

Reconsidering the Ecological Mission of the Church

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1. Drawing an Introductory Map of Eco-Theology

What *eco-theology* actually is and how is it related to the science and pastoral perspective of theology? Is it a new trend? It is a fact that the ecological crisis impacts more and more upon the poorest regions worldwide. Overpopulation, overproduction and overconsumption direct modern society to a lifestyle based on the “culture of consumption”, as a necessary gear of the established economic model. Today market analysts consider development as synonymous to the capacity of people to purchase industrial and technological products. According to them the human entity is valuable only when it is a customer entity. Especially, the ecological crisis is caused by the agro-industrial-economic complex and mainly by the global Northern hemisphere. The developed and developing countries have a view that development is identical to the exploitation of natural resources, using human labour in order to produce wealth and comfort for a few at the expense of the survival of others¹.

Moreover, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate change are different aspects of the same reality related to the practice of environmental injustice. At that point religions cannot remain silent. On the contrary they should act dynamically as advocates for the voiceless

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1. [https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/ Document Adopted Date: 2-9-2009: Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/Document%20Adopted%20Date%202-9-2009%20Statement%20on%20eco-justice%20and%20ecological%20debt), p. 1.

people, those who are in need and those who live on the margin. Peace and general growth will not be possible in society, unless justice is dominant among people. For that reason world religions should work intensively together on the issues of social, economic, political and environmental justice through the process of mutual cooperation and dialogue. Their shared values and their engagement increase the energy for seeking solutions².

Also, Churches should deploy the notion of the so-called “social Gospel”,³ where values such as justice, peace, recognition and human and nature’s dignity should be emphasised. Christianity in a spirit of humility and repentance⁴ has to study the lifestyle of the other faith traditions and communities that live in harmony with the environment. This is the case of the East Asian traditions of Confucianism and Taoism, which are the most life-affirming of the world religions⁵. In these two traditions there is an interconnection between the divine, the human and nature, which is described as an *anthropocosmic worldview*. Additionally, this type of cosmology is based on the philosophy of *ch’i* (material force), providing a unity between the material and the spiritual. Personal cultivation is achieved by being in harmony with nature, with humanity and the movements of *tao* (way)⁶.

It is true that the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have developed a human-centered morality and ethics. Because of this anthropocentrism, nature and creation were seen as being of

2. Erin Lothes Biviano, *Ecology and Justice*, Orbis Books, New York 2016, p. 124.

3. A new insight of the importance of the social perspective of the gospel was given in the 4th General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala 1968, where it was stated that: “...*In their faith in the coming Kingdom of God and in their search for his righteousness, Christians are urged to participate in the struggle of millions of people for greater social justice and for world development*”, see *Uppsala Speaks, Reports of the Sections*, WCC, Geneva 1968, p. 45.

4. *Matthew* 6:12.

5. Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim, “The Challenge of the Environmental Crisis”, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 1996, p. 9.

6. Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality*, N.Y. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, p. 47.

secondary importance. However, during the last four decades, due to the re-orientation of sacramental theology, of Christology, of Bible studies and of eco-theology there has been made an important shift. Specifically, nature is viewed by Christian scholars as sacred, not in the sense that it contains “elements of the God’s essence”, but under the belief that it is created by God, and as such it has its own value.

Actually, the strength of the Church derives from its prophetic and salvific message, which is contrary to the concept of human domination over nature. Humanity must learn to live within the bounds of earth’s sustenance, without threatening the existence of other forms of life. The biblical voices of *Jeremiah* (14:2-7), *Isaiah* (23:1-24) and the *Book of Revelation* (ch. 22) make clear the connection between socio-economic injustice and the environmental crisis.

Hence, the WCC, based on the biblical notion of *jubilee* (*Leviticus* 23), has been calling since the 1970’s for the cancellation of the illegitimate external financial debts claimed from the countries of the Southern hemisphere. According to the present economic and foreign policy the countries of the South are forced through certain conditions for loans and investment agreements. The transnational corporations actually set the geopolitical and geo-economic plan, because of the power they have over the rules of trade. Consequently, the governments of the South are unable to secure their peoples’ security, environmental integrity and traditional values.⁷ Additionally, the industrialised countries of the North make disproportionate use of ecological space. Their ecological footprint is 6.4 gha/person*, while in the South it is 0.8 gha/person, which means that the North has more than a eight times times greater impact on the environment than the South⁸.

7. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/economic-justice/social-justice-and-common-goods-policy-paper> Document Adopted Date: 22.03.2011: *Social Justice and Common Goods – Policy Paper*, p. 1.

8. *gha=global hectare per person is a measurement unit for the ecological footprint of people and the biocapacity of the earth. One global hectare is the world’s annual amount of biological production for human use and human waste assimilation, per hectare of biologically productive land and fisheries. See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_hectare.

Analysis of climate change identifies that, in the short and long term, trapping of heat by carbon dioxide leads to more frequent storms, floods, droughts, fires, rising ocean levels, ocean acidification etc. The IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) and the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) have both published multiple studies on that issue proposing several solutions, which all begin with the public information. The results of these surveys are really worrying proving that we are living through the sixth mass extinction event, where for instance, we will lose 30 to 70 % of the world's biodiversity in a time span of 20 to 30 years, while this extinction would need almost 10 million years time to recover. Moreover, only 1.5 million of the world's estimated 8.7 millions species have been identified⁹.

Another example of the effects of climate change is global warming and its consequences. The ice cores from the Antarctic glaciers, which are melting very quickly, include small bubbles of air that contain trapped carbon dioxide. The ratios of isotopes in the water of these ice cores are indicators of past temperature levels in comparison to current numbers, where the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is now higher than it has been during the last 800.000 years. Moreover, the vegetation on the land and the phytoplankton in the oceans have, due to higher temperatures, reduced capacity to uptake carbon dioxide. Biologists have proved that the rate of release of carbon dioxide is higher than the rate of photosynthesis, which actually traps carbon¹⁰. In addition, the burning of fossil fuels reduces atmospheric oxygen which could trigger a serious danger to the ability of Earth to support life forms that rely on oxygen, such as humanity¹¹.

It is evident that the nature's life balance has been violated. Climate change and ecological destruction are getting more and more menacing for

9. D. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution*, Fortress, Philadelphia 1993, p. 13.

10. Celia Deane Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology - Theology for a Fragile Earth*, Cascade Books, Oregon 2017, p. 5.

