and Ama-sheshe – Anglicans)

Brazil and Portugal. Through social media and various networks, we have formed a relationship with the other Portuguese speaking countries (together with Mozambique and Angola), sharing our materials and social media. A Green Anglicans group, Rede Lusofona, has been formed.

New Zealand. The Anglican Schools in New Zealand saw our "Ryan the Rhino" Sunday School book and asked to adapt it with stories from the Maori culture and it has now been released as "Kelvin the Kakapo".

Lessons learned

What have been some of the factors that have led to the growth of the Green Anglicans movement? What has enabled it to move from organization to movement? Much of this material is taken from an evaluation of the program by Tearfund,[2] including quotes by participants from interviews and focus group discussions.

Spiritual basis of the movement

The movement is God centred and biblically shaped. The basis is the fifth Mark of Mission and each activity is underpinned with scriptural references. It also leads to spiritual revival as people are really enjoying

[2] Kareithi, R.M. "Review of Green Anglicans: What is Working and Why?" Anglican Church of Central and Southern Africa and Tearfund United Kingdom in association with DAS Associates (Pty) Limited, South Africa, February 2018.

the eco-spirituality such as outdoor services, holy hikes, eco-retreats, and new liturgies. People are understanding the importance of environmental ministry as a core part of their spiritual journey, not just an *added extra*.

From interviews with clergy and bishops we have learned a lot. To begin with, people knew about God's creation and their spiritual journey, but never connected the two. Green Anglicans has made it possible for people to connect their faith with their love and concern for the environment. We seek a theological approach to climate change, and a suitable language within the eucharist to address the crisis. People are really embracing an eco-spirituality.

> "It is almost like people are re-embracing their spiritual roots of what it means to be a believer on African soil. I think that the dominion/individualist theology is one of the legacies of colonialism. The theology of water has also been a big ah-ha moment for many people as they realize that the waters of baptism mean that water is our sacred element." (comment from Focus Group Discussion with Clergy)

Young people have internalized, owned and are self-driven by the moral conviction of being Earth-keepers

The movement has prioritized the role of young people, with interns, youth coordinators, recognizing their key role, this has helped the Young Green Anglicans to develop a sense of self-worth, positive attitude and self-drive which comes from within. It is further fuelled by the newly acquired and/or rekindled realization of God's command to care for mother earth. Active Young Green Anglicans reported that they are proud to and want to continue adhering to God's command. They radiated an exciting infectious energy and reported that the self-value keeps them proactive in planning, implementing eco-friendly activities and influencing others without authorities giving instructions. We have heard

the following from focus group discussions with active Young Green Anglicans:

> "This is our thing. Nobody is talking down to us! We used to go to church, now we are church. I understand that God loved the world, he also loved us and also the creation. Because God gave us the land to take care of it, it means I am taking care of the environment. It makes me aware of the fact that God has made us all responsible. It has taught me a lot. When I became part of the movement I had no idea of what was happening. It makes me proud because I can understand why it is important for us as Christians and people of faith. For me it is an issue of stewardship and since I got involved I understood more and more how I have to be a steward."

Leadership from the front: the environment is a topical issue supported at the highest level within the Anglican church

Green Anglicans has identified diocesan environmental clergy, canons and chaplains who support the movement. They are highly recognized and respected within the Anglican church. During meetings, these leaders influence and encourage each other to engage with environmental issues.

At the Lusaka conference at which Green Anglicans received the highest level of support and endorsement from the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is strong leadership from the Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Thabo Makgoba.

Green Anglicans holds a key role within the Anglican Communion Environmental Network as Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya is the chairperson and Canon Rachel Mash is the secretary of ACEN, so our work becomes known by other dioceses and provinces.

The movement has its roots in the decades long work of Bishop Geoff

Davies (the Green Bishop) and Kate Davies who faithfully laid the foundation of the ACSA Environmental Network over many years of ministry.

It was magical to have the Archbishop of Canterbury in our midst and to have the honour of praying for him. The fact that he was there and when he gave his opening sermon at the ACC, he shared his experience with the young people and what it means for the church to be led into this green movement by the young people. A supportive Bishop is very important. Nothing from the top will result in nothing filtering down the system.

Mainstreaming the environment

Environmental issues are now discussed at diocesan and provincial Synods, where key discussions are made, policies agreed upon, and recommended actions—at various levels—developed and communicated. Not only does the leadership support the movement, but the organizational and governance structure of the Anglican church ensures that information and decisions are filtered down to its members. The environment has become a key topic within the Anglican church.

The structure was further strengthened by the appointment of an Environmental Desk Coordinator at the provincial level, which is funded, and provides financial and logistical support to the churches. Additionally, through the established structure, duties are allocated and effort made to monitor implementation of activities.

The environment has also been a key issue at conferences of other Anglican organizations such as Mothers' Union, Anglican Students' Federation, Anglican Women's Fellowship. These organizations have also passed environmental resolutions – for instance the Mothers' Union agreed to stop using styrofoam and the Anglican students changed their constitution to include the role of the environment.

"I believe that climate change can become a unifying issue for

the Anglican Communion which is divided on so many other issues." (Interviews with bishops and coordinators)

Multi-levels of capacity building

The movement has promoted multiple levels of reach and capacity building to its leaders, and congregants including children. Training has taken place at many levels: bishops (at eco-bishop workshops), priests (clergy training and eco-retreats), Sunday school teachers at workshops, young "movers and shakers" workshops, young people at conferences, Mothers' Union, and other organizational members at their conferences. These different levels began to cross pollinate one another as people would hear similar messages from multiple places.

Emphasis on producing attractive and regularly updated resource materials

A large amount of the time of the Green Anglicans staff goes to producing regular materials, yearly Season of Creation booklets containing sermons and liturgies, materials for major environmental days and training materials. During COVID-19 we produced weekly environmental services on YouTube and WhatsApp.

> "There is now a resource for engaging children to create a better environment and how to relate to God's creation as early as possible. The Anglican church functions around its liturgy; Green Anglicans has been able to influence and add the environment in the liturgy — meaning each and every church has access to the resource book which has adapted the Anglican liturgy for environmental care." (Interviews with Bishops and Coordinators)

Climate change is now evident

The phrase *global warming* is no longer an abstract concept. Across the region, many have experienced the reality of climate change. A severe drought hit the Western Cape and other regions with the threat of Day Zero, when the taps would be turned off. Cyclone Idai and Kenneth struck Mozambique with devastating flooding. Namibia suffered a devastating drought, and many had to slaughter their cattle.

People are thus increasingly willing to contribute to making a change for themselves and future generations. The Green Anglican Movement offers an accessible means of participation:

> "The evidence leading to climate change can be seen with the naked eye. Experiencing the [adverse] effects of climate change namely drought and loss of animals that are considered as wealth in African culture" (Interviews with Bishops and coordinators)

It is an exciting and fun movement to be part of

Young Green Anglicans have the space and opportunity to influence others. Participants expressed how privilege they felt to participate in an intervention they considered important, they enjoyed to and were proud to have the opportunity to influence others positively. They further expressed excitement at mobilizing others, bring change, and witnessing the results.

Participants further reported that they utilized different ways to be effective in influencing others. These included: Engaging children through play, outdoor services, falling in love with nature, talent competitions, green festivals and drama.

> "I get to do what I am passionate about which is saving the environment. Not stopping but continuing to go, and making

> sure that I am heard - in church and community and neighbourhood What makes it special is because it makes you want to go to church because you want to do the environmental things at church, so it helps the kids to keep off the streets because they have something to do". (Focus Group Discussion, Young Green Anglicans)

Benefits of being eco-friendly

The community is more easily mobilized as they appreciate the direct and indirect benefits of being eco-friendly. Direct benefits, for instance, are the incomes community members get through recycling business; while indirect benefits are a cleaner, more pleasant living environment for self, children and community both currently and into the future. People enjoy eating their own fresh vegetables and the beauty of the new trees that have been planted.