11. Th. Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco 1988, p. 21.

humanity and providing a global challenge, which should be reflected in theological education and formation worldwide. Within that framework theological institutes, seminars and faculties should work together in order to share information in the field of the *eco-theological formation* of ministers, youth and congregations. Cooperation among faith based environmentalists could build trust. Consequently, the Church ministers apart from their primary mission of the evangelisation of society, must at the same time work in the field of salvation in Christ of the whole world, including the creation. It is clear that climate change has affected directly the livelihoods of marginalised communities, farmers and fishing communities, who are crucial to the world's food security. The era of "unlimited consumption" has far exceeded its limits. It is clear that society has lost the perception of *enough*.

Regarding the financial line it should be replaced by a triple line of ecological sustainability, financial viability and social impact. This whole situation demands a political response and a general transformation of the global economic system and world markets, since global problems require global action. Ecumenical networks and religious groups in total can play a minor role in this regard and only in dialogue and collaboration with other key players. These changes will take place at a global level only when public political powers mandate them and the public will promotes them. Only then, for instance, will the high value of overconsumption be replaced by the value of sufficiency or frugality¹².

Eco-theology has proved widely that the ecological problem has its roots in humanity's alienation from its environment. Unfortunately, only a few positive steps have been made up to now (see Rio Agreement, Paris Agreement - COP21 etc.) towards true and stable reconciliation between humanity and nature. From one point of view humanity is an organic part of the world. Hence, without natural resources humans cannot actually survive. From the other point of view humanity is a victim

12. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil, Love as Ecological – Economic Vocation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2013, p. 205.

of its own egocentrism, eudemonism and contempt of the material world. We are in fact part of a community of life, which forms a single interrelated whole, and in which creatures other than ourselves have their own value. God's presence in all creation reveals to us that in addition to human beings, other creatures also exist, which are not to be used for our pleasure or for our purposes. It is necessary to develop the notions of respect and of integrity for the freedom of all creation. Creation has its own rights which must be respected by humans. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople His All Holiness Bartolomew I is asking with emphasis: "*Mais qu'en est-il des droits de la terre – à laquelle nous participons et en dehors de laquelle nous ne pouvons exister ? Qui parlera au nom des ressources de notre planète qui sont sans voix ? Qui protégera la diversité silencieuse de ses espèces ? Allons-nous accepter la responsabilité de pousser notre environnement vers un point de non-retour?*"¹³.

Thus, there is a vital need for world religions to clarify the moral and mostly the spiritual roots of this underlying problem. The ecological crisis is an unprecedented threat to the integrity and diversity of life on earth. Committing an ecological abuse should be regarded as a sin against God and as a crime against humanity. Thus, according to eco-theologians there is a need to enlarge the understanding of sin, not merely in anthropological and social terms, but also in terms of the natural world, such as the waste production, atmospheric pollution, exhaustion of natural resources, climate change, ozone depletion etc. Mistreatment of nature should be treated as an *anthropological heresy*. If we really desire to find a solution to the ecological problem we must firstly answer the question: how does Christianity and religions in general understand the position of humanity within creation? It is time to move our mindset from human-centered to nature-centered (environmental ethics)¹⁴, where humanity has its own distinctive place in order to offer

13. "Soin de la Création, Justice écologique et éthique - Vers la COP21: La société civile mobilisée pour le climat", Réflexions du Patriarche Œcuménique Bartholomée, Musée national de Manille, le 26 février 2015, in <http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=gr&id=2009&tla=gr>.

14. I. Zizioulas, *The Creation as a Eucharist – A theological approach to the problem of*

its own stewardship and diaconia to nature, not governing it as a master, but as a fellow; not as an owner, but as a tenant who actually borrows their children's house. This is Berry's vision who describes "*the whole universe as the ultimate sacred community*"¹⁵.

God is present *in* and *with* the world: "*the Creator is ontologically other than the creation (transcendence) and God is omnipresent within the creation (immanence)*"¹⁶. World religions teach that God is Love and as Love has joy in creation. God is the ultimate Creator of all, where in nature's diversity we can see God's abundance of grace. Again and again in the book of Psalms we are reminded that God is the owner of the earth and all that inhabits it¹⁷. As St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: "*Wherever you turn, you will see a symbol of God; wherever you look, you can read the handwriting of God.*" And another saint from Syria Isaac states: "*Having a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation: for humans, for birds, for beasts, even for demons – for all God's creatures*"¹⁸. This includes non-human creation as well as the human, since there is inter-connectedness between these two elements. That concept is related to the eschatological vision of creation, to the Kingdom of God, in which is expressed that an ultimate harmony will be restored to the whole of creation, and in which *God will be all in all* (I Cor. 15:28). "*Come Holy Spirit and renew your whole creation*", Christians pray; but there is a need to move from theory to praxis. God commanded Adam and Eve to safeguard the Garden of Eden as the earthly environment in which God placed them.

Ecology (in Greek *Η Κτίση ως Εὐχαριστία – Θεολογική προσέγγιση στο πρόβλημα τῆς Οἰκολογίας*), Akritas, Athens 1998, pp. 39, 40, 63.

15. B. Thomas, *Befriending the earth: A theology of reconciliation between humans and the earth*, (s.l.), Twentythird Publications, 1991, p. 13.

16. D. Brunner, *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, Baker Academic, Washington 2014, p. 78.

17. D. Moo & J. Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2018, p. 64.

18. *Ascetic Treatises* 48.

2. Integrity of Creation: A Theological Approach

In 1949 Aldo Leopold offered in his book *A Sand County Almanac* the following terminology regarding the notion of integrity of creation: “*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise... Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, or for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture. That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics*”¹⁹.

Only in 1983 after the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC do we come across for the first time the terminology of “*Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*” as a programme priority for the Council’s future work. In 80’s the world lived through an arms race between countries leading to potential total self-destruction and to global nuclear threat, unless something would change that route. Churches and Christians called once again to confess anew their faith against racism, sexism, economic exploitation, militarism and misuse of technology and science based on the biblical vision of peace and justice for all including the creation. In that perspective God is seen as Creator, Liberator and Sustainer. As an outcome of that effort in 1990 in Seoul the JPIC World Convocation made ten critical affirmations offering to the world community four concrete elements:

1. Affirming the security of all nations and building a culture of non-violence.
2. Building a culture where people can live in harmony with creation’s integrity.
3. Eradication of racism on all levels dismantling the sin of racism.
4. Developing a just economic order liberating nations from the bondage of foreign debt²⁰.

19. A. Leopold, *A Sand County almanac*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1949, p. 8.

20. Preman Niles, “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation”, in N. Lossky, J. M. Bonino, J.

The term *integrity of creation* was first clarified in 1987 in Glion by the members of Church and Society Working Committee, where we read in their analysis: “*It refers to the intrinsic and instrumental value of each creature in its relationship to its environment and to God*”²¹. In other terms we could say that the notion of integrity of creation is useful because: a) it has given a new perspective to the doctrine of creation and b) it has offered a context within which justice and peace could be developed²². Actually the task of that group was to conceptualize the interaction between theory and praxis in the field of society, technology and environment, finding patterns of sustainable development which would avoid critical threats to the environment. Also, the same working group declared that humans are parts of a community of life, which forms a single interrelated system²³.

What we recognise is the given importance of community against the importance of the individual. The whole is more important than any part of it, including humans. Likewise, the health of an ecosystem as a whole is more important than that of any organism or species individually, including again humans. Holmes Rolston, a leading figure in environmental ethics, has proposed a combination of *biocentric* and *ecocentric* approaches²⁴. What matters is not only equality, but also quality. Development is not only to be measured solely in terms of economic growth and statistics. Rather development should be seen relative to the quality of life.

Pobee, T. Stransky, G. Wainwright, P. Webb (ed.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC, Geneva 2002, pp. 631-633.

21. *Report and Background Papers meeting of the Church and Society Working Group, Glion, Switzerland, September 1987*, WCC, Geneva 1987, p. 37. See also, Peter Bakken, Joan Gibb Engel & Ronald Engel, *Ecology, Justice and Christian Faith – A Critical Guide to the Literature*, Greenwood Press, London 1995.

22. Niles Preman, *Resisting the threats to life: Covenanting for justice, peace and the integrity of creation*, WCC, Geneva 1998, p. 58.

23. Op. cit., *Report and Background Papers meeting of the Church and Society Working Group, Glion, Switzerland, September 1987*, p. 42.

24. Andrew Light & Holmes Rolston (ed.), *Environmental Ethics – An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2003, pp. 143-153.

A new insight was offered by Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar, who wrote extensively on the so called “*theology of land*”. God does not give land to people, but God gives peoples to land in order to care for it and make it flourish. Otherwise God’s name is dishonoured. This is the paradigm of the Babylonian exile, where God exiles the peoples of Israel away from the land, so the land gets some rest from their sins²⁵. Additionally, according to Daneel “*The land is the people, the animals, the plants, the entire earth community – unborn, living, dead. In other words, the land is totality of known and unknown existence. Human life can flourish within the context of a community of life. Humans live alongside the soil, water, plants and the other animals*”²⁶.

In 2002 in Kenya the African Regional Consultation on Environment and Sustainability adopted a statement called *Earth Belongs to God*, according to which:

- We came from the earth and to the earth we will return.
- We are not living on the earth; we are part of the earth’s biosphere.
- We form part of the land and we live from the earth.
- The well-being of the earth transcends all of us because it is something bigger than our own interests²⁷.

3. Christians’ involvement in modern technologies; from selfies to selfishness lifestyle

In the eve of the 21st century world religions will have to face the dilemma of how to deal with the modern technology. Is there any kind of “neutral technology”? Some people say yes, while others claim that

25. W. Brueggemann, *The Land place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2002, pp. 138-140.

26. M. Daneel, “African Independent Churches face the challenge of environmental ethics”, in *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North*, WCC, Geneva 1994, pp. 248-263.

27. E. Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping - In search of an inspiring vision*, (s.l.): Sun Press, 2011, p. 71.

there is no positive or negative, but only a unique use of technology. The critical questions emerging from the technological development have no ethical, but mainly ontological criteria. Could it be this *artificial intelligence* for example the beginning of neutralisation of the human intelligence? Probably, the main question will be what kind of human being we desire to have, and not how to use future's technology.

The modern society is full of anticipation and great expectancy for the coming technological development. Nobody could argue against the achievements and the progress of technology, but in the end what is the price for the future generations of this reality? This new formulated situation challenges with intensity the traditional definition of personhood, life and human being's relation with the environment. There is a risk for human to become just another part of the technological engine. Many believe that we get into another type of life where technology will be exclusively based on artificial intelligence and not on human's skills. That means that in the near future people will have more passive role instead of active. Furthermore, this transitional era is characterised by the gradual replacement of human mind by the smart devices (e.g. smart phones).

Additionally, it is a common experience in our nowadays to see everywhere people to communicate with each other using different platforms of social media (facebook, instagram, twitter etc). This type of communication based on technology is faster and it needs no real physical presence. Especially, the element of space has also been replaced by the cyberspace.²⁸

Moreover, the concern for Christians' involvement in modern technologies is related to the search for a just, participatory and sustainable society. This topic has always been central to the ecumenical dialogue between

28. Chr. Savvatos, *The human being and the development of the modern technology – A challenge for the Orthodox theology*, (in Greek, *Ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἡ ἀνάπτυξη τῆς σύγχρονης τεχνολογίας – Μιὰ πρόκληση γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία*), H. D. Messinias, Kalamata 2019, p. 33.

member Churches. At the same time this issue challenged the structure of society and of the Church itself. Some scholars emphasised the notion of the “appropriate technology”, which is the one that fits people’s values, principles, cultures and life styles. Appropriate technology is also linked with the appropriate development.²⁹

Also, there is an interaction between the theory of theology, the practice of economy, the use of the technological means and the general growth. Thus, it is necessary to keep in mind the existing connection between the technological development and the ecological crisis, since the growth in industry and in science demand to “sacrifice” natural resources. Consequently, Christianity must provide with answers and proposals the modern society in order to offer a true and meaningful lifestyle based on the eucharistic fellowship. In this eucharistic vision all creation is included; humanity and environment. There is a mutual interdependency between human nature and environmental nature.

4. The Issue of Ecological Crisis *vis à vis* the Ecumenical Moment

In 1961 in New Delhi the Churches – members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), during the 3rd General Assembly in India, declared that: “*the Christian should welcome scientific discoveries as new steps in man’s dominion over nature*”³⁰. Science and technology, generally speaking, represents the employment of the human being’s intellectual superiority for the purpose of discovering ways and means by which they might derive greatest possible profit for their own purpose. Consequently, academic theology became in the past jointly responsible with science and technology for the ecological problem by its persistence in identifying the *imago Dei* only with a pure human rational being.