> "What makes it special is because it makes you want to go to church because you want to do the environmental things at church, so it helps the kids to keep off the streets because they have something to do. I love children and when I play with my nephews and nieces, I teach them to look after the plants." (Focus group discussion with young Green Anglicans)

Role of social media

Our extensive social media presence has helped to grow the movement in different countries and dioceses, it enables direct sharing of information to individuals which may otherwise get stuck at diocesan or parish level. It enables people to feel proud as they see their activities being show cased on a larger platform.

Through all this, we have learnt that transformative change doesn't take place when individuals change, it takes place when networked individuals change.

19. EDUCATION FOR ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY: THE EXAMPLE OF CENTRO EMMANUEL IN URUGUAY

Ileana Sosa Redaelli

In this short presentation, I will focus on the educational role of Centro Emmanuel.[1] Our activities are intended for groups of students from both primary and high-school institutions, public as well as private. Our aim is to promote ecological awareness by inviting students to explore Centro Emmanuel's farm and introducing them to agroecological topics. Another side to our work — with a more explicit theological content and an inter-generational approach — is organizing workshops and meetings with different church-related groups, always seeking to promote and be consistent with the ecumenical spirit that characterizes Centro Emmanuel.

Now, as input for our group discussion, I would like to mention three of the cross-cutting themes we intend to focus on in all of our awareness, promotion and educational actions.

In search of hope

> "This is all wrong. I shouldn't be standing here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to me for hope? How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky

[1] Paper presented at the conference "Churches in Southern as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

> ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing…"
>
> Greta Thunberg, Speech at UN Summit, September 2019

It is undeniable that, even allowing for regional differences and peculiarities, environmental problems are serious and may well fall into the category of crisis. Much of the information we receive, as well as scientific research from prestigious institutions, confirms this and foresees a far from bright future. This is now an indisputable fact, and even the most fervent deniers of climate change and ecological degradation have been forced to step back from their position. We may therefore argue that dramatic situations demand dramatic speeches to call attention to the urgency of the situation and push us into action.

But regardless of the validity of this claim and however accurate the data reported in these dramatic speeches, they entail the risk of arousing feelings in listeners that — in our view — do not contribute to the process of finding an alternative way out. For starters, they may lead to hopelessness and resignation on the understanding that once the damage has been done, there is no point in trying to revert the situation. Then there is also anger and outrage, and a feeling of unfairness for having to pay the price for other people's negligence and greed. When people are caught up in such feelings, finding common ground for agreement and viable alternatives becomes increasingly difficult. The attitude becomes one of judgement and pointing out culprits. Thus, a speech intended to raise awareness and promote environmental care ends up creating a communication barrier.

At Centro Emmanuel, we have witnessed these dynamics at work on several occasions in the confrontation between conventional versus agroecological farmers who sometimes happen to be members of the same church. This is a matter of concern for us, and we try hard to avoid

this kind of confrontations.

This does not mean, however, that we will remain silent and not raise our voice against situations which must be changed, or that those responsible for environmental care and policies — whether in public office or in decision-making positions — are not to be held accountable for their actions or omissions. But we firmly believe that in our interactions with the community and, above all, in educational activities with children and youth, our approach to the big issue of environmental sustainability should be based on empathy and mutual care, fostering mutual understanding and discovering that we are inextricably linked to one another and to nature.

Awareness actions based on predicting catastrophic events or, at best, on complete uncertainty, do little more than appeal to fear. And while admittedly they succeed in quickly reaching a large audience (think how fast Greta's speech went viral), and to a point, they may be justified, for us, Christians, an educational approach that is not rooted in hope is not a valid option, for it goes against the very essence of the Gospel.

Conversely, when we educate in hope, we remain open to the new and unexpected, and every action, no matter how small, becomes meaningful because it may impact our reality in unpredictable ways. Hope enables us to accept –without falling into frustration– that our knowledge and actions are of a provisional and incomplete nature, so we can then think of education for *adaptation*, which implies providing the right tools to face challenges creatively and with enthusiasm.[2]

If we want to rekindle hope, we must strengthen our belief that even in times of crisis there are countless priceless things to treasure, and advocating for their preservation is a worthy effort. This takes us to the

---

[2] Raúl Sosa, "Educar en tiempos de incertidumbre" (Paper, ALAIME Conference 2019).

second topic.

In search of an ethics of care

For some years now, Centro Emmanuel has been working under the motto *Por una cultura del cuidado de la vida* which roughly translates as building a "care for life culture". By "culture of care" we mean a new paradigm of living together, converting to new forms of relating to one another and to nature and working towards an agreement to honour and preserve all that exists and life in all its forms.

Leonardo Boff, the Brazilian theologian, sees *care* as the fundamental *ethos* of the human being. Care is more than just an action; it is an attitude, and as such it stretches beyond a single moment of concern to a *manner of being*, so that we care and worry for one another and become responsible for and emotionally involved with others.[3]

It is a well-known fact that we care for those things that are valuable or important to us, so it is relevant to ask ourselves (as a sort of practical exercise) what things we consider valuable and how we measure their value. Some time ago, at Centro Emmanuel, we planned the following activity as part of our devotional time: We displayed several products (cheese, vegetables, preserves, and so on) resembling a street-market stall. Next to each product, we placed a note card with a number written on it. People immediately associated those numbers with the price, i.e., money. On closer look, however, they realized that those numbers could not possibly be the price — five carrots could not cost $140 (approximately 4 USD) —, they must surely represent something else. After a few minutes, they found out that those numbers indicated the number of days

[3] Leonardo Boff, *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature* (Baylor University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

required for that given product to reach an edible, ripe stage and be tasty and nutritious. This very simple exercise revealed how our valuation system is governed by the market logic, i.e., how much money is needed to have access to a certain product. But we ignore *nature's investment* in each product … a time for sowing, a time for reaping, the water cycle, the life of soil organisms, and all the wonderful and complex processes that make it possible for us to get a "final product ready for consumption". Too often we also ignore our brothers' and sisters' work behind the production process.

Contrary to this logic, a *manner of being based on care* allows us to understand and experience where real value lies and what things are truly important, not at market value but because of their intrinsic value. From this essential value, the notions of otherness, of respect and reciprocity arise.

In this regard, we can learn from ancient cultures — Latin American, in our case, but surely from other continents as well — who consider nature as a *subject of law*, which means it has rights and a value of its own, regardless of the use human beings make of natural resources. This is not to say that we see nature as sacred in the sense that we should not interfere with it at all, but it does mean that human beings should relate to nature in a different way, recognizing that a relationship with nature based on power and greed can no longer have place in our world.[4]

To develop an *ethics of care* and find new forms of valuing and a sense of purpose, we must connect with nature, we must become "ecologically literate", according to Boff. This means that every person needs to see

---

[4] José Luis López, "Vio Dios cuanto había hecho, y todo estaba muy bien", (Gen 1:31): La Teología Cristiana de la creación y el Buen Vivir Andino: Construcciones anticapitalistas," *Diálogos A. Revista de Culturas, Espiritualidades y Desarrollo Andino-Amazónico* 9 (2015): 17, 18.

themselves as part of the local ecosystem which integrates nature and culture. We must get to know the brothers and sisters who share our same atmosphere, landscape, water and food sources; we must know the animals, plants and microorganisms that live in our ecosystem.[5] This "knowing" is not about reciting the names of every species or identifying every soil component; it is about feeling our ecological niche, experiencing it as an extension of our own body.