29. Ans van der Bent, *Commitment to God’s World*, WCC, Geneva 1995, pp. 126-128.

30. L. Vischer (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, The Bethany Press, Missouri 1963, pp. 145.

During the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in September 2009 a statement was adopted declaring that the ecological crisis is actually a reflection of human failure to deal with life's issues. Also, there is a serious concern from Christian Churches and of all persons of good will for the rapid ecological destruction and for the abuse of God's creation. At the same time this environmental crisis provides an important opportunity for global Christianity to re-consider its faith status regarding its relation with nature and also to re-deploy a schedule of action and a new engagement in order to tackle the problem of climate change, before it is too late³¹. Therefore, it became clear that "economics is a matter of faith and has an impact on human existence and all of creation"³². Additionally, during the proceedings of the same central committee of the WCC (2009) it was acknowledged that a new ethos and a new life style based on ecological responsibility and reflecting the values of solidarity, common good and inclusion, must emerge in order to replace the anti-values of greed, individualism and exclusion. Also, this kind of ecological ethos should be developed with respect to the microcosm and to the macrocosm³³.

A few years later during the last General Assembly of the WCC in Busan 2013 the members Churches of the Council identified that *eco-theology* and *climate justice* are the main two priorities for the next agenda (2014-2021)³⁴. Thus, it is clear that issues such as eco-theology, climate and economic justice are components in the global pilgrimage for peace for the present and for the future generations. There is a deep and moral obligation for Christianity to promote the notion of *ecological justice* using the tools and the hermeneutics of *eco-theology*. However, when we say *ecological justice* we do not mean the narrow fulfillment of

31. F. Osborn, *Our Plundered Planet*, Little Brown and Company, 1948. See also, Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, First Mariner Books, New York, 1962.

32. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-eco-justice-and-ecological-debt>.

33. H. Kung, *Global responsibility in search for a new world ethic*, Crossroad, N. York 1991, p. 30.

34. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/the-way-of-just-peace>.

the law through the spectrum of obligation. Instead we want to declare justice which is deployed beyond the legal sense to the notion of loving care of the entire created world; humanity and nature³⁵.

5. Steps to Be Taken: Ecological Reformation of Religions

In the 21st century it is a common thesis that all religions and cultures should design a plan of ecological reaction against the present environmental crisis. And this platform of reaction should be accomplished in every geographical context, since there is no Muslim river, or Catholic mountain, or Orthodox sea, or Protestant forest etc.³⁶. Earth is the household – *oikos* of all people, all races, all nations, all religions, all languages; we are all in the same boat³⁷.

Once again the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in 1997 emphatically stated *vis à vis* the ecological issue: “*However, if we do not change within ourselves the attitude of our heart toward our fellow human being from an attitude of indifference or even enmity to an attitude of friendship, co-operation and acceptance, then we will achieve nothing in confrontation of the ecological problems of worldwide interest... All people must be mobilised, otherwise anything that one person tries to build, another tears it down. Addressing such an issue demands an ecumenical dialogue and a wide collaboration in all levels. Science has important things to say on this issue, because it studies and records the actual situation, determines its causes, predicts their effects and recommends measures to address it*”³⁸. Political leadership also has an equally important role to play in these matters, since it is up to them to decide on the measures and to ensure that they are implemented.

35. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, John Chryssavgis (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven – Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, Fordham University Press, New York 2012, pp. 165-166.

36. S. McDonagh, *The greening of the Church*, Orbis Books, New York 1991, pp. 192-193.

37. Op. cit., Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, J. Chryssavgis (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven – Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, p. 269.

38. Op. cit. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, John Chryssavgis (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven – Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, pp. 271-274.

Only political will is able to bring justice and enable poor majorities to have a share of the benefits of development and participation in the decision making process. What then is religions' role and how could they contribute to tackling this issue? Religions offer the moral values and the spiritual background for these measures. The initial zeal will soon wear off, unless religions provide society with the appropriate moral contribution justifying their right cause³⁹.

Taking care of earth could provide the proper *locus* of religions' reconciliation offering at the same time the proper elements in order to build their future life together. In 20th century the ecological crisis gave birth to a new theological academic conception called *eco-theology*, where the Bible's message is addressed again in a new hermeneutic context. Lessons then are important and precious when they are learned together. Historic conditions have separated religions, but present conditions call on them to re-write history, which is to cooperate and work again together having as a firm ground the soil where they stand. Taking care of earth together could work as a platform for dialogue between religions and as a bridge of communication, where bridges do not make the two banks of the river even, but connect them. In that case genuine solidarity and ecumenical cooperation between religions' representatives and communities are not optional, but are compulsory. It is a general axiom that it is not permitted to hurt our fellow human being and this principle mostly is understood and applied with respect to direct harm. However, law must protect society also from indirect harm and damage, whose consequences are not manifested in time immediately or visibly. Usually, these kinds of damages cover long distances and long periods⁴⁰; such is the case of environmental destruction.

What does this kind of ecological reformation entail? It is based on a twofold critique. Namely, the first critique is towards the past, where

39. Op. cit. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, John Chryssavgis (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven – Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, p. 275.

40. Op. cit. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, J. Chryssavgis (ed.), *On Earth as in Heaven – Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, p. 277.

Christianity heavily contributed to the unlimited exploitation of natural resources, to unlimited industrial production and to a life style based on consumption again unlimited. The second critique is the fact that we have not as Christians recognised the ecological dimension of the Gospel. In the core of this vision is God's love extending to all His creatures and Jesus' message addressed through the Holy Spirit to all peoples⁴¹. Finally, the ecological reformation should be extended to Bible study, catechism, liturgy, hymnology, ministry and mission.

According to Rosemary Ruether, in her work *Christianity and Ecology*, there are two different theological perspectives which can work complementary to each other. The first type is called *covenantal*, which draws its origins from the Churches with Protestant biblical background based on the notion of the covenant tradition, and the second type is called *sacramental*, which derives from the patristic and medieval mysticism, where the term of creation is regarded as sacred, as the place where the divine presence is revealed⁴².

Regarding Orthodox spirituality this ecological reformation should be based on conversion and renewal. *Metanoia* (repentance) is a key-point in humanity's transformation regarding their behaviour toward nature and toward their neighbour⁴³. There is a need to expand the doctrine of "loving the neighbour" to "loving the neighbourhood". For Eris Biviano, it is necessary to enlarge the notion of neighbour to the community of earth, where social justice serves the entire earth, seeing the earth as the new poor of the Gospel⁴⁴. The message that we must honour the neighbour and preserve the world with humility, generosity

41. Kallistos Ware, *Ecological Crisis and Hope*, Akritas, Athens 2008, p. 88: "This reality of Christ's presence in our neighbour, is the basis for every social action of Christians within the world", (in Greek: *Οικολογική Κρίση και Έλπίδα*).

42. R. Ruether, "Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the well-being of earth and humans", in D.T. Hessel & R. Ruether (ed.), *Eco-justice at the center of the Church's mission*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 603-614.

43. See, Bartholomew I Ecumenical Patriarch, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*, ed. John Chryssavgis, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2003.

44. Op. cit., Erin Lothes Biviano, *Ecology and Justice*, p. 24.

and solidarity, has been expressed too by Church leaders, such as the Ecumenical Patriarch His All Holiness Bartholomew I, who declared in 2005 in Geneva that: “*We must serve our neighbour and preserve our world with both humility and generosity in a perspective of frugality and solidarity alike*”⁴⁵. Thus, *metanoia* is another feature of the ecological ethics on which a sufficient attention must be given. Additionally, environmental destruction, as a result of human’s reckless exploitation and not unwise use, could be regarded as a sin, because the world is not treated as God’s wondrous creation, but it is considered as a material for profit. Therefore, a genuine conversion of ourselves in Christ is necessary changing the way we think and act in our daily life⁴⁶.

There are rich theological resources available in many traditions that could assist in this purpose. Though from the Orthodox theological activities *vis à vis* the ecological care I will only refer to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople which every first of September since 1989 promulgates the *Encyclical on Environment*. The aim of this official document is to raise the awareness of Orthodox members regarding the environmental crisis and their personal responsibility. Also, every 1st September is dedicated to the protection of earth, and that is why all local churches have been asked to pray for that purpose developing special hymns and educational programmes for youth. Moreover the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has established a series of inter-disciplinary seminars held at the Holy Trinity monastery on Chalki island and inter-religious symposiums at sea regarding the issue of protection of earth and water⁴⁷.

The Abrahamic religions, according to the “Green Patriarch Bartholomew”, “*are called today to establish a new and true relationship with God the Creator.*”

45. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Statement for the WCC Working Group on Climate Change”, August 2005, in L. Andrianos, J.-W. Sneepe, G. Kerber & R. Attfield (ed.), *Sustainable Alternatives for Poverty Reduction and Eco-Justice*, vol.1, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Chania 2014, p. 18.

46. Op. cit., Celia Deane Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology - Theology for a Fragile Earth*, p. 112.

47. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Messages and Addresses for the Environment* (in Greek *Μηνύματα και Όμιλίες δια τὸ Περιβάλλον*), Fanarion, Athens 2002, pp. 341-403.



Only in that case it will be possible to develop an ecological ethics based on the need of a person to love and to be loved; a personal call coming from God addressed to humanity... In that perspective ecology should be taken as a practical answer from human to that divine call”⁴⁸.

6. The Notion of Earth keeping

We have witnessed three decades of environmental statistics, analyses, programmes and movements. As a global community we have made progress on issues such as acid rain and ozone depletion, but we have not managed to change our modern life-style, which is actually based on consumerism. Along with the industrial revolution in the West another kind of revolution happened, the consumer one, which represents our preferences and buying habits. Our modern civilisation is marked mainly by our ego-satisfaction in consumption.

A typical ethical approach will not solve the problem. Within the community of life freedom is clearly linked to justice and peace. These three terms (integrity - justice - peace) are to be recognised as indispensable dimensions of a contemporary Christian ethic. The ecological crisis is not simply a matter of management and technicalities, but it is a matter of changing our spiritual attitude and our world view. It is a problem which should be addressed through moral formation in combination with praxis. Thus, this praxis is expressed through prayer, reflection and the transformation which finally leads to transfiguration of all. The fundamental difficulty lies not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem, but in the human heart.⁴⁹ Beginning to see nature as God’s work we realise our own place within nature. A global and at the same time a personal sense of *ecological responsibility* must be developed towards *earthkeeping*. Each one of us is

48. Op. cit., Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Messages and Addresses for the Environment*, pp. 416-417.

49. J. Chryssavgis & Br. v. Foltz (ed.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration – Orthodox Christian Perspective on Environment, Nature and Creation*, Fordham University Press, New York 2013, p. 88.



called to make a clear distinction between what he/she wants and what he/she needs⁵⁰.

This notion of *earthkeeping* includes the following points:

- Respect of diversity cultures, species, traditions etc.
- Sharing the benefits and the responsibility for preserving the common, global, goods.
- Full participation in the decision – making part for all who are engaged.
- Solidarity, rebuilding relationships especially to those who are voiceless and marginalised.
- Sufficiency, not allowing humans' greed to abuse the natural resources⁵¹.

7. Spirituality of Resistance against the Structural Injustice

Jesus said to them: “*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*”⁵². What does spirituality have to do with wealth, with economic globalisation, or the common goods? Why should one introduce spirituality into this context? In 1975 M. Thomas, moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC at the Nairobi Assembly, pointed out the phrase *spirituality for combat*. What he really wanted to point out was that the struggles for justice and human dignity have a spiritual dimension of their own. “*The struggle for justice is about serving God or an idol... Struggle is not merely against others, but also against our self-righteousness of ideals which reinforce collective structures of inhumanity and oppression*”, Thomas continued⁵³. After the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC in 1983 Gwen Cashmore and Joan Puls presented in the ecumenical dialogue the notion of *spirituality of resistance*, which means to confront spiritually all forms of power

50. K. Ware, “Through the Creation to the creator”, in *Ecotheology*, 2 (1997), pp. 8-30.

51. See E. M. Conradie, “The dispute on responsible stewardship as a metaphor for Christian earthkeeping”, in *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology*, 16 (2007), pp. 173-190.

52. *Luke*, 12:15.

53. K. Raiser, “Spirituality of Resistance”, in *Passion for Another World: WCC, Internal Encounter of Churches, Agencies and Other Partners on the World Bank and IMF, Geneva 11-12/9/2003*, WCC, Geneva 2004, p. 6.

which serve Mammon, to defend those who are poor, strangers, outcasts, to challenge any sort of absolutism, to fight against the interest of the few and to fight in favour of the needs of the many.