This can only be achieved through collective education, an educational process grounded on direct experiences and interactions with the environment. In this regard, educational activities at Centro Emmanuel always include sensory experiences: walking outdoors, hand in hand, with eyes closed to perceive sensations other than visual, working in the soil with our own hands, or enjoying aroma and flavour as we cook and share a meal together. In our experience, these activities intended to help people become aware of their sensory perceptions and experiences have proved to be not only enjoyable but an effective stimulus for reflection and discussion. As the Brazilian theologian Hugo Assmann has pointed out, the morphogenesis of knowledge should be dynamic and enjoyable; a process in which our brain, emotions and body are simultaneously involved.[6]

In search of an ethics of enough

The potential and the challenge of environmental education is to contribute to ecological transformation as it is a very effective means of

---

[5] Leonardo Boff, *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature* (Baylor University Press, 2008), chapter 9.

[6] Hugo Assmann, "Reencantar a educação: rumo à sociedade aprendente" (Ed. Vozes Ltda., 2002), chapter 2.

creating new relationships between society and nature, and between human beings themselves, by promoting caring and respectful attitudes towards all forms of life. However, it would not be fair or even reasonable to place full responsibility for such a huge change on education alone, nor on today's children or youth, deferring change to some future time. The transformation effort encouraged through education must be accompanied by a change in the habits and practices of all of us.

Today it is clear that countries cannot move towards unlimited economic growth; development conceived as a linear and upward process is no longer viable (and probably never was). As an alternative, the notion of *sustainability* has been proposed, and we frequently see *sustainable* associated with *development* to refer to a more constrained model of development, but one which still places great emphasis on productive and economic issues and ignores the multidimensional nature of human, social and environmental well-being. This kind of *sustainable development* follows the same rationale, a rationale that – to give just one example – regards people's consumption possibilities as an indicator of their well-being.[7] We believe it is imperative that we move towards a different type of development: a comprehensive development model respectful of ecological balance and aimed at improving the quality of human life, not in terms of economic standards but human standards.[8]

To help us create an alternative model, we can revisit the teachings of *Sumak Kawsay*, a philosophy rooted in the worldview of indigenous peoples of the Andes, whose name can be loosely translated as *good living* or *well living*, for lack of a more appropriate translation. *Sumak Kawsay*

---

[7] Freddy Álvarez González, "El Buen Vivir un paradigma anticapitalista," *Pacarina del Sur* 4, no. 16 (2013): 3–5,19–22.

[8] OECD, *Compendium of OECD Well-being Indicators* (2011), https://www.oecd.org/general/compendiumofoecdwell-beingindicators.html.

aims at achieving a collective development that recognizes the ties that bind all existing things and is defined by the harmonious coexistence of human beings with one another and with nature. In this worldview, fraternity exceeds the anthropological sense to take on a cosmic meaning[7]. *Sumak Kawsay* is grounded on an *ethics of enough* for all the community; its goal is not to ensure the *best life* but a *good life*, firmly believing that we can find meaning and fulfilment by living a frugal life.

However, not only the philosophy of *Sumak Kawsay* calls to an ethics of enough and to humility, but the Bible is also very clear on this point. It becomes apparent in Jesus' response to the young rich man's question (Matthew 19:21) and in chapter 6 of the book of Matthew where worship of treasures is opposed to worship of God who knows and provides for the needs of every creature in all Creation. This Christian ethics is also clearly reflected in how we are urged to guard ourselves from greed when Jesus replies to a man in the crowd that demanded his share of inheritance (Luke 12:15), and then again when Paul warns Colossians that greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). And surely there are many more examples we could cite.

At Centro Emmanuel, we have addressed these topics making use of agroecology as an example of an alternative way, as it is a comprehensive approach to agriculture that respects the connections between the different components of the agroecosystem and seeks to conserve natural resources (taking from the ecosystem only what it can regenerate), while it is also driven by a solidarity-based economy, social justice and the promotion of responsible consumption.

The call to move towards an *ethics of enough* surely questions our daily choices and actions. Again, the purpose is not to make people feel guilty, nor is it about recreating remote past times or abolishing every form of production or consumption. In our view, the proposal is to accept our responsibility to care for one another and for our Common Home, not as a

burden laid upon our shoulders, but embracing it joyfully as a collective endeavour, because it stems from our gratitude for the magnificence of Creation and for God's infinite generosity.

Bibliography

Álvarez González, Freddy. "El Buen Vivir un paradigma anticapitalista." *Pacarina del Sur* 4, no. 16 (2013).

Assmann, Hugo. *Reencantar a educação: rumo à sociedade aprendente*. Ed. Vozes Ltda., 2002.

Boff, Leonardo. *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*. Baylor University Press, 2008.

López, José Luis. "Vio Dios cuanto había hecho, y todo estaba muy bien (Gen.1:31): La Teología Cristiana de la creación y el Buen Vivir Andino: Construcciones anticapitalistas." *Diálogos A. Revista de Culturas, Espiritualidades y Desarrollo Andino-Amazónico*, no. 9 (2015): 15–22.

OECD. *Compendium of OECD Well-being Indicators*, (2011). https://www.oecd.org/general/compendiumofoecdwell-beingindicators.html.

Sosa, Raúl. "Educar en tiempos de incertidumbre." Paper, ALAIME Conference (2019).

20. TOWARDS AN ALL AFRICAN CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK: SUGGESTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dietrich Werner and Cain Lerumo Matloko

The following working paper out of one of the workshops of the Pretoria consultation brings together a short presentation on the European Christian Environmental Network as well as initial ideas to form as an analogy an All African Christian Environmental Network.[1]

One of the most far-reaching decisions of the ecumenical movement was taken during the Vancouver assembly in 1983, in which the WCC declared a conciliar process on commitment (covenant) for justice, peace and integrity of creation to be pursued by all churches together in order to deepen and continue their commitments for the interrelated dimensions of social witness as referring both to justice, peace and integrity of creation. For the first time issues around care for creation and sustainability gained primary and equal importance. Churches could not continue to distance themselves from one of these agendas arguing that justice or peace are the sole and primary role only of churches in another region in the world. Environmental care and protection were not any more seen as a luxury issue of some saturated churches in the west, but as a global issue which is of urgency for the whole of Christianity as the planet as such and its integral and ecological balances are at stake. Three European Ecumenical

[1] Paper presented at the conference "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability" in University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 28–31 October 2019.

Assemblies followed in in Basel (1989), Graz (1997) and Sibiu (2007), all of which deepened and broadened the learning process of both Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in the European continent on issues of eco-theology and environmental protection.

The Basel Assembly affirmed with very strong statements and new and common commitment of Christian churches related to environmental care and protection:

> "74. We consider it to be a scandal and a crime, that irreversible damage continues to be inflicted on creation. We are becoming aware that there is the need for a new partnership between human beings and the rest of nature. We do not want to solve problems any longer at the expense of other people or by producing additional new problems. We will work for an international environmental order . . .
>
> 76. We consider it to be vitally urgent to learn that the resources of this earth are to be shared with the coming generations and future life. We commit ourselves to a new lifestyle in our churches, societies, families and communities.
>
> 77. As Christians we are living in God's covenant with us and the whole of creation. We are all part of the one body of Christ. Because God changes hearts and minds, we covenant with one another. Our first loyalty belongs to Him. All other loyalties (national, cultural, social, etc.) are of secondary importance.

> This is the basis for our engagement for justice, peace and the integrity of creation."[2]

In the sections on environment (No 87ff) some very bold and specific recommendations were agreed upon to strengthen public engagement and concrete political action to take up burning issues in terms of the destruction of the ozone layers, the disappearance of species and different modes of energy use and supply in industrialized countries:

> "(a) All technological development has to be assessed according to the above- mentioned criteria of sustainability (see para.84(a)). This entails a complete reversal of the concept of sustained economic growth as well as in the use of natural resources.
>
> (b) The wasteful use of energy in the industrialized countries has reached such gigantic proportions that there is an urgent need for a drastic reduction in their use. Some churches have committed themselves to work for a significant reduction in the use of energy. We appeal to all the European churches and Christians to do the same within the limit of their possibilities and untiringly to challenge decision-makers in political, technological and business life to more efficient policies for saving energy.
>
> (c) We are referring in particular to fossil fuels, a reduction of the use of which can be achieved through effective energy-saving techniques and through the development of renewable energy supplies (sun, water, wind). The necessary financial resources could be collected by appropriate taxation. Nuclear power should

---

[2] See Basel European Ecumenical Assembly, *Final Document* (1989), accessed 26 August 2023. http://oikoumene.net/eng.regional/eng.reg.basel/eng.reg.basel.7/index.html.

not be the basis of future energy supply because of its social, technical, ecological and military risks. Safety requirements in nuclear power plants should be to the highest international standards.

(d) According to the Brundtland Report the technical possibility exists of reducing per capita energy consumption in industrialized countries by 50% and increasing the per capita energy consumption in the Third World countries by 30% (on the basis of predictable increases in population). In so doing the total world energy consumption would only be increased insignificantly. This is the only worldwide energy perspective which combines the preservation of creation with justice. This approach should be considered seriously by Christians in the industrialized countries, particularly as the Brundtland report has increased substantially public awareness of ecological issues and is well regarded in the scientific community.

(e) Special measures have urgently to be taken in order to protect the ozone layer, to counteract the greenhouse effect, preserve what is left of the rain forest, and to prevent the spread of desertification.

(f) There is an urgent need for an international and controllable regulation on waste disposal, particularly for nuclear and other dangerous waste. On no account should European countries dump their waste at the expense of other countries, in their seas or international waters. Special attention in this matter is deserved by the question of nuclear waste disposal (e.g., in the Pacific).

(g) International agreements on border-crossing emissions in order to prevent the further pollution of water, air and soil, and to undo

the damage already done, are an urgent priority for all European countries.

(h) Strict legislation and controls for genetic research and genetic engineering and professional codes of conduct are needed. There is equally an urgent need for the churches to continue to reflect on the latest developments in the field of bio-technics in order to provide ethical guidelines for these issues about the implications of the value of life, not only of the human person, but of all living creatures and of nature itself.

(i) Urgent measures have to be taken to preserve the variety of species and variety of genetic riches within the species. The churches can be instrumental in making this problem known. The United Nations World Charter for Nature of 1982 is a first step. The next step could be an international Species Convention such as the International Union of Nature and Natural Resources has proposed. Financial agreements should be reached which ensure that the countries, particularly in the poor world, receive an equitable share of the benefits and earnings derived from the development of these species."[3]

It is amazing to read these visionary statements from the year in which the reunification of Germany and Europe happened like an unexpected and very surprising gift of God as many of the items spelled out at that period still are on the political agenda today.

---

[3] *European Ecumenical Assembly Basel*, accessed 26 August 2023, http://oikoumene.net/eng.regional/eng.reg.basel/eng.reg.basel.7.1/index.html; also in German language: https://www.ecunet.de/fileadmin/mediapool/gemeinden/E_stiftungoekumene/Oekumenische_Treffen_Weltregional_und_National_Basel.pdf.

It belongs to this context of a growing environmental movement in European churches in the 1990s that the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I extended in 1989 a global call and invitation to establish 1 September each year as a day of prayer for environment. The second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria, in 1997 further strengthened these efforts. The assembly recommended that a network of persons with environmental responsibilities within the churches should be set up at a European level. The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) is a response to this call. The network was established in October 1998 in the Orthodox Academy in Vilemov in the Czech Republic. In 2007 the European Ecumenical Assembly, building on the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, recommended that the period from 1 September to 4 October be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change. Thus, the initiative for the annual repetition of the period of Season of Creation was born.[4] Today many different church related networks for environmental care and climate justice groups and initiatives are part of the ECEN network.[5] The aim of the ECEN is to share information, experiences in environmental work among widely varied Christian traditions and to encourage a united witness in caring for God's creation. ECEN works closely with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in addressing the need for environmental engagement and responding to climate change. ECEN is also related to Council of European Bishops' Conferences (Consilium Conferentiarium Episcoporum Europe, CCEE), thus maintains close collaborations with Roman Catholic churches and networks. It comes together in an annual

[4] *Season of Creation*, accessed 26 August 2023, https://seasonofcreation.org/.

[5] European Christian Environmental Network, "About Us," accessed 26 August 2023. https://www.ecen.org/about-us.

assembly[6] and has different thematic working groups as well as an office in Brussels in collaboration with CEC and Peter Pavlovic as executive secretary.[7] Thus, ECEN serves to strengthen cohesion of collaboration of European churches in issues of climate justice and environmental care, provide chances for capacity building in expertise and knowledge for environmental issues between all Christian churches in Europe, enhance chances for common lobbying work on environmental policy with regard to dialogue with the European Union and support visibility for regional and local initiatives on Christian environmentalist action which otherwise would not find a common platform just within their local or regional contact.

The question as discussed whether a similar common platform would be helpful in the southern region of the African continent or even with the perspective to be extended as an All African Christian Environmental Network. An initiative was formulated by a group of African activists, theologians and environmental to formulate a platform for AACEN (All African Christian Environmental Network).

It is an ecumenical response to the call heard at the heart of the *Laudato si'* encyclical from Pope Francis who asked: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" In his encyclical he also argues: "Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results." Thus, the *Laudato si'* document brings to our attention a dual cry: the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor!

From the conversations, certain common convictions were articulated: There is "complacency and a cheerful recklessness" within the Body of Christian Africa; there is a deficiency of a more careful 'Life Culture' and

---

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] *Ibidem*.

adequate thought leadership on creation care in church and society; there is a need to provide more encourage and willingness to change lifestyles and to develop more sustainable production and responsible consumption patterns.

However, currently the church in Africa does not yet have a unified voice on the current ecological crisis. This is so, because the church is still fragmented and lacks the necessary *prophetic will* to speak up on the preservation and protection of life into the ecological crisis. Therefore, there is need for a coordinated, informed and effective Christian voice in Africa to allow ecumenical efforts to advocate, lobby and educate Christians and policy makers for sustainable change. Therefore, the creation of a common platform like AACEN is agreed and deemed helpful and necessary.

The AACEN would exist to, among other things, to sharpen and embolden the prophetic voice of the church to speak truth to power on the ecological crisis we face. It would be a safe learning space to share knowledge and best practices, allowing to reflect, discern and conceptualize on major pending issues (i.e., a sustained evolution from our heavy reliance on the burning of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources). Moreover, it would be a forum to engage in common lobbying and advocacy work for favorable environmental policies. Lastly, it would build the church's capacity to effectively advocate for change in ecologically destructive industrial practices (mining, waste production, air and water pollution and deforestation).

Bibliography

Basel European Ecumenical Assembly. *Final Document*. 1989. Accessed 26 August 2023.

http://oikoumene.net/eng.regional/eng.reg.basel/eng.reg.basel.7/index.html.

European Christian Environmental Network. "About Us." Accessed 26 August 2023. https://www.ecen.org/about-us.

European Ecumenical Assembly Basel. Accessed 26 August 2023, http://oikoumene.net/eng.regional/eng.reg.basel/eng.reg.basel.7.1/index.html; also in German language: https://www.ecunet.de/fileadmin/mediapool/gemeinden/E_stiftungoekumene/Oekumenische_Treffen_Weltregional_und_National_Basel.pdf.

Season of Creation. Accessed 26 August 2023, https://seasonofcreation.org/

CONCLUSION

21. MAPPING THE WAY FORWARD ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann

1. Summary of key themes and points of discussion

The growing dynamic of southern African religious communities' interest in, engagement with and practical action on climate change and ecological sustainability was clearly visible in the contributions and discussions in the capacity-building webinar "Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa" (Berlin, 2020) and the "Churches in Southern Africa as Civil Society Actors for Ecological Sustainability Conference" (Pretoria, 2019).[1] This section synthesizes key themes and conclusions discussed at the events.

The outline of the present ecological situation in southern Africa and the alarming climate predictions for the future by climate scientist Francois Engelbrecht during the consultation resonated with a strong sense of urgency for ecological action among the participants. A shared responsibility was felt by all participants to start acting against climate change by advocating for strong climate protection regulations locally and

[1] A previous version of this text was published as part of the report *Religious Communities as Actors for Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond* (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2021).

globally and by teaching in religious congregations about the spiritual importance of nature as climate change mitigation measures. The debates about global social injustice between highly industrialized and less industrialized countries was mainly taken to a theological level. In this theological discussion the (negative) role of Christianity as a historical import from environment-polluting Europe to Africa was repeatedly debated, questioned and reconfigured – especially in its consequences and relevance for today's Christians.

Participants of the two consultations spoke in detail of the challenges experienced by southern African communities and presented local solutions already implemented by religious communities. Many speakers elaborated on the importance of the recent *bodily experiences* of local effects of climate change that led people to actions. It was also pointed out that the majority of global emissions do not come from the southern African region and that emission reduction in the region might jeopardize much-needed economic growth. Consequently, the focus of the conversations was much more on climate change *adaptation* measures and less on emission reduction. Religious communities were reported to be very active in finding and implementing adaptation solutions locally during water shortages in southern Africa or as a reaction to the severe impacts of tropical cyclone Idai that affected around 2.6 million people across the region in 2019. Nevertheless, climate change adaptation has to be implemented on a political level in southern Africa. Especially the effects of climate change on food security in the region have to be recognized and tackled internationally by NGOs, FBOs, and governments.

Another central and recurring theme was the importance of interdenominational and interreligious dialogue. Joint interdenominational and interreligious action against climate change and for the preservation of the environment was highlighted as fundamentally

important. At the same time, discussions on the pressing ecological problems felt by people of all faiths and the urgent need for ecological action visible across the different religious communities are important points of interreligious encounter and can be conducive to interdenominational and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. However, it was also highlighted that there also needs to be in-depth, theological engagement in each individual religious community in order to strengthen and clarify the respective theological standpoints on ecological sustainability of a community's traditions, perhaps even before engaging with other denominations and religions on this issue.

Within the Pentecostal tradition an important theological debate, referring to the relationship of economic development and ecological sustainability, concerns the issue of prosperity. Relating to the widespread prosperity theology in many African churches, one important conclusion of this debate brought forward specifically by Pentecostal church leaders was that prosperity should not be mainly understood in a material sense but in a wider, more comprehensive sense that includes environmental dimensions and ecological sustainability.

A generally relevant theological question is the question of eschatology. Eschatology refers to the ultimate things in a theological sense, the redemption of believers, the end of the world and the afterlife. The specific eschatology of a religious community has fundamental implications for its members' attitudes towards the natural environment. The question arose whether the Christian belief in an ultimate redemption of the world through God would mean that the current planet Earth could be neglected by Christians – or whether this belief constitutes a theological imperative to treat the Earth with care. All speakers agreed that humans needed to act to preserve this current creation, but arguments differed as to why this was so from a theological standpoint. These debates gravely influence how believers interact with their

environment. This point was also highlighted by speakers who presented best practice examples on ecological actions motivated by religious beliefs. It was pointed out that changing the foundational religious beliefs on how humans should relate with their environment is key to any behavioural changes.

In this context, the role of African Traditional Religious values for ecological engagement was discussed. Its possible role as a new ecological paradigm leading to a more ecological religious tradition in Africa and beyond is also a recurring topic of academic debate. A growing corpus of literature reflects on the positive impact of African Traditional worldviews on the environment.[2] These authors argue that before the arrival of Christianity in Africa, traditional taboos and other behavioural rules in African Traditional Religions prevented an over-exploitation of the environment through a holistic worldview that embedded humans in nature and that understood many single natural landmarks like rivers or trees as animate and filled with spirit(s). Chitando, in contrast, has argued that unspecific African worldviews need to be critically researched in in-depth case studies for their individual contribution to environmental sustainability, as some of them might not have protected the environment for the sake of nature itself, but for the sake of saving humans from godly

[2] Jacob Kẹ́hìndé Olúpọ̀nà, "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 259–282.; Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa, "Spirit and Ecology in the Context of African Theology," *Scriptura 111,* no. 3 (2013): 422–430; Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh, Mark S. Aidoo and Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, eds., *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019).

wrath.[3] This scholarly debate was reflected in the consultations' contributions and highlights the need for further case studies on African Traditional Religious world views and their relationship to ecological sustainability.

Several best practice examples were presented, which highlighted effective approaches to climate change awareness-raising and action in local faith communities. In a first step, many initiatives work to change the underlying religious narratives about the relations between humans and nature. In a second step, they support communities to evaluate their local environmental challenges and to establish long-lasting and self-reliant group structures for action against the specific local challenges. The establishment of contextual *messages* about the environment in local languages was in most cases connected to the *right messenger*, such as local pastors, women's groups or youth leaders. In addition to the *right message* and the *right messenger*, oral or digital *means of communicating the message* were presented as best practice examples to reach out to the communities.

The participants moreover showed a common interest in new, contextually relevant and multilingual environmental learning material liturgies for different religions and denominations that would support local environmental actions and in additional learning opportunities on religious environmental perspectives for religious leaders and members to adapt to and mitigate the environmental impacts in their immediate surroundings. In some cases, this important small-scale engagement has led to larger interreligious or interdenominational environmental initiatives as the most effective way to learn from each other and provide

---

[3] Ezra Chitando, "Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment," in *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, ed. M. C. Green and Muhammed Haron (Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2020), 3–16.

support to the communities.

Overall, the examples presented substantiate the hypothesis that religious communities indeed possess great potential for ecological sustainability and increasingly use this potential to promote ecological sustainability at various levels.

2. Ways forward and recommended action points for development policy, religious communities and research in the field of religion and ecological sustainability

A great sense of urgency to engage with climate change and the ecological crisis was shared by all participants at the two consultations. Various recommendations and policy implications emerged from the contributions and discussions. In the following, they are channelled into action points for 1) Governments, 2) Religious communities and FBOs, and 3) Academia. The recommendations focus on actors on the micro, meso and macro levels of society and cover the action areas of environmental protection and climate action through measures of environmental and climate change awareness-building, advocacy, mitigation, and adaptation.

2.1 Policy recommendations for local and national governments and intergovernmental actors

2.1.1 Cooperate with religious communities as local actors for ecological sustainability

Climate change mitigation and adaptation requires fundamental shifts of values, mindsets and behavioural patterns. Religious communities know the impact of changing climate and environmental pollution on the lives of their congregants. Their input is vital on the most urgent and most

effective areas of action for environmental protection. Furthermore, religious communities are very influential actors in the lives of many people and can communicate the necessary behavioural changes effectively, embedded in religious teachings and in accordance with believers' convictions.