In that framework a *spirituality of resistance* based on the notions of openness, connectedness and earthedness should be applied at the ecumenical level, where *openness* means the willingness to make room for the other and to open oneself to the action of the Spirit, *connectedness* means the recognition that life is sustained by bonds of community and earthedness binds the ecumenical spirituality to the everyday conditions of life at a given time and place. Analysing this kind of resistance one could say that:

- we resist the attitude that creation is treated as a source for human exploitation
- we resist the human greed that makes land a commodity, which devastates the earth for profit⁵⁴.

The financial system of recent times has shaped the world more than ever before. However, by becoming the engine of virtual growth and wealth, it has enriched some people but has harmed many more, creating poverty, unemployment, hunger and death; widening the gap between rich and poor; marginalizing certain groups of people; eroding the whole meaning of human life; and destroying ecosystems. Today's global financial crisis, which originated in the richest parts of our world, points to the immorality of a system that glorifies money and has a dehumanizing effect by encouraging acquisitive individualism. The resulting greed-based culture impoverishes human life, erodes the moral and ecological fabric of human civilisation, and intoxicates our psyche with materialism. The crisis we face is, at the same time, both systemic and moral. In a word: human life and the earth are under grave threat.

According to statistics 7.7 million persons each owned wealth worth one million US\$ or more. The sum of their wealth reached 28.9

54. G. Roger, *A Spirituality of Resistance – Finding a peaceful heart and Protecting the Earth*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1999, pp. 9-32.

trillion US\$, or almost three times the United States national product that same year. In the meantime, 840 million people worldwide are undernourished and 1.5 billion the majority of whom are women, children, and Indigenous Peoples live on less than one dollar a day. The world's richest 20 % account for 86 % of global consumption of goods and services. The annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 57% and at least 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. Environmental problems - global warming, depletion of natural resources, and ossified biodiversity - loom ever larger. Wars rage in many parts of the world, and militarization and violence have become part of our daily existence. Financial crises have become more frequent and intense. Joblessness is threatening the people's livelihoods.

8. The Process of A.G.A.P.E.

The WCC after its General Assembly in Harare (1998) elaborated a study on economic globalisation, along with its specialised partners (WARC, LWF etc.) in Southern Africa, India, Ecuador, Canada and Sweden. Out of this process it was born a project called *AGAPE* (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth)⁵⁵, which is a milestone in the Ecumenical Movement. This project analysed current topics such as poverty, wealth, financial justice and ecology from the Biblical perspective. Furthermore, the aim of that project was to establish a model of a sustainable and just economy with moral and ethical basis. The *AGAPE* project led the WCC to the next level with the ongoing study process on *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology*. It was evident after all that economics is an issue of faith (already indicated above) having major impact on human life and on the whole of creation. The current economic methodology, promoted mainly by IMF policy, is in favour of the neoliberal doctrine modifying the world more than ever before

55. St. Tsompanidis, *Ecclesiology and Globalisation*, Pournaras, Thessaloniki 2008, pp. 119-141 (in Greek: *Ἐκκλησιολογία καὶ Παγκοσμιοποίηση*).

by widening the gap between the rich and the poor, by marginalising certain groups of people (especially indigenous people, children and women) and by destroying ecosystems. As a consequence, there is a glorification of money and a simultaneous dehumanisation of culture because of greed and individualism⁵⁶.

However, Jesus has told us that “*you cannot serve both God and wealth*”⁵⁷. The unlimited and irresponsible consumption of goods and of natural resources is contrary to biblical teaching and principles. Following that economic module people do not learn to cooperate. Instead, they become unable to share with each other and they cannot live in harmony with the environment. This situation is a challenge for world religions in order to develop a culture based on social justice, human dignity and ecological sustainability. Thus, the WCC, already a decade ago, through its central committee (26th of August - 2nd of September 2009) emphasised the need to explore a new paradigm of economic development, which should not calculate only numbers and the Gross Domestic Product of countries. On the contrary, the AGAPE process should aim to replace the current one with another, based on the notion of caring for creation and for future generations. The pillars of the AGAPE project are the following: 1. Quality of life, 2. Good governance, 3. Education, 4. Health system, 5. Ecological resilience, 6. Cultural diversity, 7. Spiritual well being⁵⁸.

9. Conclusions

In March 2016 in Volos, Greece there was an international consultation on Eco-theology, Climate Justice and Food Security. There a declaration in a *Manifesto for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity*, stated: “An

56. [https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/ Document Adopted Date: 2.09.2009: Statement on just finance and the economy of life](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/Document%20Adopted%20Date%202.09.2009%20Statement%20on%20just%20finance%20and%20the%20economy%20of%20life), pp. 1-2.

57. *Luke* 16:13.

58. Op. cit., [https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/ 2009/ Document Adopted Date: 2.09.2009: Statement on just finance and the economy of life](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/Document%20Adopted%20Date%202.09.2009%20Statement%20on%20just%20finance%20and%20the%20economy%20of%20life), p. 3.

*ecological reformation of Christianity is a matter of repentance, conversion and renewal for all Christian traditions*⁵⁹. Previously in 2009 the WCC had made clear that there is a need for a transformation of life and society in all levels ending the ecological indebtedness and at the same time starting the restoration of right relations between people and between people and earth. This begins with the recognition of *ecological debt*, which refers to damage caused over time to ecosystems, places and peoples through the over-production and consumption of natural resources⁶⁰. Primarily it is the debt owed by the industrialised countries of the North to countries of the South through the degradation of environment, the disproportionate appropriation of ecological space to dump greenhouse gases and toxic wastes and secondly it is the debt owed by the economically and politically powerful national elites to marginalised peoples⁶¹.

There are three main areas where religions could act together and effectively in order to answer to those who claim that THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE (TINA)⁶²:

- 1) Participating with peoples of good will, religions and ecological movements.
- 2) Changing the oppressive national and international economic and industrial structures.
- 3) Developing ecological oriented educational programmes.

Acting in that form religions would be a sustainable community able to secure food, social balance and peace in the midst of people and staying

59. *Global Survey on Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security in theological education and Christian leadership development*, file://Manifesto_on_an_ecological_reformation_of_all_Christian_traditions_March2016.pdf.

60. *Dossier on Globalisation and Debt, Justice, Peace and Creation team, World Council of Churches, No. 3, WCC, Geneva 1999, p. 9.*

61. Op. cit., https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/Document_Adopted_Date:_2-9-2009:_Statement_on_eco-justice_and_ecological_debt, p. 2.