2.1.2 Create opportunities for the engagement of religious communities and natural sciences

Many people, among them also religious leaders, are still unaware of the dramatic consequences that climate change will have in southern Africa according to the projections by climate scientists. Education on environmental protection and climate change was repeatedly discussed during the consultations as an important cornerstone of involving religious communities in ecological sustainability programmes. Environmental education should be offered to communities in schools, universities and workplaces, but also via religious institutions. Natural sciences could provide a wake-up call for religious communities, while religious leaders are in a unique position to convey the natural scientific knowledge to their communities. In addition to their role as mediators of environmental knowledge from the natural sciences to their communities, religious leaders are in the position to formulate and impart *religious* knowledge on the environment that reaches believers at the core of their value- and behaviour-shaping religious identity.

2.1.3 Support environmental action as interreligious action

The environmental crisis creates a collective sense of urgent action for different religious and denominational traditions. This is the time to encourage interreligious and interdenominational initiatives and actions and to strengthen religious peace and cooperation alongside environmental protection. At the same time, context sensitivity remains one of the most crucial points for the successful implementation of

ecological initiatives. Knowledge about local interfaith relations as well as about intra-religious factors needs to be included in the planning of any interreligious or interdenominational programme. Communication with *all* religious leaders in the region and religious literacy on the side of policymakers is essential for successful interreligious initiatives.

2.1.4 African Pentecostal churches and African Independent churches need to be included

African Pentecostal Churches and African Independent Churches, also known as African Initiated Churches, are the fastest-growing religious movement in sub-Saharan Africa.[4] However, they are often not represented in Christian ecumenical bodies and have therefore often not been included in ecumenical environmental protection programmes. In many cases, African Initiated Churches are reacting proactively to environmental destruction through self-organized environmental clean-up campaigns, prayer weeks, agricultural training and a shift in their theological focus.[5] Nuances within the teachings on the environment by the religious movement of African Initiated Churches need to be recognized by FBOs, governments, academia and religious leaders as influential actors in the promotion of ecological sustainability.

---

[4] Philipp Öhlmann, Marie-Luise Frost and Wilhelm Gräb, "Introduction: African Initiated Christianity and Sustainable Development," in *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonization of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*, ed. Philipp Öhlmann et al., Routledge Research in Religion and Development (Abingdon/Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–29.

[5] Juliane Stork and Philipp Öhlmann, "Ökologische Nachhaltigkeit in African Initiated Churches," Kurzstellungnahme 04/2019 des Forschungsbereichs Religiöse Gemeinschaften und nachhaltige Entwicklung. Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2019.

2.1.5 Protect the environment to protect religious freedom and protect religious freedom to protect the environment

Many religious traditions in southern Africa perform their worship in nature and have strong spiritual connections to the environment, land, vegetation, water sources, mountains or animals. Threats to the environment also threaten these religious practices and traditions. If spiritually-significant natural sites are polluted, believers lose the grounds for their practices and their beliefs. Religious traditions that have strong connections to their environment need to be protected in their religious freedom through environmental protection. At the same time, the protection of religious freedom can foster environmental protection.

2.2 Action points for religious communities and faith-based organizations

2.2.1 Strengthen climate change awareness among religious leaders and in religious communities and let religious communities become environmental learning spaces

All religious traditions described in this volume have spiritual connections to the environment. Religious leaders and religious communities during the consultations were very interested in learning more about climate change and environmental pollution and destruction and about how their faiths respond to them. To fulfil their fundamental potential for promoting the necessary paradigm shifts towards climate protection and environmental sustainability, religious communities need to increase their knowledge about local effects and global connections of climate change. Responsible water consumption and soil-renewal strategies are two examples of practical knowledge that could be shared in religious communities as relevant information for short- and long-term survival. Religious communities already serve as venues of formal and informal education and should be supported in adding environmental

education from the perspectives of their traditions to their curriculums.

2.2.2 Involve children and youth

Greenhouse gas emissions determine the future of today's children and youth, who in turn will have the opportunity to determine climate politics only in the future. Children and youth have started to raise their concerns on climate change, with considerable global momentum generated by the Fridays for Future movement. Children and youth need to be encouraged and supported in their engagement with the environment by their religious communities and targeted FBO programmes to become engaged civil society actors and to play key roles as messengers of climate-related and environmental protection information in their families, religious communities and societies.

2.2.3 Unite religious voices for effective advocacy

While many religious traditions worldwide are already actively engaged in environmental care in their local communities, a concerted global effort for climate protection is necessary. A worldwide prayer movement could be installed by religious communities and combined with a global joint advocacy effort at future international and national climate summits. Through such a prayer movement, awareness of environmental and climate action *and* of religious communities' crucial position with regard to climate protection could be created. Additionally, politicians would be reminded of their responsibility for environment and climate by a strongly united religious voice that would also speak from their own religious traditions to them. A joint "African Kairos for Creation" document could serve the purpose of a united interreligious voice for environmental protection in Africa. National and local advocacy campaigns would also benefit from such a global campaign.

2.2.4 Strengthen environmental and climate advocacy by religious communities at all levels

In addition to a worldwide advocacy movement, more specific regional advocacy initiatives need to be started and strengthened by religious communities. Participants in the Berlin Webinar stressed that an African advocacy roadmap explaining how to reach out to local and regional political bodies would facilitate this work. While environmental advocacy on a local level reaching out to political decision makers is very important, internal advocacy also needs to be strengthened within religious movements to convince religious communities of the spiritual importance of the environment based on theological arguments from within the same religious tradition.

2.2.5 Create religious learning materials for all religious communities

A lot of learning materials on environmental protection and climate change already exist. Still, specific learning materials inclusive of the specific faith traditions are often completely lacking or unavailable in rural and poor communities. Learning materials in local languages that speak to religious communities on concrete local climate circumstances should therefore be produced and disseminated by religious communities and FBOs in collaboration with the local communities.

2.2.6 Religious communities and FBOs need to develop climate change adaptation strategies

Religious communities need to plan a strategy of action for cases of climate emergencies such as droughts, floods and storms. Religious communities and FBOs know and can access local religious infrastructures to provide low-key and effective adaptation measures that can serve as adaption examples for other societal actors. Many religious communities already successfully run social development campaigns. A central request during the consultations was that these should also

include environmental adaptation campaigns and actions.

2.3 Desiderata for academic research and knowledge exchange

2.3.1 Conduct in-depth studies on local religious knowledge about and action on the environment

Although religious communities have served as actors for ecological development in many areas of the world for years, in-depth analyses of environmental beliefs and activities in different religious traditions are still lacking. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as well as effective development cooperation must rely on knowledge about religious beliefs and action on the environment. The effectiveness of religious environmental action was frequently referred to during the consultations. However, more specific knowledge from long-term and geographically comprehensive studies has yet to be generated in order to successfully support partnerships on ecological development between governments, FBOs and religious communities.

2.3.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of religious advocacy initiatives

Religious communities have often developed their own strategies to engage their communities for the environment and for environmental advocacy. The approaches differ substantially across religious communities. Research should set out to evaluate the effectiveness of the different engagement and advocacy strategies to identify best practices of religious communities' internal and external advocacy initiatives. This would constitute an important basis of mutual knowledge exchange within religious communities and between religious communities and other civil society actors.

2.3.3 Global partnerships need to be translated to a local level

Global partnerships by large development organizations invest in

religious advocacy campaigns and knowledge dissemination to religious umbrella organizations. However, studies still need to establish how and if these international efforts trickle down to a local level and cause behavioural changes in religious communities' members.

2.3.4 Founding of a southern African research initiative on religion and ecological development

The consultations showed that much religious environmental action takes place in southern Africa. A southern African research initiative on religion and ecological development could expand this knowledge and support the potential of religious communities for ecological protection.

2.3.5 Intergenerational and local knowledge needs to be preserved

Intergenerational environmental knowledge is often preserved in local communities. This formerly influential and context-sensitive knowledge on agriculture, biodiversity or water protection is lost with dissolving local relations due to passing generations and urbanization. (Traditional) religious communities are decisive places where this knowledge is kept alive. The academic community should increase its efforts to capture and preserve this local and informal knowledge in close and equal cooperation with local religious communities.

Bibliography

Chitando, Ezra. "Ecotheology in Africa: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment." In *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, edited by M. C. Green and Muhammed Haron, 3–16. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2020.

Ntreh, Benjamin Abotchie, Mark S. Aidoo, and Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, eds. *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology, and Traditions in Africa.* Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019.

Öhlmann, Philipp, Marie-Luise Frost, and Wilhelm Gräb. "Introduction: African Initiated Christianity and Sustainable Development." In *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonization of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*, edited by Philipp Öhlmann et al., 1–29. Routledge Research in Religion and Development. Abingdon/Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2020.

Olúpọ̀nà, Jacob Kẹ́hìndé. "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 259–282. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sakupapa, Teddy Chalwe. "Spirit and Ecology in the Context of African Theology." *Scriptura* 111, no. 3 (2013): 422–430.

Stork, Juliane, and Philipp Öhlmann. "Ökologische Nachhaltigkeit in African Initiated Churches." Kurzstellungnahme 04/2019 des Forschungsbereichs Religiöse Gemeinschaften und nachhaltige Entwicklung. Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2019. https://www.rcsd.hu-berlin.de/de/publikationen/pdf-dateien/kurzstellungnahme-04-2019-oekologie-in-aics.pdf/at_download/file.

CONTRIBUTORS

Coenie Burger

Professor Dr Coenie Burger is a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. He served as the moderator of the church from 2002 to 2007 and in several ecumenical bodies, such as the South African Council of Churches and The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa. He is a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation and a member of Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton. After his retirement, he has been involved in the training of African Independent Church pastors.

Ernst Conradie

Professor Dr Ernst M. Conradie is senior professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape where he teaches systematic theology and ethics. He works in the intersection between systematic theology, Christian ecotheology and ecumenical theology. He is currently working on an envisaged series of twelve edited volumes entitled *An Earthed Faith: Telling the Story amid the "Anthropocene".*

Kate Davies

Kate Davies is a natural scientist with a specialist interest in environmental learning processes. After two decades of work in rural churches, schools and communities she helped co-found SAFCEI, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute. Her work is grounded in her belief that

faith communities can play a pivotal and transforming role in education for sustainable living because they are deeply rooted in local contexts.

Mohammad Ridwaan Gallant

Sheikh Dr Muhammad Ridwaan Gallant graduated with a PhD from the University of Kwazulu-Natal. His main focus was on Sustainable Development and Islam. He wrote many articles on environmental ethics in newspapers and presented numerous research papers on the subject. He established the environmental desk at the Muslim Judicial Council and served as a board member of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute. He is currently lecturing Islamic Studies at the University of the Western Cape.

John Njeru Gichimu

Ven John Njeru Gichimu is an Archdeacon in the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa, which was founded in 1920s in Kenya during the Gikuyu nationalist movements. He has worked at the Organization of African Instituted Churches since 1995 as a Facilitator for Theological Education by Extension and currently the Coordinator Programme for Theology and Ministerial Formation. He is a holder of Master of Arts in Mission Studies from Birmingham University, UK. With long experience in understanding African Independent Churches.

Wilhelm Gräb

Professor Dr Wilhelm Gräb († 2023) was Professor emeritus of Practical Theology and co-founder of the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Senior Advisor at the Faculty of Theology and Principal Investigator in the International Research Training Group "Transformative Religion" as well as Extraordinary Professor at Stellenbosch University.

Christine Gühne

Rev. Dr Christine Gühne is a Protestant Pastor and currently working as Theological Officer of Bread for the World in Berlin. After her studies in Germany and in the Middle East she has served as an Ecumenical Co-Worker for Theological Education in a Church in Northern Nigeria. Her fields of interest are different issues linked to the overall relation of Religion and Development.

Barnabas E. Lekganyane

His Grace The Right Reverend Bishop Dr Barnabas E. Lekganyane is the spiritual head of the Zion Christian Church. The Zion Christian Church is southern Africa's largest religious communities. It has its headquarters in the Holy City of Moria in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Cosmo Mapitsa

Adv. Cosmo Mapitsa studied Geography and History at the University of Johannesburg, and Law at the Universities of South

Africa and Cape Town. He has experience as a researcher across different areas, including local government planning and migration, livelihoods and poverty; and impacts of the implementation of water laws on communities. His current research interests are in the areas of the relationship between the state and religion, and the role of traditional belief systems in sustainable development.

Loreen Maseno

Dr Loreen Maseno is Senior Lecturer, Department of Religion, Theology and Philosophy, Maseno University, Kenya and Research Fellow, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. She is an Ambassador Scientist for the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation. Her research and teaching interests include theology and climate change, feminist ecology, gender, Pentecostalism, inequality, food and spirituality, virtual religion and kinship.

Rachel Mash

Rev. Dr Rachel Mash is the Environmental Coordinator for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. She is the secretary of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network and a member of the global ecumenical steering committee for the Season of Creation. She is a member of the UNEP Faith for Earth task team on pollution.

Cain Lerumo Matloko

Cain Lerumo Matloko is a post-graduate student of Missional Leadership at Stellenbosch University. He serves as Regional

Manager for South Africa at Mergon Foundation. Cain is an ordained Minister and his passion include Christian Education, Restorative Dialogue, Leadership, Youth and Community Development.

Mangaliso Matshobane

Apostle Dr Mangaliso Matshobane is founder and senior pastor of Community Church, a Neo-Pentecostal church based in Bisho, Eastern Cape. He is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of South Africa, where his research work is on the contribution of Pentecostals in sustainable development. Furthermore, he serves as a board member of the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners a professional body for pastors in South Africa.

Tahirih Matthee

Tahirih Matthee serves as an Interfaith Liaison for the Baha'i Office of Public Affairs in South Africa. She has served as a Baha'i representative on Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum, the Advisory Council of South African Faith and Family Institute, and was the chairperson of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute for 8 years. At Durban University of Technology she is submitting a thesis on educating for peace.

Seulaule Calvin Mokgaditse

Seulaule Calvin Mokgaditse is a member of South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions, registered as a Professional Natural Scientist under Water Resources Science.

Mr Mokgaditse has a B.EngTech Hons in Water Engineering, B.Tech in Water Engineering and B.Tech in Water Care. He is currently employed by Rand Water as an Experimental Chemist with overall 7 years of experience in the water industry. He is a Christian who witnessed religious connections with water.

Esper Ncube

Dr Esper Ncube is *inter alia* a member of Coaches and Mentors South Africa, the South African Institute of Civil Engineers and WISA Senior Fellow. Dr Ncube is a Christian who has witnessed many religious connections with water. She has a PhD in Public Health and an MSc in Water Utilisation. Dr Ncube is currently employed by Rand Water as Manager Process Technology and has 26 years of experience in the water, wastewater, and sanitation.

Siboniso Ngobese

Apostle Siboniso Ngobese is the founder and spiritual head of Gilgal Bible Church, Kaalfontein, Midrand, South Africa. He is a husband and a father to his children and the community at large. He is also a founder of S Ngobese Foundation, a community-based NPC that deals with community trainings and educational development programmes. Apostle Ngobese is the author of two books, *The Cross* and *No Champion without Battles*.

Philipp Öhlmann

Dr Philipp Öhlmann is Feodor Lynen Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University

of Botswana, Research Associate in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Botswana and co-founder of the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His research focuses include religion and development, sustainability, religious social practice, African traditional religion and African Christianity. He furthermore serves as the founding executive editor of the journal *Religion & Development*.

Robekkah Ritchie

Dr Robekkah Ritchie is a Canadian-born researcher that relocated to Germany in 2008 and currently resides in Berlin. Her research topics intersect art, material culture, sustainability and beliefs particularly within a contemporary Buddhist context.

Ileana Sosa Redaelli

Ileana Sosa Redaelli has a BSc in Biochemistry and an MSc in Cell and Molecular Biology. She works as a researcher at the Institute Pasteur Montevideo, and also as a teaching assistant. Ileana is part of the Eco-theology working group at Centro Emmanuel and a member of the Methodist Church in Uruguay, where she collaborates with the church's Mission Program in the areas of Climate Justice and Care for Creation.

Juliane Stork

Juliane Stork is currently pursuing a PhD at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on the topic of theological reactions to climate change in African Initiated Churches in South Africa.

She is John Mbiti Research Fellow at the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her work is focussed on religion and ecological sustainability, eco-theologies, lived religion and theology production.

Tanya van Wyk

Prof. Tanya van Wyk is Associate Professor in the Department of Systematic and Historical Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. Her current research foci include discourses about women and leadership, inclusive language, political theology, feminist ethics and religion and sustainable development with a focus on gender equity. She associated with the Research Programme for Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and is an ordained minister of the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa.

Dietrich Werner

Rev. Prof. Dietrich Werner is a retired Pastor of the Lutheran Churches in Northern Germany, Senior Research Fellow at the Faculty of Theology of Humboldt University Berlin, Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development. He was Head of the Ecumenical Theological Education Programme of World Council of Churches as well as Senior Theological Advisor to Bread for the World, Berlin.

Globethics

Globethics is an ethics network of teachers and institutions based in Geneva, with an international Board of Foundation and with ECOSOC status with the United Nations. Our vision is to embed ethics in higher education. We strive for a world in which people, and especially leaders, are educated in, informed by and act according to ethical values and thus contribute to building sustainable, just and peaceful societies.

The founding conviction of Globethics is that having equal access to knowledge resources in the field of applied ethics enables individuals and institutions from developing and transition economies to become more visible and audible in the global discourse.

In order to ensure access to knowledge resources in applied ethics,

Globethics has developed four resources:



Globethics Library

The leading global digital library on ethics with over 8 million documents and specially curated content



Globethics Publications

A publishing house open to all the authors interested in applied ethics and with over 190 publications in 15 series



Globethics Academy

Online and offline courses and training for all on ethics both as a subject and within specific sectors



Globethics Network

A global network of experts and institutions including a Pool of experts and a Consortium

Globethics provides an electronic platform for dialogue, reflection and action. Its central instrument is the website:

www.globethics.net

Globethics Publications

The list below is only a selection of our publications. To view the full collection, please visit our website.

All products are provided free of charge and can be downloaded in PDF from the Globethics Repository and Globethics Publications at: https://globethics.net/publications. Bulk print copies can be ordered from *publications@globethics.net* at special rates for those from the Global South.

Prof. Dr Fadi Daou, Executive Director. Prof. Dr Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ékué, Academic Dean, Dr Ignace Haaz, Managing Editor. M. Jakob Bühlmann Quero, Editor Assistant.
Find all Series Editors: https://globethics.net/publish-with-us
Contact for manuscripts and suggestions: *publications@globethics.net*

Peace and Justice Series

Peter Eshioke Egielewa, *Conflict Sensitive Reporting in the Nigerian Print Media: Boko Haram Crisis as a Case Study*, 172pp. 2023, ISBN 978-2-88931-544-4
DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4298322

Governance Series

African Law Books

Pascal Mukonde Musulay, *Démocratie électorale en Afrique subsaharienne: Entre droit, pouvoir et argent*, 2016, 209pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-156-9

Pascal Mukonde Musulay, *Droits, libertés et devoirs de la personne et des peuples en droit international africain Tome I Promotion et protection*, 282pp. 2021, ISBN 978-2-88931-397-6

Pascal Mukonde Musulay, *Droits, libertés et devoirs de la personne et des peuples en droit international africain Tome II Libertés, droits et obligations démocratiques*, 332pp. 2021, ISBN 978-2-88931-399-0

Ambroise Katambu Bulambo, *Règlement judiciaire des conflits électoraux. Précis de droit comparé africain*, 2021, 672pp., ISBN 978-2-88931-403-4

Osita C. Eze, *Africa Charter on Rights & Duties, Enforcement Mechanism,* 2021, 406pp., ISBN 978-2-88931-414-0

Fweley Diangitukwa, *Les élections en Afrique : Analyse des comportements et pistes normatives de gestion des conflits*, 2022, 432pp., ISBN 978-2-88931-452-2

Kennedy Kihangi Bindu, *Traité de droit de l'environnement. Perspectives congolaises*, 2022, 512pp., ISBN 978-2-88931-463-8

Fweley Diangitukwa / Ruth Bekoung Siadous, *Les prisons sont-elles utiles pour l'avenir de la société ? droits de l'homme et milieu carcéral : le cas du Gabon Un témoignage exceptionnel*, 2023, 314pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-501-7 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4266299

Co-Publications

You Bin 游斌, *Christian Liturgy: A Chinese Catechism of Celebrating, Chinese Catechism 4*, 2023, 217pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-509-3

Ignace Haaz, Jakob Bühlmann Quero, Khushwant Singh (Eds.), *Ethics and Overcoming Odious Passions: Mitigating Radicalisation and Extremism through Shared Human Values in Education*, 2023, 277pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-533-8 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4292368



Journal of Ethics in Higher Education

https://jehe.globethics.net/
ISSN: 2813-4389

No. 3 (2023): Time for Education

This is only a selection of our latest publications, to view our full collection please visit:

https://globethics.net

ISBN 978-2-88931-548-2

Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond

Climate change and environmental degradation are threatening livelihoods in many parts of the world. To develop pathways into a sustainable future and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, fundamental socioecological transformations are needed. This process requires not only appropriate policies as well as scientific knowledge, but necessitates radical paradigm shifts and changed mindsets and behaviour. Religious communities are crucial stakeholders for achieving these paradigm shifts: religion shapes social imaginaries and people's values, and religious communities have the ability to act as agents of socio-ecological transformation. This volume seeks to elucidate the role of religious communities for ecological sustainability with a focus on Southern Africa. The book provides resources for scholars and students of religion and ecological sustainability, religious communities and faith-based organizations as well as policymakers, practitioners and NGOs in the field of sustainable development. It thereby seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange and to spark further engagement on religion and ecological sustainability in Southern Africa and beyond.



Philipp Öhlmann is a scholar in the field of religion, development and sustainability, currently working as Feodor Lynen Research Fellow at the University of Botswana (2022–2024). He is one of the founders of the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin as well as the International Network on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development and serves as executive editor of the journal Religion & Development.



Juliane Stork is currently pursuing a PhD at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on the topic of theological reactions to climate change in African Initiated Churches in South Africa. She is John S. Mbiti Research Fellow at the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her work is focussed on religion and ecological sustainability, eco-theologies, lived religion and theology production.

Globethics