62. Dokument (sic) Datum: 28.01.2003, *Lead us not into temptation – Churches' response to the policies of international financial institutions*, Third World Social Forum (WSF), Porto Alegre, Brazil 23-28 January 2003, p. 1.



away from the spirit of triumphalism and self-righteousness. In order for this vision to happen a limit to growth should take a central place in development (see Church and Society consultation in Bucharest 1974). Development is not a problem, but becomes a problem when peoples become objects of development. Acknowledgement of cultural pluralism, distribution of power and equal opportunities are parts of development too. Therefore religions should deploy a dynamic spirituality becoming agents of transformation and of renewal, protecting the poor, the weak and the oppressed, since they can influence attitudes, values and raise consciousness.

In conclusion we set some recommendations:

- Sharing and networking (Co-operations between Eco Congregations, Green Churches and Eco-diakonia and the establishment of a dialogue platform between Churches and Scientists, and between Christians people of good will and people of other religions; each faith has to become an *earth-centred faith*).
- Awareness Raising (Training of theological teachers and work with theological educational institutions).
- Emphasis on liturgy and spirituality (Liturgy could serve at the level of congregations to raise spiritual awareness of God's creation).
- A holistic vision of theology (Solidarity with vulnerable people who suffer from climate change and the deteriorating weather conditions – Accepting the fact we are all members of the whole household of God)⁶³.

The only solution to the ecological problem is to stop the corruption and the alienation of humanity from itself. A development without limitation is based on the very core of human's desire for growth. However, Jesus warns that "*You cannot serve both God and wealth*"⁶⁴. The current financial globalisation and economic expansion have been increasingly driven by

63. L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community – Earth Ethics*, Orbis Books, New York 1996, p. 243.

64. *Luke* 16:13.





greed. The challenge for the religions and for the Christian Churches today is not to abandon their prophetic role, but to transform their modern identity keeping away from this greed. Honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability should be the pillars of the desired re-orientation.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ἐπανεξέταση τῆς Οἰκολογικῆς Ἀποστολῆς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας

π. Αὐγουστίνου Μπαῖραχτάρη,
Ἐπίκ. Καθηγητοῦ Π.Α.Ε.Α.Κ.

Ἡ παροῦσα μελέτη ἐπιδιώκει νὰ ἀναδείξει μία σειρὰ ἀπὸ ἐπίκαιρα ζητήματα, τὰ ὁποῖα συνδέονται μεταξύ τους καὶ ἔχουν ὡς ἐπίκεντρο αὐτὸ ποὺ ὀνομάζουμε οἰκο-θεολογία. Εἶναι ἓνας σχετικὰ σύγχρονος ὅρος καὶ μία νέα θεολογικὴ κατεύθυνση, ἡ ὁποία μελετᾶ τὴ σύνδεση μεταξύ τοῦ οἰκολογικοῦ προβλήματος καὶ τῆς θεολογίας. Ἡ θεολογία ὡς ἐπιστήμη καλεῖται νὰ ἔχει ἓναν προσανατολισμὸ ὀλιστικό. Ἡ κτίση λοιπὸν δὲν μπορεῖ ὡς ἔννοια καὶ ὡς πραγματικότητα νὰ εἶναι ἐκτὸς τῆς σωτηριολογικῆς καὶ ἐσχατολογικῆς θεολογικῆς ἀνάλυσης⁶⁵. Ὁ ἀνακαινισμὸς τῆς δημιουργίας ἀποτελοῦσε ἀνέκαθεν μία ἔννοια βασικὴ στὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ πρώιμου Χριστιανισμοῦ, ποὺ ὅμως παραμελήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴ σχολαστικὴ θεολογία γιὰ πολλοὺς αἰῶνες, ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς ἀνθρωποκεντρικῆς ἠθικῆς, ποὺ ἀνέπτυξε τόσο ὁ Δυτικός, ὅσο καὶ ὁ Ἀνατολικὸς θεολογικὸς κριτικὸς στοχασμὸς⁶⁶.

Ὁ 20ὸς λοιπὸν αἰῶνας, ἐξ αἰτίας αὐτῆς τῆς ὑπερτροφικῆς, μονοδιάστατης, οἰκονομικῆς ἀνάπτυξης, δημιούργησε σημαντικὰ προβλήματα στὴ βιωσιμότητα τοῦ περιβάλλοντος. Ὁ ὑπερπληθυσμὸς, ἡ ὑπερπαραγωγὴ καὶ ἡ ὑπερκατανάλωση κατευθύνουν τὴ μοντέρνα

65. Chr. Arvanitis, *Human being and Ecological Crisis*, Stamoulis, Thessaloniki 2013, p. 118 (in Greek *Ἄνθρωπος καὶ Οἰκολογικὴ Κρίση*).

66. Lynn White, "Religion's Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis: An Argument Run Amok", in *Worldview* 18 (1975), pp. 39-45.



κοινωνία σὲ ἓνα μοτίβο ζωῆς βασισμένο στὸν λεγόμενο «πολιτισμὸ τῆς κατανάλωσης». Οἱ οικονομικοὶ ἀναλυτὲς τῆς ἀγορᾶς θεωροῦν ὡς συνώνυμο τῆς ἀνάπτυξης τὴν ἰκανότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ ἀγοράζει βιομηχανικὰ καὶ τεχνολογικὰ προϊόντα. Ἡ ἀνθρώπινη χαρὰ ἔχει ταυτισθεῖ μὲ τὴν ἀγορὰ προϊόντων, ποὺ ὁδηγεῖ βαθμιαία σὲ μία αὐτο-επιβεβαίωση τοῦ ἐγώ, ἐνῶ ἔχουν πλήρως ἀγνοηθεῖ ἔννοιες ὅπως εἶναι ἡ φαντασία, ἡ δημιουργικότητα καὶ τὸ μοίρασμα μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους. Ἔτσι ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ὄντοτητα ἔχει αντικατασταθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν καταναλωτικὴ ὄντοτητα. Ἐπιπλέον, οἱ ἀνεπτυγμένες καὶ ἀναπτυσσόμενες χώρες βασιζοῦν τὴν οικονομικὴ τους ἀνάπτυξη στὴν ἐκμετάλλευση τῶν φυσικῶν πηγῶν καὶ πόρων τῶν χωρῶν τοῦ Νότου κατὰ κύριο λόγο, χρησιμοποιώντας κατάλληλα τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἐργασία πρὸς τὴν ἐπίτευξη αὐτοῦ τοῦ σκοποῦ. Ὡστόσο, τὸ αὐστηρὸ αὐτὸ συστημικὸ μοντέλο οικονομικῆς παραγωγῆς καὶ ἀνάπτυξης ἔχει ὡς ἀπόρροια τὴν οἰκολογικὴ καταστροφή, τὴ διατάραξη τῆς ἰσορροπίας τῆς φύσης, τὴν ἀπώλεια τῆς βιοποικιλότητος καὶ τὴν κλιματικὴ ἀλλαγὴ, ὅφεις τῆς ἴδιας πραγματικότητας, ποὺ προκαλεῖται ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς λεγόμενης περιβαλλοντολογικῆς ἀδικίας.

Σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς στατιστικὲς μελέτες, 7,7 ἑκατομμύρια ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν περιουσία ἐνὸς ἑκατομμυρίου ἀμερικανικῶν δολαρίων ἢ περισσότερων. Τὸ σύνολο τοῦ πλοῦτου τους φθάνει τὰ 28,9 τρισεκατομμύρια δολάρια, ἐνῶ ὑπάρχουν στὴ γῆ 840 ἑκατομμύρια ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ὑποσιτίζονται καὶ 1,5 δισεκατομμύριο ἄνθρωποι (κυρίως γυναῖκες, παιδιὰ καὶ αὐτόχθονες πληθυσμοί) ποὺ ζοῦν μὲ λιγότερο ἀπὸ ἓνα δολάριο τὴν ἡμέρα. Τὸ 20% τῶν πιδὸ πλούσιων ἀνθρώπων τοῦ παγκόσμιου πληθυσμοῦ καρπώνεται τὸ 86% τῶν προϊόντων καὶ τῶν ὑπηρεσιῶν. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι τὸ ὑπόλοιπο 80% τοῦ παγκόσμιου πληθυσμοῦ καταναλώνει τὸ ὑπόλοιπο 14% τῆς παγκόσμιας παραγωγῆς. Κάθε ἡμέρα 24.000 ἄνθρωποι πεθαίνουν ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα ἢ τὴν κακὴ διατροφή. Οἱ εἰδικοὶ ἐπιστήμονες καταλήγουν στὸ συμπέρασμα ὅτι ἂν συνεχισθεῖ αὐτὸς ὁ ρυθμὸς τῆς οἰκολογικῆς ἐκμετάλλευσης, τότε σὲ ἓνα χρονικὸ διάστημα 20 ἕως 30 ἐτῶν θὰ χαθεῖ τὸ 70% τῆς βιοποικιλότητος, ἐνῶ ὁ χρόνος φυσιολογικῆς ἀνάκαμψης εἶναι περίπου 10 ἑκατομμύρια χρόνια. Ἐπιπλέον, μόνον 1,5 ἑκατομμύριο ἔχει καταγραφεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ 8,7 ἑκατομμύρια εἰδῶν ἐντόμων, ζῶων καὶ ὀργανισμῶν κ.λπ. ποὺ ὑπάρχουν, ἐνῶ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ 200 εἶδη ἐξαφανίζονται καθημερινά.

Σ' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς τὸ σημεῖο οἱ θρησκείες καλοῦνται νὰ ἀναπτύξουν ἕναν λόγο δυναμικό, καταγγελτικό, προφητικό καὶ ὑποστηρικτικό, ὥστε νὰ ὁμιλοῦν στὸ ὄνομα ὅλων ἐκείνων ποὺ στεροῦνται τῶν δικαιωμάτων τους καὶ ζοῦν στὸ περιθώριο. Εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ ὑπάρξει κοινωνικὴ εἰρήνη καὶ προκοπὴ μεταξὺ τῶν θρησκειῶν καὶ τῶν λαῶν, ἂν δὲν ἐπικρατήσῃ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἡ καταλλαγὴ. Συνεπῶς, οἱ θρησκείες καλοῦνται νὰ συνεργασθοῦν πάνω στὸ ζήτημα τῆς κοινωνικῆς, οἰκονομικῆς, πολιτικῆς καὶ περιβαλλοντολογικῆς δικαιοσύνης μέσω τῆς διαδικασίας τοῦ διαλόγου καὶ τῆς ἀμοιβαίας συνεργασίας σὲ πρακτικὸ ἐπίπεδο, καθὼς δὲν ὑφίσταται μουσουλμανικὸ δάσος, προτεσταντικὸ ποτάμι, ρωμαιοκαθολικὸ βουνὸ ἢ ὀρθόδοξη θάλασσα. Το περιβάλλον λειτουργεῖ ὡς τὸ σπίτι ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Εἰδικώτερα ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς, πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν πρωταρχικὴ του διακονία ποὺ εἶναι ὁ εὐαγγελισμὸς τῆς κοινωνίας, καλεῖται νὰ ἐργασθεῖ καὶ στὸ πεδίο τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ σωτηρίας πάντων, συμπεριλαμβανομένης καὶ τῆς κτίσεως. Εἶναι φανερὸ ὅτι ἡ κλιματικὴ ἀλλαγὴ ἔχει ἐπηρεάσει δραματικά καὶ ἄμεσα τίς ζωὲς τῶν ἀγροτῶν, τῶν ἰχθυοπαραγωγῶν καὶ ὅλων ὅσοι ζοῦν σὲ ἐναρμόνιση καὶ ἐξάρτηση μὲ τὴ φύση. Ἡ ἐποχὴ τῆς χωρὶς ὄρια κατανάλωσης ἔχει πρὸ πολλοῦ φθάσει στὰ ὄριά της. Ἡ παγκόσμια ἐπομένως Χριστιανικὴ κοινότητα ἔχει συμπεριλάβει στὴν προσκυνηματικὴ της πορεία πρὸς τὴν εἰρήνη τόσο τὴν ἔννοια τῆς οἰκολογικῆς δικαιοσύνης, ὅσο καὶ τὴν οἰκο-θεολογία ὡς τὸν θεωρητικὸ πυλῶνα πάνω στὸν ὁποῖο μπορεῖ νὰ ἀναπτυχθεῖ μία μορφὴ «οἰκολογικοῦ ἡθους». Εἶναι ἀναγκαῖο νὰ διευρύνουμε τὸν εὐαγγελικὸ κανόνα τῆς ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν γείτονα στὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴ γειτονιά.