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Introduction

*Aruna Gnanadason
GIT Dean of Students*

The 2017 Global Institute of Theology (GIT) was special! It was organized in the context of the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

A biennial programme of the WCRC, the GIT offers a unique opportunity for a community of students to live together and learn and do theology in a fully inter-contextual and ecumenical way, connecting theology from the local to the regional and world levels—each session being organized in a different part of the world.

The 2017 GIT was organized in Germany and had two phases. The first phase (8-27 June) was held in Wuppertal, in cooperation with the Kirchliche Hochschule (KiHo), an independent theological university; the Reformierter Bund (Reformed Alliance) and the Vereinten Evangelischen Mission (VEM). The second phase of the GIT was held in Leipzig (28 June-7 July) where the students had the opportunity to participate, as theological consultants, at the General Council.

The GIT has become a very popular course—of the over one hundred applications, 45 students were selected to participate, and eventually 41 were able to participate. They were drawn from countries as far flung as Brazil, Trinidad, and Cuba; Germany and Hungary; Syria and Lebanon; South Korea, Taiwan, Myanmar, India, and Indonesia; South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, and Kenya; the USA and Canada.

The setting for the first phase of the GIT was perfect in more ways than one! We met on Bethel, or “the Holy Hill,” as it is sometimes called, on a beautiful, sprawling campus with spectacular views and walkways both within the campus and surrounding it. KiHo and the Reformed Alliance collaborated with the WCRC in developing the academic aspect of the GIT. The hosts also organized a well-planned and very meaningful exposure to the history of the region, the life of the churches, particularly of the minority Reformed churches as well as of ecumenical initiatives, but also of the people and their lives in the North Rhine region of Westphalia, Germany. The encounter with local congregations and participation in different styles of worship was enriching, as was the worship life in the GIT itself with students offering worship that they are familiar with. KiHo, with its well-equipped and spacious classrooms and excellent library, was



conducive for serious reading and writing. Special efforts had been made (even before our arrival) to equip the library with English language reference books and texts on the topics of the GIT courses. KiHo's guest house and dining hall also enhanced the atmosphere for community building.

The theme of the GIT was the same as that of the General Council: Living God, renew and transform us. The academic content was planned to give theological students and faculty the opportunity to delve deeper into the theological wealth of the theme and to explore its significance to the church in its mission in the world.

Wuppertal, Germany, is near Barmen, a significant town in church history. Here in 1934, despite the looming threat of the Nazi takeover of the German Church, Christians from all over Germany gathered and made a courageous confession stressing that only Christ is the Lord of the Church. The Barmen Confession has become a symbol of the assertion that transformation comes only through the Word of the Living God. The sub-theme of the GIT, Confessions and Confessing Churches, was befitting of the context in which we met.

The goals of the Global Institute of Theology were five-fold:

To build a community of learning and faith as students and faculty work together

To encounter contemporary biblical and theological approaches

To introduce the varying contextual perspectives on the Christian witness of the global Reformed family

To strengthen global networks of sharing and reflection to contribute to the ecumenical formation of a new generation of church leaders within the Reformed community

To reflect more deeply on the theme of the General Council

These goals were incorporated into the methodology of four main courses and six electives, all requiring research, reading, and group discussions as the students immersed themselves into the content of the Council as well as strengthened a common understanding of their role in their own churches and societies. All the students were required to complete a paper on one of the core courses. This issue of Reformed World offers a selection of the papers the students submitted.

The students continued their theological journey with the participants at the General Council, including more than 400 official delegates from the member churches of the WCRC. The General Council provided an opportunity for the students to learn through encounters with church leaders, eminent scholars, theologians, and activists. The inspiring keynote addresses and Bible studies by eminent theologians and activists and the space the programme gave for younger voices were inspiring to the students. They participated fully in the life of the Council and particularly in the discernment process through which they discovered that communion can be strengthened—that attentive listening and dialogue on even the most difficult moral and ethical issues can lead to greater unity rather than to division.

For the majority of the students, this was the first time that they had participated in a global ecumenical gathering of these dimensions, and so it inspired them, leaving a lasting impression as they continue their development into the next generation of church leaders. A few of their comments indicate what they gained from their participation:

“I’ve learned that I am part of a world family... and I am proud to be part of this body. This is the closest to the body of Christ I have ever been.”

“To embrace openness, openness to learn from others but also openness to accommodate others. I’ve learned that people can share communion without necessarily agreeing on theological doctrine.”

“The incredible need for the church to take up seriously the call for concrete actions of justice. Furthermore, that ‘doctrine’ and ‘justice’ do not stand in distinct opposition to one another, but are intertwined and need each other to be of any use.”

“I have learned so much from gathering with Reformed Christians committed to justice together. As I return home, I will continue to wrestle with how to hold together unity and diversity, both communion and justice.”

“I am thankful that we believe God is the one who gathers the church, so we can trust in God that it is possible to maintain communion with one another as we pursue justice and wrestle with how to live out the gospel in our contexts.”

It is with pleasure that I, on behalf of the faculty and staff of the 2017 Global Institute of Theology, present to you this issue of Reformed World, giving voice to a very promising generation of young theologians.



Echoes of the Reformation in the Barmen Declaration Still Resonate Today

Dustyn Elizabeth Keepers

This summer I had the opportunity to participate in the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) in Wuppertal, Germany. The GIT brought together Reformed theological students from all over the world to study in advance of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) meeting in Leipzig, Germany, in July 2017. One of the many gifts this opportunity gave was to experience the history of the places we visited. We participated in the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation through special worship services and a day trip to Wittenberg, and also had opportunities to see how the more recent history of Germany and its churches has shaped the people who live there and the wider world.

One of the most remarkable days was when we took a break from our studies at Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel to travel a few miles down the road to the Gemark Church in Barmen. There, in May 1934, the Barmen Confessional Synod met and adopted the Barmen Theological Declaration in response to the German Christian movement's steps to align the German church with the Nazi regime. My denomination, the Reformed Church in America, never formally received the Barmen Declaration as an official confession or statement of faith, so it is not often discussed or taught in our seminaries these days. This seemed a great loss to me as I read and studied the Barmen declaration in the place where it was written and was struck by how much it still has to say today.

Despite its importance in the immediate context of the Confessing Church during and after World War II, outside of the German-speaking world much of the scholarly literature one finds today on the Barmen declaration was written in the mid-1980s, near the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Synod. At that time, a burst of writing and conferences encouraged scholars to explore ways the example of the Confessing Church in general, and the Barmen Declaration in particular, could teach and inspire the church in its current reality.¹ I believe this year's celebration

¹ Of course, one very famous example of how the Barmen Declaration has been applied to other contexts is its influence on the writing of the Belhar Confession in South Africa in the 1980s. Several other collections of essays and conference talks in English cited throughout this article are indicative of the impulse at that time to consider how the Barmen Declaration speaks beyond its own time and place, and I found these types of works particularly helpful as I considered how we might engage the Barmen Declaration again today.

of the Reformation Jubilee provides another good opportunity for theological reflection on how the Barmen Theological Declaration, as part of the legacy of the Reformation, can continue to call the church towards renewal today.

Today's Ecclesiological Questions

I approach this reflection as a theologian and ordained minister from a small North American Reformed denomination which, like many others, is struggling with what it means to be the church today. We regularly hear stories of controversy and church division rippling through other historic denominations, like ours. Church leaders who take a position on hot-button issues are lambasted on Twitter or have their books removed from the shelves of Christian book stores. The ruling spirit of the day seems to be a divisive one, even in the church.

As I arrived in Germany and began my GIT classes, I carried a knot of tension in my gut knowing that thousands of miles away my denomination was holding its annual General Synod. Along with friends and colleagues back at home, I felt this event bringing my concerns about the future of our denomination to a peak. Our most pressing question was (and still is) whether we will join the list of denominations splitting because of disagreements over gay marriage. But in addition to the practical concerns for my denomination, I was also pondering deeper questions about what holds us together as Christians even when we disagree about various points of Christian belief or practice. It seemed to me these same concerns were reverberating in the halls in Leipzig when the WCRC met for its General Council and debated whether or how to discuss communion and sexuality together.

Though the “presenting problem” that seems to threaten our division these days is usually identified with our responses to changing understanding of human sexualities, I believe that beneath these debates there are ecclesiological questions at stake. In the midst of societal changes around us that we all grapple with, we must ask ourselves: Who are we together? What defines us as a church? Is it our historical connection to the Reformed tradition? Is it our polity? Or a particular approach to Scripture? Must we agree on a certain list of beliefs and behaviors in order to recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Christ?

I carried these questions with me as I traveled to Barmen and peered into the display containing the original document and the typewriter on which it was drafted. Like the Reformers, the authors of the Barmen Declaration saw a need



for renewed clarity about the church's identity and addressed it by reiterating the centrality of Jesus Christ for the church's existence. Particularly in its third thesis, the Barmen Declaration grounds the "essence and mission" of the church Christologically in a way that renewed Reformation understandings of the church.²

The Barmen Declaration reminded the church of Jesus Christ that it is "solely his property." And I believe my church, and perhaps many of our churches, need to hear this kind of clarification of the church's identity, an echo of the Reformation, calling us to renewal once again. To that end, in this article I will explore how both the Barmen Declaration and the Reformation vision of the church, as articulated in John Calvin's ecclesiology, can shed light on our own struggles as a church today.

By making this comparison I am not claiming any particular connection or similarity between the socio-political situations of the Reformation, the Barmen Declaration, and today. Rather I am assuming that the church must continually, in every generation, recall its foundation and identity in the face of the particular temptations of its context. In the Reformed tradition, as I heard repeated so often at the WCRC gathering, we have this motto, "Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda;" we are the "reformed church, always being reformed" according to the Word of God.³ The Barmen Declaration reflects this sentiment, and thus as we consider the history of the church in light of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it calls us to examine how our churches today are in need of reformation according to the Word.

2 Rolf Ahlers quotes Klaus Scholder who "has stated that the 'third Barmen thesis for the first time grounds christologically the essence and mission of the evangelical church.... In this third thesis... Barmen gave to German Protestantism what has been missing since the Reformation: an evangelical definition of the church.'" See Klaus Scholder, "Die Bedeutung des Barmer Bekenntnisses für die Evangelische Theologie und Kirche," *Evangelische Kirche* 27 (1967): 442 in Rolf Ahlers, "The 'Community of Brethren': the Contemporary Significance of the Third Thesis of the Barmen Declaration," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20:1 (April 1985), 8.

3 Leo J. Koffeman summarizes several helpful sources as he traces some of the history and possible uses of this phrase. Koffeman, L.J., 2015, "'Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda' Church Renewal from a Reformed Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71:3 (2015).

In this essay, we will examine three ecclesiological themes in the Barmen Theological Declaration, with particular focus on thesis three, and relate them to Calvin's approach to similar ideas in his ecclesiological writing. We will begin by exploring how both Barmen and Calvin root the identity of the church in Christ by employing the biblical image of the body of Christ. Next, we will examine the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the church and in Christ's presence in the Word and Sacraments as described by both the Barmen Declaration and Calvin. The emphasis on Christ's activity in Word and Sacrament in both sources can reframe our understanding of the marks of the church and help us explore how both Barmen and Calvin view the activities of the church as a response to its identity as a third major theme. In conclusion, we will briefly consider how these three themes might address the questions for the church today raised above.

Centrality of Christ in Barmen Thesis 1

The whole of the Barmen Theological Declaration could be described as an ecclesiological document, though this comes out in its fullness when one reaches the third thesis, which explicitly describes the church. Yet, before turning our focus to the third point, let us briefly examine how the declaration begins to set the course for what follows.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6.) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

The first affirmation of the Barmen declaration states that "Jesus Christ... is the one Word of God" to which Christians must respond. It rejects the idea that the church could have any other source for its proclamation, which is integral to the church's identity. The Scripture quoted at the beginning of this first thesis paints an image of the church as a sheepfold or a house for which Jesus is the



only entrance. The church is created through Christ, the one Word of God. He is its only source and the only foundation for the message it is called to proclaim. As Robert T. Osborn notes, the undoubtable centrality of Jesus Christ as the one Word in the first thesis makes it clear that the central point of the third is that the church is the congregation “in which Jesus Christ acts presently as Lord.”⁴ With the grounding of this initial statement in mind, we can now turn to the third thesis, the ecclesiological center of the Declaration.

The Body of Christ in Barmen Thesis 3

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together.” (Eph. 4:15–16.)

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren⁵ in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.

“On one hand, this thesis is the consequence that follows upon the two preceding theses. It is on the other hand the practical center of the confession.⁶ Here, the centrality of Christ for the church’s identity is made even more clear. It begins with a quote from the apostle Paul presenting the church as the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body and the one who holds the body together.

4 Robert T. Osborn, *The Barmen Declaration as a Paradigm for a Theology of the American Church* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991), 129.

5 “Brethren” is a term that may be viewed as gender exclusive. When I speak in my own words to summarize this idea I will use gender inclusive language such as “siblings” or “brothers and sisters,” but in quotations I maintain the language of the Barmen Theological Declaration as translated into English in the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Confessions.

6 Eberhard Busch, *The Barmen Theses Then and Now: the 2004 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary*, English ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010), 50.

All the members of the body are meant to grow toward him. Ephesians here presents the head as the both the source of nourishment and the direction of the body's interconnection and growth. Christ is the source and goal of the church and for each of us as members. There can be no other head and no other foundation for the church. There can be no other direction for us to move besides together towards Christ.

The Ephesians quote that introduces this thesis has been abbreviated.⁷ Verse 16 goes on to describe in more detail how each part works in cooperation as they are joined together "from" Christ. It is an image of the body in motion with ligaments flexing and connecting as "each part is working properly" to promote the body's growth. Christ is both the source of life and giver of direction to the movement of this body. Its actions show that "it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction." This is why the church cannot "abandon the form of its message and order" for the sake of its own desires or popular ideas of the day. Rather it must always be reformed according to the Word of God, which, as thesis 1 reminded us, is Jesus Christ.

Our relationship to Christ, the head, binds this body together. The affirmation in the third thesis says this in another way: The church "is the congregation of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as Lord." The church is a family, we are siblings, bound together by the fact that Jesus Christ acts among us. The action of Christ is primary. He acts first, as the Lord in Word and Sacrament. Word and Sacrament, the traditional "marks of the church," are not firstly the church's activity, but Christ's, as we will explore in more depth below. First, let's examine how this image of the body of Christ is described in Calvin's ecclesiology.

The Church as the Body of Christ in Calvin

The doctrine of the church was a key concern for John Calvin. As John T. McNeil, the editor of a definitive English edition of the Calvin's *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, notes, "The space accorded by Calvin to the doctrine of the church in the

⁷ The full quotation of Ephesians 4:15-16 (in the New Revised Standard Version) reads: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."



Institutes is evidence of the high importance it assumed for him.⁸ And one of the central images Calvin repeatedly used to speak of it was the Body of Christ.

In the opening of book 4 of the Institutes, after describing why we need the church, Calvin defines the church as referring to “all God’s elect.” As he goes on to elaborate on the importance of believing the church, which we confess in the Apostle’s Creed, he argues that this belief does not simply refer to comprehending the “multitude of the elect.” Rather we must understand that we are united with all other members into one body. The church is called “catholic” in the creed because the elect “are so united in Christ [cf. Eph 1:22-23] that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together [cf. Eph. 4:16] as are the limbs of a body [cf. Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 27].”⁹

Calvin, like the Barmen Declaration, centers his definition of the church with this image of the body whose source is its head, Christ. The members are “joined and knit together” like a body because of their dependence on Christ. According to Calvin, those whom God elects for salvation must be described as chosen “in Christ” because “it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members.”¹⁰ When we are granted faith by the Spirit, we are also engrafted into Christ’s body by that same Spirit. For Calvin, to be elect “means to be ‘elected’ into the body of Christ, in whose person ‘God the father embraces in his love the whole church.’”¹¹

It is in and through Christ that the church is formed. Our election to salvation through Christ does not happen to us only as individuals, but also necessarily makes us members of the body of Christ, uniting us to one another as well. Because, in Christ, God embraces each of us as sons and daughters, we are also siblings to one another. “If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all

8 John Calvin in McNeil, John T., ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), footnote 1, 4.1.1, 1011.

9 *Ibid.*, 4.1.2, 1014.

10 *Ibid.*, 3.24.5, 970. Although here Calvin uses gender exclusive language to speak of “sons,” this familial image of salvation as the embrace of a child clearly extends beyond gender. I chose to include this part of the quote because it resonates with the familial (though also gender exclusive) use of “brethren” in the Barmen Declaration. Both are pointing to this truth: It is because we are embraced as God’s children that we are all siblings in Christ.

11 Origen 11:18; in Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 72.

and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.”¹²

Calvin’s comments on Ephesians 4:16 point out that not only is Christ the source of life and nourishment for this body, but the members are being called to promote the body’s growth by supplying to one another what is distributed from the source, like conduits. The goal of this nourishment by the body of Christ is “the edifying of itself. This means that no increase is of use which does not correspond to the whole body.”¹³ Our union with Christ is the source of our connection and strengthening that union with Christ and with one another is its goal.

Through the Holy Spirit

So far, we have seen how both Calvin and the Barmen Declaration root the identity of the church in Jesus Christ by making use of the biblical image of the body whose head and source of nourishment is Christ. This body is interconnected and bound together by Christ, an image that ought to inform how we understand the close connection indicated when the Barmen Declaration goes on to describe the church as a community of brothers and sisters. These are not scattered siblings living separate lives, but members who are intimately connected. The family and the body are two metaphors which, though they (like all metaphors) ultimately fall short, describe the inseparable relationship created between Christians when God claims us as his own in Christ through the Spirit. The Barmen Declaration says we are a particular family or body “in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit.” We are not just any family, but one that is brought together by the work of the Spirit.

For Calvin, our union with Christ and, therefore, with one another is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit plays an integral role throughout Calvin’s theology in various roles such as illumining the Word and giving the gift of faith. In fact, “we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God.”¹⁴ The Spirit is the bond of unity that enables believers to participate in Christ’s righteousness through salvation and be accepted as children of God because Christ “unites

12 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.3, 1015.

13 John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 185.

14 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.2.34, 582.



himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members...."¹⁵ The Spirit makes us members of Christ and thus unites us to one another in one body. It is the Spirit who unites believers into the Church of Christ. "As it was through the Spirit that the world was first formed, so it is through the Spirit... that the church is created."¹⁶

The Spirit, for Calvin, is also inseparably connected to the Word. It is "by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds..."¹⁷ The work of the Spirit illumining our hearts enables us to receive Scripture as the Word of God. It is, likewise, the Spirit who makes the material aspects of the sacraments spiritually efficacious to show forth Christ and provoke believers to grow in faith. "If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding on deaf ears."¹⁸

The Barmen Declaration also makes it clear that it is "through the Holy Spirit" that "Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament." Jesus acts presently through the Holy Spirit, and he does so through these two means in particular. Considering Word and Sacrament in the Barmen Declaration, "especially in light of the first thesis, it becomes evident that they must be understood christologically... Jesus himself is the primary subject."¹⁹ Both the Barmen Declaration and Calvin affirm that Christ acts through the Spirit in a special way through the Word and Sacraments. As the community among whom this happens, "the church can be the church only as the living Jesus Christ is present to it in word and sacrament, and only as it answers to this Jesus in that same word and sacrament."²⁰

In Word and Sacrament

For Calvin, as well as Luther, these two unique ways God continues to act among

15 Ibid., 3.1.3, 541.

16 Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 58.

17 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.9.3, 95.

18 Ibid., 4.14.9, 1284.

19 Robert T. Osborn, *The Barmen Declaration as a Paradigm for a Theology of the American Church* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1995), 155.

20 Ibid., 161-162.

his people, in Word and Sacrament, are the famous “marks of the church.” When Calvin discusses “preaching of the Word and proper administration of the Sacraments” as the two visible indicators that a church exists, he seems at first glance to be emphasizing the actions on the part of the church. In a true church we find these two activities being carried out, but we don’t in a false one. For Calvin, Word and Sacrament are the minimum requirements we should see happening to consider a gathering a church. Yet, we ought not allow ourselves to think this means Word and Sacraments are only or even primarily human activities.

Rather, Word and Sacrament are visible signs of the church for us because God has promised to be present and to work through these signs. “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it cannot be doubted, a church of God exists [c.f. Eph. 2:20]. For his promise cannot fail: ‘Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.’”²¹ Later in the same section he adds, “For it is certain that such things [the marks] are not without fruit.”²² Where Word and Sacrament are happening, God will act.

This trust in God’s promise to be present through Word and Sacrament is why Calvin can say that even if people don’t seem to be heeding the Word immediately or if “some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments... this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church.”²³ God has founded the church in Jesus Christ and has promised through the power of the Spirit to be present to it in Word and Sacrament. These marks point to the presence of a church because they point to the active presence of God, even when human beings fail to do their part perfectly.

The Church Has to Testify

“For its part the church responds to this life-giving sacramental presence of its Lord by claiming its life in Christ—namely, by coming to be with him at his table, by uniting as members of his body....”²⁴ The church’s actions and message come

21 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.9, 1023. (Italics mine)

22 Ibid., 4.1.9, 1024.

23 Ibid., 4.1.12, 1025.

24 Robert T. Osborn, *The Barmen Declaration as a Paradigm for a Theology of the American Church* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991), 159.



as a response to Christ's action to pardon our sin and unite us to himself as members of his body We testify to his ongoing presence with us through Word and Sacrament by continuing to preach, baptize, and share the Lord's Supper. Only because of Christ's action, though the Spirit, creating and nourishing the church, does the church become an entity that can act at all. Though his presence it becomes a living body. So, church's response gives testimony that its being and identity come from Christ. A healthy, functioning body does not act on its own, nor the parts move in uncoordinated directions, rather all its actions demonstrate its connection to its Head.

The proper action of the church, founded on the Word, Jesus Christ, is to continually speak and show forth the Word that constitutes it. As Barmen's third thesis declares "it has to testify... with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance." The marks of the church are reliable indicators of the true church because they are, primarily, indicators of God's action within it and only secondarily of the church's testimony to that action, however obedient or right we may judge their action or message to be. "It has been assumed that the confession establishes the church. But the Barmen Declaration states that Christ establishes the church and that the church responds to that institution with its message and ordinances but also with its various proclamations and—yes—its confessions."²⁵

Resonating Today

My church, like many others in my context, is tempted to divide based on whether or not we think the actions of others are right or their interpretation of the Word pure. When we do so it seems as though we consider the church, like the other groups in the world around us, to be made up of like-minded individuals grouping together. We judge whether or not one group's way of doing church or professing faith is similar enough to our own preferences that we should join with or break from them. But as Osborn notes, "a church composed of 'individuals'... is inclined to become a rather rigid 'life-style' enclave, reflecting and bound to values and serving the ends of the larger society."²⁶ This is precisely

²⁵ Rolf Ahlers, "The 'Community of Brethren': The Contemporary Significance of the Third Thesis of the Barmen Declaration," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20:1 (April 1985), 29.

²⁶ Robert T. Osborn, *The Barmen Declaration as a Paradigm for a Theology of the American Church* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991), 136.

what the Barmen Declaration says the church cannot be. It cannot be formed according to “its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.” As both the Barmen Synod and the Reformers before them made clear, it is Christ who creates the church by uniting us to himself and one another through the Spirit. We do not create it by aligning ourselves around a shared cause or belief.

When we forget that the church is Christ’s body we are willing to divide it in false ways—by race, class, or political leanings. Yet, as the Barmen Declaration reminds us, the church’s message, actions, and even its order are meant to testify that it is “solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and direction in the expectation of his appearance.” If we live in expectation of seeing Christ, we ought to look for glimpses of his activity in the church now, even where we think human faithfulness seems lacking.

We can look for the “marks of the church” as indicators of Christ’s activity through the Holy Spirit. He has promised to make himself known in Word and Sacrament. So, according to Calvin, we can trust that wherever we see these two signs of his presence that “it deserves without a doubt to be held and considered a church. For it is certain that such things are not without fruit. In this way, we preserve for the universal church its unity, which devilish spirits have always tried to sunder.”²⁷ Staying connected to Christians among whom Christ has promised to be present testifies to the fact that by the power of the Spirit, we are members of Christ’s body and called to live into that reality being “joined and knit together” by Christ’s presence among us.

The Barmen Confessional Synod itself was a testimony to such unity even in the midst of differences. Lutheran, Reformed, and United Christians came together despite differences in their theology and practice of the faith and famously passed the Declaration without amendment. Perhaps it was a miracle, as some at the time described it, but certainly their action was a testimony to the unity that can only be found in Christ. As Busch describes it, their coming together shows that, “They are bound to God in such a way that even old divisions among Christians can be overcome.... What brings these diverse people to each other is the fact that Christ is the head through which they are members of his body—while still remaining very different members.”²⁸ Looking to Christ, our present

27 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.9, 1023.

28 Busch, Eberhard, *The Barmen Theses Then and Now: The 2004 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary*, English ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010), 15.



and active Lord, can hold us together despite long standing or newly emerging differences.

“The church is the church of Jesus Christ only to the extent that it lives in constant repentance, turning away from the idea that Christ is dependent upon the church, turning to the understanding that it is dependent upon him.”²⁹ As the Reformed church, always being reformed according to the Word of God, we are called to this repentance and renewal. Both the Barmen Theological Declaration and the theology of Reformers such as John Calvin sought to refocus the church’s attention to the central reality of its existence, that it belongs to Jesus Christ. Acknowledging that together we belong to Christ calls us to turn from efforts to define for ourselves what a church should be based on our own preferences or ideological leanings. Instead we look for the presence of Christ, who acts by the power of the Spirit with the Church, his body. He promises, by his Spirit, to draw the church together as its source of life and to be present within in as its Lord. May our actions as the church testify that we “live solely from his comfort and from his direction.”

²⁹ Ibid., 55.

Exploring Theodicy in South Africa: The Book of Job a Possible Place of Epiphany?

Marco Koch

Introduction

“The Bible is a story; the only way to talk about God is through a story. Telling the story is to invite others to partake in this story. It invites our stories into the biblical story.” This was Philip Vinod Peacock’s comment on discussing biblical texts as place of epiphany in his second lecture on Places of Epiphany on the 22 June 2017, Wuppertal, Germany. He also stated (in his third lecture on 23 June) that, in the Bible, anger/lament is part of the story.

Referring to Jürgen Moltmann’s book *The Crucified God*, Peacock states that the question, “God why have you forsaken us?” is the question of oppressed communities all over the world. He also stated that theology is a response to this question. We need to move away from traditional dogma and tradition. We need alternative forces for doing theology. Can we find epiphany in pain? Do those who suffer pain have special knowledge about God? The history of the church has told us that we have failed time and time again. We need to deeply listen to those we’re out to save.

The book of Job reflects on the deepest problem of pain and anger—more than any other book in the Bible.¹ Job asks difficult questions in the light of the nature and power of God, reflecting to the above questions posed by Peacock.

Looking at the book of Job, at first glance it seems that the book of Job attempts to answer what is better known as *the question of theodicy*. W. Vosloo makes the following statement in his book *Meer as net 'n Storie (More than Just a Story)*: “The Bible is a book that is subject to questions that it is not supposed to answer, and wrong questions usually lead to wrong answers.”² This statement reminds us to be honest about the longing with which people (including ourselves) approach the book of Job.

Thomas Long writes that to understand the book of Job as a book solely about theodicy is both problematic and disappointing. Most people who read the book

1 D.J. Simundson, “What Every Christian Should Know about Job,” *World & World*, 31:4. 2011, 349.

2 W. Vosloo, *More Than Just a Story* (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1986), 1.



of Job as a book of Theodicy are plainly confused, upset, and even angry.³ In spite of its shortcomings in regards to theodicy, the book of Job is still regarded as an important source on the topic because theodicy is so broadly discussed.

This essay explores the notion of theodicy in the book of Job as a possible Place of Epiphany from a unique South African perspective with its own experience of pain and anger.

1. Exploring Theodicy

Before we can talk about Job's relation to theodicy, it is necessary to first explore the origin and meaning of theodicy itself.

According to M.H. Smith,⁴ one of the first influential writings on theodicy was by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) titled *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. It is from this work that the field of study of theodicy originated.

J.D. Douglas and Merrill Tenney explain the origin of the word theodicy as derived from two Greek words: *Theos* meaning "God" and *Dikē* meaning "justice."⁵ A direct translation might look like this: "to justify the acts of God." The actual definition of theodicy is more complex. It would have been easy to justify all acts of God if everything in the world was beautiful, good, loving, and kind. The problem is that not everything in the world is beautiful, good, loving, and kind. Unfortunately, the world is filled with tragedy, sickness, and death. It is exactly here where the field of study of the question of theodicy starts. On one side of the coin, theodicy is trying to make sense of God's omnipresence and goodness in this broken world; on the other side of the coin it asks why bad things like disasters, sickness, and other tragedies happen.⁶

According to Millard J. Erickson, there are three important concepts of traditional theodicy theory that needs to be discerned: the omnipresence of God, the

3 Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 94.

4 M.H. Smith, "Theodicy," in Harrison, E.F. (ed.), *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 517.

5 J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2011), 1447.

6 Ibid.

goodness of God, and the problem of evil.⁷

The first topic, the omnipresence of God, is a common characteristic ascribed to God. E. Thoennes says it means that God is not limited in terms of space.⁸ God is not limited to size, and God is fully present, in God's fullness, at all places at all times. The core of the issue here is that God's work is not the same at all places at all times.

The systematic theologian Wayne Grudem uses the creation texts of Genesis 1 and 2 as important texts to justify the above stated explanation of God's omnipresence.⁹ Gerhard von Rad reminds us that the writers for these texts are not known but distinguishes only between the Yahwist and Priestly sources.¹⁰ To him, the creation narratives were written not to convey attributes of God, but to portray God as the only true God (amongst those worshipped by the Gentiles). T.D. Alexander agrees with Von Rad and adds that these texts originated during the Babylonian exile.¹¹ The message here is that there are traditional texts that are perceived to talk about the omnipresence of God that should not be taken out of context. There are, however, various other texts that highlight the phenomenon of omnipresence: Jeremiah 23:23-24, Psalm 139, Acts 17:28, and Colossians 1:17.

The second important concept in theodicy, the goodness of God, is understood by Grudem as God being the final standard of what can be considered as good.¹² Goodness can be measured according to God's character and God's revelation to humankind, everything God does is good and therefore worthy of praise. Erickson furthers Grudem's point by adding that God's standards is not the same as humankind's standards.¹³ The determining factor of what is good is not what humankind thinks but what God does. Louis Berkhof endorses that statement¹⁴

7 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology (Second Edition)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 439.

8 E. Thoennes, "Biblical Doctrine: An Overview," in Dennis, L.T. (ed.), *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2515.

9 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 173-174.

10 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Revised Edition), (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), 46.

11 T.D. Alexander, "Genesis," in Dennis L.T. (ed.), *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles), 49.

12 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 197-198.

13 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology (Second Edition)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 439.

14 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 70-72.



by saying that something can only be regarded as good if it complies with God's standard of the ideals; God's goodness can be seen in God's love, grace, mercy, and everlastingness. The essence of the goodness of God is that it can not be understood by humankind.

The third and last important concept in theodicy, the question of evil, is described by Erickson as that which is regarded as evil by God and not what humankind understands evil to be.¹⁵ The important question is: Where does evil come from? Alexander says that it's common practice to jump to Genesis 3, the fall of man, to provide a quick answer this question. He describes Genesis 3 as the moment where God's creation was taken out of harmony and forced into chaos.¹⁶ von Rad understands the essence of Genesis 3 as God providing what is regarded as good; when humankind chooses against this, evil deeds are the result. It is these evil deeds that are later referred to as sin.¹⁷ J.K. Grider argues that even disasters, sickness, and other tragedies happen because of the sinful decisions of humankind.¹⁸ John J. Collins, on the other hand, believes that the origin of evil could have been in heaven itself.¹⁹ He refers to scriptures from Ben Sirag to form the basis of his argument. Moving closer to the book of Job, Thomas Römer understands evil as an entity or entities in its own because God was not the direct reason for Job's pain.²⁰

Following the traditional theory, the question of theodicy can be formulated as: If God is almighty (and omnipresent), and God is good, why does evil exist in the world?

2. Exploring Theodicy in South Africa

15 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology (Second Edition)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 450.

16 T.D. Alexander, "Genesis," in Dennis L.T. (ed.), *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles), 50.

17 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary (Revised Edition)*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), 89-90.

18 J.K. Grider, "Evil," in Tenney, M.C. (ed.), *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 420.

19 John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30.

20 Thomas Römer, *Dark God: Cruelty, Sex, and Violence in the Old Testament*, translated by O'Neill, S. (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 97.

Viktor Frankl used the analogy of gas to explain his understanding of suffering:

A man's suffering is similar to the behaviour of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.²¹

Even though all people experience suffering, not all suffering is the same and one cannot dare to believe that one understands exactly the pain of another. Even though suffering is not always the same, it does originate in a certain context, and pain generated within similar contexts might have some commonalities. What form does the question of theodicy take in the context of South Africa?

C.U. Wepener's observation of the current South African landscape is that South Africans are angry.²² G.O. West, on the other hand, makes his own observation, that people in South Africa suffer from pain. People in South Africa suffer from multiple wounds.²³

We can now ask: Why do people in South Africa suffer so much pain, and why do they get so angry? When facilitating the first Healing of Memories workshops in the late 1990s, Michael Lapsley and his colleagues used to say "Every South African has been damaged by apartheid."²⁴ Philippe Denis adds to the effects of apartheid the pain caused by HIV and AIDS, sexual abuse, corruption, xenophobia, domestic violence, and various forms of discrimination, hence the saying that South Africans suffer from multiple wounds.²⁵

21 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (London: Rider, 2008), 97.

22 C.J. Wepener, "Bliksem!" / Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(3), Art. #1422, 2015. doi:10.4102/ve.v36i3.1422, 1.

23 G.O. West, "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV" in Boase, E. & Frechette, C.G. (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 209.

24 David T. Adamo, "The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria," in G.O. West and Muse Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 336-49.

25 Philippe Denis, "Storytelling and Healing," in P. Denis, S. Houser, and R. Ntsimane(eds.), *A Journal towards Healing: Stories of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2011) 5-17.



Wepener says that people in South Africa are angry because of what's happened and also about what is happening with regard to injustice, racism, corruption, poverty, poor leadership, and poor service delivery. Wepener also notes that this anger is not an unfamiliar presence among South Africans.²⁶

The question arises: How do we let people communicate their anger? Wepener quotes²⁷ C. Bignaut and G. Koen from a newspaper article following a debate about the lyrics of a song which apparently propagated violence: "There is a difference between expressing your anger and the instigation of violence. Let's focus on why people are angry."²⁸

Why people in South Africa get angry is an important question. Wepener puts it very simply. People get angry because people love. When something people love gets threatened, it is only natural to get angry about it. This is also true of the nature of God and Jesus.²⁹

Wepener shares an interesting fact³⁰ from an N. Jackson article³¹ that around 84.14%³² of the South African population is made up of Christians. At first glance this might pose some serious concerns, because there is an assumption that Christians do not or should not get angry, and if it happens, on rare occasions, it will not happen in church.³³ At second glance, Wepener cites the work of Andrew Lester, who is of the opinion³⁴ that "the Bible is not focused on eradicating the internal experience of anger, our capacity for anger, but on why we get angry and

26 C.J. Wepener, "Bliksem!"/Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36:3 (2015). doi:10.4102/ ve.v36i3.1422, 1.

27 Ibid, 2.

28 C. Bignaut and G. Koen, "Burn the Farm and F*** the Boss," *Rapport Nuus*, 12 October 2014, 3.

29 C.J. Wepener, "Bliksem!"/Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36:3 (2015). doi:10.4102/ ve.v36i3.1422, 4.

30 Ibid, 1.

31 N. Jackson, "Most People Call Themselves Christian," in *Kerkbode*, viewed 06 October 2014, from <http://192.185.30.195/~kerkbode/meeste-sa-mense-noem-hulleself-christene/>.

32 As determined by research from StatsSA.

33 C.J. Wepener, "Bliksem!"/Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36:3 (2015). doi:10.4102/ ve.v36i3.1422, 1.

34 Andrew D. Lester, *The Angry Christian. A Theology for Care and Counseling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 148-149.

on how to creatively handle the expression of anger.” To get angry is not a sin. If it is for right reasons, it can be a necessary expression of love.³⁵

3. Exploring Theodicy in South Africa: The book of Job

A large part of the discussions in Job, especially by Job’s friends, recycles the notion of cause and effect. Simundson highlights the fact that this notion is then also questioned critically throughout the book of Job.³⁶ Some serious questions arise in the midst of these discussions: Where does pain come from if not from cause and effect? Is Job justified to lament against God the way he does in 38:1-42:6, as indicated by West?³⁷ Does the book of Job provide any answers to the problem of pain and anger? According to David Clines, the book of Job does not provide answers to these questions.³⁸ However, these questions are discussed within the scope of the book.

The fact that the character of Job is a specific character from a specific place, the land of Ur, does not mean that it refers to a historic character. Norman Habel believes that Job is a fictional character from a fable because of the over-exaggerated riches and the exact numbering used to describe them. Another argument for Habel is the fact that Job’s tragedies happened in such an extraordinary fashion, chance against all odds. The argument is that a fictional character is used so that anyone can relate to the person of Job, providing a sort of universalism.³⁹

Clines takes note of the fact that Job is an innocent victim.⁴⁰ The mere fact that Job is used as a guinea pig is enough proof for Habel that Job is an innocent victim.⁴¹ It seems that Job’s integrity is being tested, but in the process God’s

35 Ibid, 4.

36 D.J. Simundson, “What Every Christian Should Know about Job” in: *World & World*, 31:4 (2011), 349.

37 G.O. West, “Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV” in E. Boase and C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 209.

38 David J.A. Clines, “Job 1-20,” in J.D.W. Watts (ed.), *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 17 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1989), xxxviii.

39 Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 60-61.

40 David J.A. Clines, “Job 1-20,” in Watts, J. D. W. (ed.), *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 17 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1989), xxxviii.

41 Ibid, 61.



integrity is being tested because God agrees to the “bet.” In the course of the book, one sees that Job’s friends never question God’s integrity, at least not in the way Job does.

Long differentiates between the prose and poetic parts of the book.⁴² The book starts with the prose, explaining Job’s riches and then the tragedy. The prose gives way to a tedious series of discussions, between Job and his friends and between Job and God. In the end, the book concludes with the prose, explaining the manner in which Job’s riches were restored. The tedious discussion, according to Long, does not arise from the inability of the writer to articulate the question of theodicy. The fact that it is so long and tedious is rather a brilliant reflection of the tedious experience in trying to make sense of God’s role in the midst of evil.

How do we make sense of the book of Job in the light of theodicy? Habel is of the opinion that Job developed a new understanding of heaven: that God can be the enemy, the spy, the predator, the demolisher, and not the God of safety and order. Habel believes that the book of Job provides the permission to lament openly toward God; it provides the starting point for the question on theodicy but not the answers.⁴³

Bart Ehrman, on the other hand, understands Job as a compilation of two separate writings, the prose and poetry parts.⁴⁴ These parts have opposite interpretations on theodicy. The first prose focuses on the notion that Job must accept the good with the evil; God can give and take away, and God should be praised for either (1:21; 2:10). This is in direct contrast to the Job we meet from Job 3 onwards; this is a Job who questions God, sometimes very directly. The core of this message is that Job serves as a good example of someone in suffering because he always turns to God, no matter in what spirit he does so.

For Long, the crux for understanding theodicy in Job lies in the last prose,

42 Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 102.

43 Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 61.

44 Bart D. Ehrman, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*. New York: HarperOne, 2009), 162-163.

where God provides Job with earthly belongings again.⁴⁵ According to Ehrman⁴⁶ and Habel,⁴⁷ this act is regarded as the restoration of Job's belongings. God was not compelled to go through with this act, but God did because God is good. Ehrman's (2009:168) explanation is more somber, saying that God has won the bet and therefore restored Job's earthly belongings through sympathy.⁴⁸

Long brings a totally different possibility to this finale. Long is of the opinion that Job's belongings have not been restored. God does not restore but builds a whole new creation, a whole new world. One of Long's arguments here is that this new world looks different from the one that was originally destroyed. First, Job's belongings were not restored but multiplied, and second, in the first prose Job's sons were the actors, while in the new world Job's daughters are brought to the fore. The daughters' names are even named, which we didn't see with the sons. For Long the reason for this inclusion is vague, but the fact of the inclusion is important. Women were not regarded as important in the ancient paradigm.⁴⁹

The fact that his daughters are mentioned here, in the way they are mentioned, shows that Job's world looks totally different from the one at the start of the book. At the very least we know that after all the discussions, struggles, and suffering, Job's world and his understanding of the world changed.

4. Exploring Theodicy in South Africa. The book of Job, a possible Place of Epiphany?

Again, the book of Job is regularly used to try answer the question of theodicy. West says that "Our (South African) churches regularly refuse opportunities to engage the lamenting portions of the biblical tradition, insisting rather on superficial forms of celebration."

West admits that too many community-based organizations for people living

45 Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 110.

46 Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*. New York: HarperOne, (2009), 167.

47 Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 67.

48 Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*. New York: HarperOne, (2009), 168.

49 Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 110.



with HIV and AIDS used biblical texts from the gospels to affirm solidarity with God and Jesus, against the condemnatory stigmatization they experienced from the people in their communities and the general society. He adds that too many funerals have been conducted with the use of Job 1:21 (“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” [NRSV]).

West shares that he and one of his colleagues, Bongzi Zangele (coordinator of the Ujamaa Centre’s HIV and AIDS word), developed a contextual Bible study on Job, based on the structure developed in the worker-priest movement in Europe in the 1930-1940s. This movement was known as See-Judge-Act: to “see” the context from below, to analyse the reality in dialogue with the prophetic voice of the Bible in order to enable the God of life to “judge” the social reality, and planning on the “act” to bring about transformation, so that all may have life.⁵⁰

West and Zangele decided to divert from the use of Job 1:21 and rather focused on Job’s lament in Job 3. The program changed over time and West presents the structure of shaping questions as follows:

1. Job 1:21, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD,” is a biblical text often read at funerals. Have you heard this text being read at funerals? Why do pastors and priests read this biblical verse at funerals? What does it say about people who have died of AIDS-related illnesses? What does it say to people living with HIV and AIDS?
2. Listen to Job 3. What is Job trying to say in this text? What images or metaphors does Job use in his lament?
3. How does this text resonate with people living with HIV? Which of Job’s images or metaphors are particularly relevant?
4. What is God’s view of how Job has spoken in chapter 3 (and elsewhere)? Read Job 42:7.
5. What would be your own version of Job 3? Share it with those in the group.
6. How can you share your version of Job 3 with your local church or community or family?⁵¹

Job refused to confine his lament in the face of his friends’ arguments, and later

50 G.O. West, “Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV” in E. Boase and C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 211-214.

51 Ibid, 215.

Job even refused to retract his lament when he was face to face with God (38:1-42:6). West concluded that both what and how Job had spoken to and of God was right, appropriate, and just, given Job's reality.⁵²

In the light of the questions above and moment of enlightenment or epiphany, the participants were encouraged to write their own versions of Job 3, relating to their own experiences. West believes that the text of Job 3 gave the participants metaphors and images that contributed toward a vocabulary that they could use to talk about their trauma.⁵³ The fact that Job's lament was so vivid validated their emerging stories and allowed them to write with raw emotion. They could relate to Job in a very special way. The participants could also relate to each other, because their stories were all validated by a sacred ancestor in faith who also refused to stay silent.

Denis draws from narrative therapy theory by Michael White and David Epston when noting that survivors of trauma sometimes regard themselves as the victims who are overpowered by the effect of pain, guilt, and confusion.⁵⁴ Through a Healing of Memories workshop, however, they can begin to write a new story for their lives. After all, they are heroes: They resisted and they survived.

West admits that it is not very easy to write one's own story in the midst of trauma.⁵⁵ The fact that Job uses poetry instead of a narrative is another valuable point of relation to those in trauma. West noted that in the same way that Job 3 expressed the struggle with his own reality, so, too, what the participants wrote expressed their respective realities and voices of trauma. The participants wanted their families, churches, and communities to hear and understand these written expressions to better understand their realities. Here follows one such expression from West:⁵⁶

52 Ibid, 214.

53 Ibid, 222.

54 Philippe Denis, "Storytelling and Healing," in P. Denis, S. Houser, and R. Ntsimane (eds.) *A Journal towards Healing: Stories of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2011) 5-17.

55 G.O. West, "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV" in E. Boase ad C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 223.

56 G.O. West, "The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa," in N. Lee and N. Mandolfo (eds.) *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Bible Literature, 2008), 195-214.



My God my God why did you allow me to have AIDS? Why did you give me this one child, when you know my life span is short? I will soon die and leave him with no parent! I wish I were not even born into this world! I am an orphan and unemployed. It would be better if I did not even exist in this world!

Through these expressions the participants could start writing their personal narratives—and rewriting them in the process. Narrative resolution is, however, not the same as trauma resolution. The work on Job 3 did not present the resolution of the participants' trauma.⁵⁷ Denis also admits that interventions that are based on narratives should not be regarded as immediate healing.⁵⁸ Judith Herman concludes this point by saying "resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete."⁵⁹

5. Conclusion

The book of Job does not provide any answers to the question of theodicy. Contrary to popular belief, the book of Job might never have been intended to answer the question of theodicy. It is significant that Long flags the importance of the different world or worldview Job enjoys at the end of the book as opposed to the start.⁶⁰ This links to West's program of the rewriting of trauma victims' narratives at the hand of narrative therapy as means.⁶¹ The specific text of Job 3 provides promise to this end from its vivid nature and honest lament, an expression of anger and suffering, an expression or call of love.⁶² Can this not be regarded as a place of epiphany? I believe and hope that, at least to some, it can.

57 G.O. West, "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV" in E. Boase and C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 223.

58 Philippe Denis, "Storytelling and Healing," in P. Denis, S. Houser, and R. Ntsimane (eds.) *A Journal towards Healing: Stories of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2011) 5-17.

59 Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 211.

60 Long, Thomas G., *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 110.

61 West, G.O., "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV" in Boase, E. & Frechette, C.G. (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 223.

62 Wepener, C.J., "'Bliksem!'/Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(3), Art. #1422, 2015. doi:10.4102/ve.v36i3.1422, 4.

Liberating the Nature and Creation of God from Suffering and Destruction

Constructive Theology of Transformative Christian Education According to the Dialog of the Theme of Ecology and the Theme of Consumptive Society and Poverty in the Context of Indonesia

Dinka Nehemia Utomo

Introduction

The city of Samarinda, the capital of East Kalimantan Province, has a population exceeding 800,000 inhabitants.¹ Most of the inhabitants are migrants from the ethnic regions of Banjar, Bugis, Makassar, Java, and so on. The livelihood of the population also varies, mostly in the formal, private, and entrepreneurial sectors. Since coal mining has become a favorite business, massive land exploitation has begun in Samarinda. At least seventy percent of the total area of Samarinda city is controlled by mining.²

The presence of the coal mining business has increased the economic standing of some people, most of them migrants. All businesses that are related to coal also enjoy the benefits, including, for example, the company that sells and leases heavy equipment and operational vehicles, coal shipping companies, fuel and food suppliers, and others. At the same time, the prices of basic needs rise, and the price of land that used to be cheap can increase many times over when coal companies are present.

There are additional negative impacts from the presence of the coal business in Samarinda, including enormous ecological damage. One of the watersheds that has a vital role in Samarinda is the Karang Mumus river basin. Data collected by Antara News describe the watershed Karang Mumus as under siege; as many as 25 coal mines in the watershed often trigger flooding. Based on map analysis, there are at least 12 mining activities that damage the watersheds of Karang Mumus, causing considerable sedimentation run-off due to erosion from stripping of land in the upper reaches of the river. This is one of the reasons for flooding in 24 spots spread across 15 districts; the number of such points is likely to increase due to the massive dredging of coal mining land left behind

1 Statistics Samarinda, <https://samarindakota.bps.go.id/linkTabelStatis/view/id/13>, accessed August 1, 2017.

2 Gatra, <http://arsip.gatra.com/2016-09-02/majalah/artikel.php?pil=23&id=162726>, accessed August 1, 2017.



by the companies, without recovery. In addition, non-tax state revenue from coal mining is much lower than the cost of reducing mine damage, especially flooding downstream. From 2008 to 2010, the cost of tackling the impact of flooding was around 107,9 billion rupiah; it rose in 2011 to 2013 to 602 billion rupiah.³ It should not have been a surprise, then, when news came in early June 2017 that while other cities had entered the dry season, in the city of Samarinda flood occurred again.⁴

The ecological challenges in Samarinda reflect and describe the condition of ecological and economic systems on the national and global scales. Therefore the churches in Samarinda, as an integral part of society, certainly have a role to help the government to preserve the environment. The churches also have a role to protect and preserve natures so that it does not become more damaged. The churches also have a call to mitigate the negative impacts of mining so that it can help people to build a better life.

One approach that Christianity can take to address ecological issues and transform the world is through Christian Education. Christian Education that transforms people to transform the world—called Transformative Christian Education—is indispensable. As Jack Seymour said, Christian Education is a life conversation, an attempt to use the source of faith and cultural traditions in bringing a fair and hopeful future.⁵ In the model of Christian Education built on such as transformative approach, an Indonesian theologian Tabita Christiani, asserts that teaching is not merely a retelling and repetition of past Christian statements of faith, but bringing together the sources of faith (biblical, doctrine, and church tradition) with traditional culture. Bringing together the way of life, culture of the present, or the real experience with statements of faith makes for renewal toward a future that is more in line with the reign of God.⁶

3 “Damar Karang Mumus Sarinda Washed in 25 Mines,” *Antara News* (April 22, 2017), <https://kaltim.antaranews.com/berita/37966/das-karang-mumus-samarinda-dikepung-25-tambang>, accessed August 1, 2017.

4 “Flood Occurred in the City of Samarinda, Intercity Road Was Disconnected,” *Tempo* (June 3, 2017) <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/news/2017/06/03/058881150/terjadi-banjir-di-kota-samarinda-jalan-antarkota-sempat-terputus>, accessed on August 1, 2017.

5 Jack Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to the Learning of the Church*, translated by Erich von Marthin E. Hutahaean (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016), 13.

6 Tabita Kartika Christiani, “Biarkan Mereka Bercerita: Pendidikan Kristiani dan Keadilan Gender,” in Deetje Rotinsulu Tiwa and Mariska Lauterboom (eds.), *Perempuan Indonesia dalam Karya dan Pengabdian: Bunga Rampai dan Penghargaan untuk Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel*, 20.

Through Transformative Christian Education, the expected goal is social transformation so that God's justice and love governance is realized, in which the citizens of the church engage with many people to encourage faithful and social transformation. The embodiment of social transformation is expected to change and renew attitudes, mindsets, and patterns how we see God's creation.

The title of this paper is "Liberating the Nature and Creation of God from Suffering and Destruction: Constructive Theology of Transformative Christian Education According to the Dialog of the Theme of Ecology and the Theme of Consumptive Society and Poverty in the Context of Indonesia." This paper will discuss two themes in Transformative Christian Education, namely the theme of Ecology and the theme of Consumptive Society and Poverty. Then this paper will examine both themes and from the dialogue will formulate a Transformative Christian Education construction that can make people recognise, be more conscious of, and able to love God's creation so that Christians in Indonesia can defend, guard, and nurture God's creation.

Christian Education and Ecological Theme

As stated before, Christian education has a very important role in educating, growing, and developing the Christian faith. Not only that, but it also has a role in talking about life including both traditions of faith and cultural traditions to enable individual and communal renewal for a just and hopeful future. Through Transformative Christian Education it is expected that there will be a social transformation in which the presence of God's reign can be realized. One of the themes that can be included in Transformative Christian Education is the ecological theme. In this section we examine the relationship between Christian Education and ecological issues.

Indonesian theologian Dekker J. Mauboi describes the planet earth⁷ based on Hans Kung's portrayal in 1991:

- Every minute nations spend US \$1.8 million on military weapons.
- Every hour 1,500 children die of starvation.
- Since the 1980s many people have been arrested, tortured, killed, forced to flee, or became victims of violence.

⁷ Dekker J. Mauboi, "Pendidikan Ekologi Dalam PAK," in Andar Ismail, *Ajarlah Mereka Melakukan: Kumpulan Karangan Seputar Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1998), 107.



- Every month the debt burden of nations increased by US \$7.5 million, with US \$1,500 million on the shoulders of third world countries.
- Every year the number of tropical forests damaged or lost are three-quarters the area of Korea.
- Every decade, geothermal temperature steadily rises, the polar ice cap melts, sea level rises.

Mauboi describes six major human problems in the 21st century,⁸ namely:

1. Threat of nuclear war or nuclear destruction;
2. The danger of overpopulation exceeding capacity;
3. Global ecological degradation through acid rain, ozone layer depletion, forest destruction, and soil erosion;
4. Widening of the prosperity gap between the north and the south;
5. Reconstruction of the education system and morality that's required to address the above four agendas; and
6. The extreme importance of morality in the future in addressing the problems that are threatening the world.

Regarding the plight of the earth, David G. Hallman also explained that the earth and other creatures are threatened.⁹ The signs are everywhere: climate change, ozone depletion, nuclear and toxic waste, urban pollution, groundwater contamination, loss of agricultural land, shrinking fish stocks, unsustainable forestry practices. According to Hallman, ecological issues also relate to situations of social and economic injustice, with the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and the sad picture of the health of human and natural communities.¹⁰ This happens because the human lifestyle, through exploitation akin to rape, threatens nature.¹¹ According to Hallman, there are some dominant values that affect society today: human behavior (usually the pattern of material consumption); the desire to dominate (embodied in the power of economic

8 Ibid, 108.

9 David G.Hallman, *Spiritual Values for Earth Community* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Mutiara Andalas, "Teologi Ekofeminis Pembebasan," in Wahyu S. Wibowo and Robert Setio (eds.), *Teologi yang Membebaskan dan Membebaskan Teologi* (Yogyakarta: TPK dan Fakultas Teologi UKDW, 2016), 156.

globalization); and fear (expressed in violence). But Hallman is optimistic that we can escape from this destructive path. There are other values that can form the basis of a sense of justice and a supportive lifestyle in the twenty-first century. Hallman believes that values are spiritual values expressed through Christianity and other faiths that can shape our way of life and govern our society. Those values are gratitude, humility, sufficiency, justice, peace, love, faith, and hope.¹²

In today's postmodern age, we are witnessing a widespread approach to understanding the ultimate influence on human behavior. So far academic methodology has been male-dominated, but it has been strongly challenged by feminist thinkers, who have brought sharp criticism regarding how privileges structured on gender- and class-based societies pave the way for others.¹³ There are two other notes. First, an understanding of the main influence of human behavior and decision-making cannot arise only from the rational process itself, but must be open to the rewards of insights derived from sources of intuition or emotional spirituality. Again, feminist thinkers have helped in raising the profile of these other skills. Second, we learn about ourselves through an interactive process of engagement and reflection. We need practical experience to improve our knowledge. Intellectual analysis is impoverished without it.

On the other hand, Robert Setio, an Indonesian Old Testament theologian, asserts that it may be dichotomous thinking—heaven versus the world—that dominates and causes problems for Christianity. In this dichotomous way of thinking, what we find in this world is seen and never can be ideal, for the ideal is only in heaven. Man must wait for his time to see the ideal in heaven. Therefore what is in this world is temporary, and, consequently, Christianity views the world or nature as less important than heaven or heavenly things.¹⁴

Related to the importance of ecological themes in Christian Education, Mauboi explains how narrative is vitally important in human life, including the scriptural narrative of the creation story and the Garden of Eden. This narrative is popular because it reflects the human being within a country that is as peaceful as the mother's womb, and not only that but because this narrative concerns the origin of life itself. Narratives can be motivating, encouraging, and transforming. Here Mauboi wants to emphasize that the narrative has a transformative power. For

12 David G. Hallman, *Spiritual Values for Earth Community* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 2.

13 Ibid, 5.

14 Roberto Setio, *Dari Paradigma "Memanfaatkan" ke Merangkul Alam; Beberapa Pertimbangan dan Usulan*, in *Gema Teologi*, 37:2 (October 2013), 169.



Mauboi, Christian Education in the church, in addition to Bible teaching, can also convey folklore that is rich in pedagogical content to build a complete world view with a sincere awareness and responsibility to the environment.¹⁵ By the delivery of biblical stories and folklore, church people can grow and form into individuals and communities who are fully aware of God's care-keeping mandate for generations.

Damage to nature or ecology has become a concern in the way the Christian faith is reflected, for the presence and calling of mankind in the world is in the framework of becoming God's fellow worker to preserve and preserve the environment. Celia Deane-Drummond explains that mankind assumes the task of becoming the image of Christ. Our ability to be the image of God and to be like Christ is reflected in our ability to live together in relationships with others and creations.¹⁶ J.B. Banawiratma, an Indonesian liberation theologian, mentions the term "spiritual ecological" as a spirituality that needs to be built and developed. Ecological spirituality has the basis of human experience faced with the destruction of the environment, as well as dealing with the experience of the Most Holy. In this experience we are called to creatively nourish the quality of life together with the Life Provider participating in seeking *shalom*, welfare together with biotic communities.¹⁷

All the above explanations on the theme of ecological education imply that it necessarily be part of the entire Christian Education curriculum in the life of Christianity and the church. This means encompassing information, practice, experience, and development to change and renew nature, covering domestic and public, local and global duties aimed at transforming Christians to have a different perspective on God's creation. Thus Christians and all mankind will regard the mother earth as an inherent and inseparable part of themselves.

Christian Education and the Theme of Consumptive Society and Poverty

The second theme of Transformative Christian Education is Consumptive Society

15 Dekker J. Mauboi, "Pendidikan Ekologi Dalam PAK," in Andar Ismail, *Ajarlah Mereka Melakukan: Kumpulan Karangan Seputar Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1998), 100.

16 Celia Deane-Drummond, *Teologi & Ekologi; Buku Pegangan*, translated by Robert P. Borrang (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia: 2001), 72.

17 J.B. Banawiratma, J.B., *10 Agenda Pastoral Transformatif: Menuju Pemberdayaan Kaum Miskin Dengan Perspektif Adil Gender, HAM dan Lingkungan Hidup* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2002), 73.

and Poverty. A consumptive lifestyle and greed make a wealthy man ignore the existence of his poor and suffering neighbor. He forgets his humanitarian duties and responsibilities to help those in need. It is interesting to notice and examine the thought of Tom Beaudoin that Christianity as a part of the body of Christ must see that the body is not a closed system but is open, all the way to the inner world. According to Beaudoin, when Christians claim to be part of the body of Christ, they must accept the importance of the world's prosperity for the welfare of the body of Christ.

To respond to the struggle and anxiety of the consumptive lifestyle, Beaudoin then developed two approaches to mature the economic spirituality. The two approaches are direct and indirect approaches. In the indirect approach,¹⁸ economic spirituality is developed in several respects: First, people are encouraged to accept the mysterious depths of their human identity, the irreplaceable uniqueness of their dignity. Here Beaudoin advises on an ongoing basis to continue to awaken the memory of our dignity by asking questions that remind us that we are not easily tempted to use our money. Second, Christians can especially be wary of the economic futility of the spiritual practice of the church. According to Beaudoin, the purpose of the ministry should be to bring itself to a position where it can credibly criticize economic practice in a wider economy. Third, we can take a media fast. This requires the support of each other in leaving television, internet, or other technological media for a certain amount of time. It helps us spiritually by encouraging us to distance ourselves critically with it and the brands that are presented via the media, allowing us to examine their influence in our imagination. Fourth, the church can reclaim its role as an advocate of art. The church can better prepare its members to consider consuming branded products by providing resources to encourage young people to create and interpret their own cultural products.

In the direct approach,¹⁹ first, we can thoroughly examine our economic decisions. We can ask questions such as: How do I use my economic resources? Who or what do I really support when I buy certain products? Second, we can formulate our declaration of spiritual freedom for our culture, for our individual, family, or community. Here are ten points of our spiritual liberty declaration:

1. **Dignity.** We will realize the dignity of the whole of life as the most basic value by nurturing and protecting human life in all stages of the circle of

18 Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are and What We Buy* (Lanham, Maryland: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 98-102.

19 Ibid, 102-104.



life and appreciating the good of the creation of animals and nature.

2. **Service.** We will do service as a basic spiritual practice, regularly offering an honest act of living resources for the church or the world.
3. **Solidarity.** We will allow the impact of using money on the poorest and disadvantaged members of society to strongly influence our shopping habits.
4. **Community.** We will share responsibility for our lives and the lives of others by being accountable to at least one community or family to which we will be actively present.
5. **Redirecting.** We will carve out our schedule by working hard for a balanced life, switching between the active and contemplative modes of silence, community, recreation and work.
6. **Play.** Because all good recreation puts us in the good of all creation, we will make playing a priority, in the form of play activities as well as in the comic dimensions of our daily lives.
7. **Readings.** We will prepare ourselves to responsibly transform our culture and community by adding readings in our tradition and fluency in our history.
8. **Local culture.** We will be good creators as cultural consumers, support local and indigenous popular culture, and interpret all forms of culture through the eyes of faith.
9. **Self-examination.** We will practice how to be attentive to God's presence in the world, cheerful for the absolute uniqueness of grace and cautious in making moral judgments through the information of conscience.
10. **Non-attachment.** Knowing that there is no perpetual spiritual growth without the imperfection of things or goods, we struggle to avoid getting caught in things or objects by avoiding overreaching them and hating them. We will regularly check our relationship with objects or goods.²⁰

Beaudoin insists that our new kind of economy reveals the task of spiritual maturity: knowing and knowing ourselves and others, without being ruled by the title of who we are or what we buy.²¹ Beaudoin says there is nothing wrong with buying or with the existence of a brand. But in the framework of turning on the spiritual dimension in front of us, we need to integrate who we are with what we buy, realizing that each of us has the freedom to receive God's gift of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 106.

life by being someone who ministers more lives than others. In that work, God becomes more trustworthy to others and the consciousness and responsibility of the relationship to God spreads through the way we use income, through awareness of those who are affected by our spending. We live our relationship to our basic meaning through what and how we buy or spend. Let the integration of faith and economy be a sign of the true spiritual seekers today, a consuming faith: Faith (in) consuming.²²

Why is awareness of and sensitivity to those who are poor and suffering important? And why is it important to be included as part of Christian Education? M.P. Joseph explains that in reality the number of people living in such a context is increasing; the general economic and political system prevailing in the world means people who have no access to the system will be increasingly oppressed. The existence of poor and oppressed people, with their questions and struggles systematically erased from public consciousness, is of great concern.²³ The reality of the poor and the marginalized with no one to care for and fight for them has long disturbed the conscience of theologians. Such conditions have made these human beings viewed as invisible nonbeings.²⁴ They are considered no longer human, they are considered to no longer exist.

Poverty and ecological damage are the effects of greed that is seen as an individual drive and selfish motives. Capitalist production is organized on the basis of profitability, not on human needs. While technology and human skills continue to be developed, they are still utilized for capitalist production. The amount of wealth created is combined with limited consumption due to constant savings of workers and lower wages. Poverty is directly linked to the profit orientation and personal plunder inherent in capitalism. Unemployment, underemployment, declining income, debt, limited consumption, and the alienation of capitalist takeovers are permanent features of the system. Poverty is a phenomenon of capitalism. Poverty can also be seen as a manifestation of human exploitation. Poor people, despite generating social wealth, do not receive the minimum income to live as though they are worthy. However, profit-taking capitalists also take advantage of non-poor, who may have enough to live

22 Ibid, 107.

23 M.P. Joseph, *Theologies of the Non-Person: The Formative Years of EATWOT* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), ix.

24 Ibid.



above the poverty line, but who do not receive a fair share of wealth.²⁵

Likewise, the ecological crisis is directly related to the profit orientation, private appropriation, and intrinsic competition in capitalism. The search for higher profits has instilled a sustainable pattern of production and consumption, which today's natural processes can no longer cope with. Production is done in the shortest possible time to realize profit, with little consideration of the rhythm of natural processes and the time required for their formation or renewal. Moreover, as the accumulation of wealth itself imposes demands on the biosphere, rich people pursue lifestyles that leave an ecological footprint much heavier than that of the poor. Finally, what is the role of greed in the capitalist process? In simple capitalist production, the capitalist increases the rate of profit by reinvesting some created wealth (pocketing the rest) and expanding production, while on the other hand reducing wages.

Rosario Bella Guzman writes that greed therefore can be regarded not only as an individual impulse but as a class act against another, and finds a scientific basis in the law of capitalism, which maintains profitability.²⁶ The linkage between poverty and ecological crisis in Asia is very strong. The linkage is seen as a deviation from Asian growth, rather than the product of the wealth creation system. He argues, however, that the situation of Asian wealth—human and ecological—has deteriorated precisely because of the relentless drive, in the era of globalization, to achieve higher profit margins at the expense of workers' income and at a faster pace than ecologically sustainable. Earlier it showed that increased production under the current system of global wealth creation is not necessarily expanded work, which is the source of human welfare. In contrast, in many developing countries in Asia, it has been linked to work stoppages, labor immobility, and technological redundancies. Where the system has created jobs, wages have been constantly eroded, working conditions have deteriorated, and job insecurity has increased for some "low-skilled." At the same time, a "high-skilled" minority group has to some extent benefited from higher remuneration and deeply rooted elites have reaped super-profits. The natural consequence of all this is endemic poverty and inequality.²⁷

25 Rosario Bella Guzman, "Establishing the Links between Wealth Creation, Poverty and Ecological Devastation: The Asian Experience", in Athena Peralta (ed.), *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific* (Chiang Mai, Suva, Geneva: CCA, PCC, WCC, 2010), 32-33.

26 Ibid, 33-34.

27 Ibid.

The Asian ecological crisis, on the other hand, is the product of a long history of colonial looting, which has not only directly deprived people from access to ecological resources, but also has embedded the existing system of wealth creation that places a high demand on bio capacity regardless of time appropriate for ecological renewal.²⁸ The continued degradation of the ecological source of sustenance has made the poverty experience more acute for farmers, fishermen, women, and indigenous peoples who rely heavily on land, forests, rivers, and seas for their livelihoods and basic needs. The governments and communities of Asia and the Pacific are already facing major environmental problems that include air pollution; reduced availability and quality of freshwater supply; desertification, deforestation, and other forms of land degradation; dust and mist; acid rain; greenhouse gas emissions; loss of biodiversity; and degradation of marine resources.

The ecological crisis has serious implications for the majority of the population in Asia. Because so many depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, poverty has made Asia more vulnerable to ecological crises. At the same time, the Asian environmental problem has exacerbated the poverty condition. Poverty in Asia is a real picture of the irony of global wealth. The creation of Asian wealth is heavily integrated with the creation of global wealth. Seeing how global wealth is allocated will therefore complement the relationship between wealth creation systems, poverty, and ecological destruction and show that human misery and ecological crisis are replicated on a global scale due to the global system of exploitation.²⁹

However, research also uncovers a balanced view of business, as proposed by Yahya Wijaya, an ethical theologian from Indonesia. The benefits of economy and business for human life need to be seen from the point of business ethics. According to Wijaya, business ethics has developed seriously as a new discipline since the 1960s, triggered by events and movements in the United States and Britain, including the unfolding of large-scale corruption involving giant corporations, growing public concerns about pollution and environmental problems, depletion of natural resources, ongoing civil rights movements against racial/gender discrimination, the call of church and religious institutions for concern for the poor and weak in both the USA and UK and in the “third world.” In business circles, the need for a moral guide is also increasingly felt. The event that marks the milestone of the development of modern business

²⁸ Ibid, 57.

²⁹ Ibid, 62-63.



ethics was the first national business ethics conference held in November 1974 by the University of Kansas.³⁰

In fact, churches have been involved early in the process leading to a paradigm shift in business ethics. Churches and religious organizations do not stop with that shift but become more active in the development of further business ethics, taking part in consultations that generate influential thoughts in the formation of various business-related policies. Wijaya is reminded that the company has a social function that is also important. Companies together with all elements of the community together carry out their duties to answer the challenges of the problems that occur in the vicinity. Multidimensional crisis is a concrete example of how corporate cooperation with the wider community is needed. Wijaya concludes his writing by reminding the importance of the church to hear the “preaching” of the business world and to understand their experience so that the church can carry out its vocation in sharing the good news in all areas of life, including in the business world.³¹

We are again looking at poverty. In relation to the duties and vocations of the church, Wahyudi quotes the Augsburg Confession 1530 which defines the church as “the fellowship of the saints in which the gospel is taught pure and the sacrament is properly served.” The church, he says, is not the kingdom of God but the seed and the beginnings of that Kingdom, also the sign and means of God’s coming government.³² Wahyudi talks about Bible teaching for addressing poverty. Wahyudi started with the concept of human creation, in the image and likeness of God. According to Wahyudi, God conferred on human brains and conscience whose intelligence exceeded the most sophisticated computers. Conscience is a moral awareness of what is good and bad and the drive to reach meaning and make a real contribution.³³ The man who is blessed by God with these advantages in association with God will be able to use the gift of God to work to develop relationships with others and self. The potential possessed

30 Yahya Wijaya, “Gereja dan Etika Bisnis,” in Supriatno, Onesimus Dani, Dan Daryatno (eds.), *Merentang Sejarah, Memaknai Kemandirian: Menjadi Gereja bagi Sesama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 61-62.

31 Ibid, 73.

32 Wahyudi, “Gereja dan Kemiskinan,” in Supriatno, Onesimus Dani, and Daryatno (eds.) *Merentang Sejarah, Memaknai Kemandirian: Menjadi Gereja bagi Sesama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 75.

33 Ibid, 81-82.

is sufficient to be able to manage the earth entrusted to human beings even though God still has a prerogative to ensure that human creativity does not hinder God's intentions and will. On the other hand, man must also remember and realize his vulnerability because it was created from dust and land so that humility and fear of God is an attitude that should be expressed in this life especially in relation to God.³⁴

According to Josef Widyatmadja, it's important that theology includes the theme of poverty, that the church builds a theology of the people and with the people. Widyatmaja asserted that the people need to be involved in articulating and crafting the faith in which they live.³⁵ From here, then, criticality can continue to be built to examine all forms of injustice and oppression that lead to poverty.

Obertina Modesta Johanis emphasized the importance of talking about poverty; according to him, God who came in Christ, came to give abundant life. The reality of poverty, which is close to death and close to human destruction, is contrary to the will of God, so she thinks the church must act to do something to answer that question.³⁶ Johanis is inspired by Frans Magnis-Suseno's opinion, stating that there are three reasons why we are morally obligated to do our utmost to eliminate poverty:

Poverty makes people suffer, and therefore we should not be indifferent to it;

Poverty prevents a person from fully developing his humanity, thus contrary to human dignity; and

Poverty for most people is the result of social injustice; poor people deserve to demand a change.³⁷

According to Johanis, poverty proved to have a great impact on women; she began her writing with stories of poor women who suffered because of their

34 Ibid, 87-93.

35 Josef P. Widyatmaja, *Yesus dan Wong Cilik; Praksis Diakonia Transformatif dan Teologi Rakyat di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010), 100.

36 Obertina Modesta Johanis "Gereja Kaum (Perempuan) Miskin, in Supriatno, Onesimus Dani, and Daryatno (eds.), *Merentang Sejarah, Memaknai Kemandirian: Menjadi Gereja bagi Sesama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 102-103.

37 Ibid, 103.



poverty. Johanis argues that women are among the poorest of the poor.³⁸ She also quotes Ann Whitehead in *Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty*, who says that more than half of the world's poorest people in developing countries are women.³⁹ Women often are restricted from work that would allow them to overcome poverty or just meet the needs of life. Women are also vulnerable to violence and to physical and sexual relationships within their work environments.

Asian feminist liberation theologian Chung Hyun Kyung explains that Asian feminist theology is born of female moans and crying, and from their desire for women's liberation and dignity. Asian feminist liberation theology emerges from the extreme suffering of women who have fallen victim to hunger, rape, beating, and so on. It arises because its theological reflection is the answer to the suffering of women. She criticized the patriarchal religious institutions that were silent towards the groans and cries of women's suffering.⁴⁰ According to Kyung, Asian women took advantage of the symbols and religious and political ideas of their movements to illustrate what Jesus meant to them in Asia today. This is a Christological change created from the experiences of Asian women as they struggle to gain their full humanity.⁴¹

According to Johanis, government intervention has not been gender sensitive. Programs have often been created from a male point of view. Meanwhile, women's poverty alleviation programs such as Women in Development (WID) or Gender and Development (GAD) are not optimum, though GAD also involves men's decision-making to invite men to understand and think about women's needs.⁴² There is also a gender mainstreaming concept created for the purpose of supporting women in development and incorporating the values of women into development itself.⁴³

38 Ibid, 107.

39 Ibid.

40 Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Marknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 22.

41 Chung Hyun Kyung, "Siapakah Yesus Bagi Perempuan-perempuan Asia?", Dalam R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Wajah Yesus di Asia*, translated by Ioanes Rahmat (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2007), 370.

42 Obertina Modesta Johanis "Gereja Kaum (Perempuan) Miskin, in Supriatno, Onesimus Dani, dan Daryatno (eds.), *Merentang Sejarah, Memaknai Kemandirian: Menjadi Gereja bagi Sesama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 109.

43 Ibid, 110-111.

Johanis also highlights the existence of the church to answer its call to the problems of poverty and women. Johanis invites the church to hold programs that come into direct contact with the issues. According to him, the church is called to be a partner of God to realize a quality and even abundant life for oppressed human beings including women.⁴⁴ He asserts that the church should be available and give itself to standing for the poor and suffering of women. Along with that, the church also can encourage government and social institutions to continue to work responsibly and to realize their concern for the poor and the suffering. The church, he thinks, is a fellow worker of God who is present to his neighbor.

Dialogue of Ecology Theme with Consumptive Society and Poverty Theme in the Frame of Transformative Christian Education

This section explicates the dialogue between ecological themes and consumptive societal themes and poverty. After exploring the themes of ecology and consumptive society and poverty, I see the two themes as very different but intertwined. Both themes are mutually supportive and complementary to each other: The problem of ecological damage is closely related to consumptive life attitudes that make people destructively exploit or rape nature. The ecological damage that ensues impoverishes and makes miserable human life because humans depend for their lives on nature. Nature is polluted, causing costs of living and health to soar. Those who cannot afford to pay and buy health care will become ill, and in pain they cannot work for a living. On the other hand, poverty can also lead to the destruction of nature. Poor and poorly educated people earn income in ways that damage nature, such as fraudulent logging and forest burning, or fishing in the sea using trawlers and bombs. Ecology and poverty are two different themes but they are strongly linked to the human perspective and the preservation of God's creation. With a healthy nature and with a good economic life man can live for his next generation and for the whole creation of God.

An additional theme related to the theme of poverty is feminism, which becomes an important part of Christian faith reflection. As Johanis says, poor women are the poorest of the poor. Poor women suffer double jeopardy, living in poverty as well as being exposed to exploitation and torture by men, whether father, husband, or from outside the family. In the 1994 World Woman's Consultation

44 Ibid, 116-117.



of The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) Woman's Consultation on Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling Against Violence, as quoted in Kwok Pui Lan, a group of Asian women wrote about the cultural influences brought by colonialism: The colonials have taught us (women) to accept their superiority (male) as a higher race group and ignore what we have because it is not good. Colonialism has shaped the character of Asian women to see their role as being very weak, meaningless, obedient, inferior, expected to suffer, and so on. Women continue to be under the domination of men.⁴⁵ Indonesian Christian educator and feminist theologian Tabita K. Christiani mentioned in her research a comparison of women victims of domestic violence from villages and cities. The women who shared their experiences, haltingly and with tears, spoke of various forms of domestic violence they are experiencing: physical, psychological, emotional, social, and economic. But when they were asked about their understanding of Christian families and marriages, the answers they gave immediately flipped a switch: the Christian family is harmonious, loving; Christian marriage does not end in divorce; husband and wife love each other. The two sets of answers show that the reality and ideals of Christianity are contradictory; the ideal is not realized by women.⁴⁶

The theme of feminism is also closely related to ecology. Mutiara Andalas says that we must learn from ecological communities that save nature from exploitation, because theology finds its spirit of liberation when theologians enter the issues of nature and women to their depths; theology loses liberation spirit as theologians ignore ecological disasters and women's suffering.⁴⁷ The eco-feminists, according to Celia Deane-Drummond, put special emphasis on the recent destruction of nature, which they believe is related to the male attitude of accentuating their own sex and insulting the opposite sex because men have

45 EATWOT Women's Commission, *EATWOT Asian Woman's Consultation: Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling Against Violence* (Madaluyong, the Philippines: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 1994) as cited in Kwok Pui Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 17.

46 Tabita Kartika Christiani, "Biarkan Mereka Bercerita: Pendidikan Kristiani dan Keadilan Gender," in Deetje Rotinsulu Tiwa and Mariska Lauterboom (eds.), *Perempuan Indonesia dalam Karya dan Pengabdian: Bunga Rampai dan Penghargaan untuk Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2014), 13.

47 Mutiara Andalas "Teologi Ekofeminis Pembebasan," in Wahyu S. Wibowo and Robert Setio (eds.), *Teologi yang Membebaskan dan Membebaskan Teologi* (Yogyakarta: TPK dan Fakultas Teologi UKDW: 2016), 167.

been in charge and responsible for what is happening in society.⁴⁸ Although the views of eco-feminist groups are seen to be too generalized, they also contain a strong element of truth.

The strength of the Western and patriarchal cultures influence on the interpretation of biblical texts, affecting the mindset of the church towards nature, disturbs Musa Dube, a feminist-postcolonialist theologian from Africa. He mentions “how the West, the Bible, and imperialism are interconnected in order to underline the era of biblical studies and in feminist biblical practices.”⁴⁹ Dube seems to say that our perspective on scripture and its application is strongly influenced by patriarchal mindsets. She, therefore, proposes that feminist biblical readers must also be decolonizing readers: readers who are aware of imperialism’s pervasive exploitative forces, who consciously adopt feminist decolonizing strategies, and who demonstrate a genuine search for liberating ways of interdependence between nations, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, and sexual and religious orientations.⁵⁰

Dube’s explanation emphasizes that injustice, oppression, and exploitation are problems that arise in the theme of ecology and in the theme of consumptive society and poverty. In the case of ecological destruction, we see how people are troubled by the practice of injustice and oppression of nature. In the case of poverty and consumptive society, we see how humans are also troubled by the practice of injustice and oppression of others.

Next, ecological themes and themes of consumptive society and poverty are also interdependent in terms of showing how human greed is seen as causing ecological damage and poverty. One form of real greed is the practice of corruption. Corruption itself has become a social disease that plagues Indonesia. Based on data from Transparency International, the corruption perception index ranks Indonesia at 90th out of 176 countries or territories, with a value of 37 (less than 50 indicates a “serious corruption problem.”⁵¹ Corruption has an adverse impact on society at large, with an impact, Peter Carey says, that has a

48 Celia Deane-Drummond, , *Teologi & Ekologi: Buku Pegangan* (2008), 62.

49 Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 42.

50 Ibid, 42-43.

51 [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Transparency-International-Corruption-Perceptions-Index-2016/\\$FILE/EY-Transparency-International-Corruption-Perceptions-Index-2016.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Transparency-International-Corruption-Perceptions-Index-2016/$FILE/EY-Transparency-International-Corruption-Perceptions-Index-2016.pdf), accessed on August 3, 2017.



power a thousand times greater than deaths due to drugs.⁵² Carey explains the impact of forest fires by plantation companies causing 91,600 premature deaths due to inhaling excessive particulate matter (PM2.5). Further, Carey says, the cost of restoration of two million hectares of peat land is estimated to cost 25 trillion rupiahs in the long term. But, according to Carey, these companies are bribing local officials to turn a blind eye to environmental destruction, and they are not prosecuted for public health losses.⁵³ Carey's research shows how greed and a greedy lifestyle in the form of corrupt practices have a fatal impact on the environment as well as on human poverty and suffering.

Both themes are also linked to the need for a church's role to address issues of ecological damage, poverty, and consumptive lifestyles. Both themes are linked and present in reality in the context of Indonesia. The two themes inspire the consciousness of the churches, especially in Indonesia, which have been living in ivory towers, within high walls, and wrapped in comfort and theological and doctrinal teachings. Churches are inspired to wake up from their long sleep and fix themselves to respond consciously and with sensitivity to the problem in its context to present the values of God's reign in life, transforming social life, and liberating oppressed and persecuted creation and human beings. In this self-reforming effort, Transformative Christian Education came to be an avenue for Christianity and the church to address the above issues.

Impacts and Consequences of Dialogue of Ecological Themes and Themes of Consumptive Society and Poverty for Developing Construction of Transformative Christian Education

The call to stand with nature and the poor has been proclaimed. Norman Habel said, "We are called to sense the very mystery of God in all things. Our mission is to reveal God suffering in, with, and under the planet."⁵⁴ In the Accra Confession as a joint recognition of the Reformed churches, in point 19-24, the call is very strongly stated. Specifically point number 24 states: "We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation, and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and

52 Peter Carey and Suhardiyoto Haryadi, *Korupsi Dalam Silang Sejarah Indonesia: dari Daendles (1808-1811) sampai Era Reformasi* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2016), xxxvi.

53 Ibid, xxxvi-xxxvii.

54 Norman Habel, "Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church," in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 37:2 (2010), 125.

the abused (Ps 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.”⁵⁵ Based on those views, the churches are called and challenged to help liberate nature and creation from destruction and exploitation.

Therefore Transformative Christian Education is part of a theological effort that seeks to realize the meaning of church attendance in the context to answer the question. Here are the effects and consequences of ecological themes and consumptive societal themes and poverty for the church in developing Transformative Christian Education and addressing challenges in the context of life.

First, the effects and consequences of the interconnectedness of the two themes above are to invite self-examination of the theology and teaching of the church on ecological, economic and gender justice, and equality. Churches can then make changes and innovations to the theology and teaching of the church about justice and gender equality. It can be done through the renewal of Christian Education in the church. Jack Seymour as quoted at the beginning of this paper mentions that Christian Education is a conversation for life, a quest to use the sources of faith and cultural traditions, to move toward an open future of justice and hope.⁵⁶ In the Christian Education model built on such an approach, Tabita Christiani asserts that teaching is not merely a mere retelling and repetition of Christian faith expressions of the past; instead it is meeting the sources of faith (the Bible, the teachings and church traditions) with the cultural traditions, way of life, contemporary culture, or real experience to make a future renewal more in line with God’s rule.⁵⁷ This means to a church member, a just and equitable ecology and economic and gender theme has been often spoken of to children from early ages—and to all church members—so that hope for humanity transforms social life and the future. Justice becomes the identity and character of Christian Education.

Second, the church is motivated to design curricula and conduct activities related to ecological and economic and gender equality themes and equality

55 <http://wrcr.ch/accra/the-accra-confession>, accessed August 4, 2017.

56 Jack Seymour (ed), *Memetakan Pendidikan Kristiani; Pendekatan-pendekatan Menuju Pembelajaran Jemaat*, translated by Erich von Marthin E. Hutahaeen (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016), 13.

57 Tabita Kartika Christiani, “Biarkan Mereka Bercerita: Pendidikan Kristiani dan Keadilan Gender,” in Deetje Rotinsulu Tiwa and Mariska Lauterboom (eds.), *Perempuan Indonesia dalam Karya dan Pengabdian: Bunga Rampai dan Penghargaan untuk Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel*, 20.



that are both appropriate for different age groups and intergenerational. The emphasis on the building intergenerational relations in the church is because with intergenerational church experiences, many healthy relationships between different generations lead to effective service. All generations are important to God; everyone in the church, regardless of age, has something that can be offered to God. God, through the scriptures, has instructed the church to be a unified body amid a great diversity, which includes generational diversity.⁵⁸ Designing curricula and faith-building activities aimed at personal conversions (power within), such as eroding greed, awakening from the oppressor's mentality, raising awareness of respect for nature and neighbor, sensitive and caring about problems in context, helping and assisting the suffering, will transmit positive energy to members of the church. From that energy, every member can find his or her own power as well as a shared power, which can be applied to engagement with nature, neighbor, and especially oppressed women.⁵⁹

One activity that can be done, for example, is reflection and sharing of faith through the media. Why use media? The changing times, with fast-paced technological developments, have affected the pattern of human life today, including children. Children experience growth without ever being separated from the influence of the media, be it television or internet. Because of that reality, Iswarahadi explained that the use of media in the proclamation of faith is important. He explained that technology can be an inspiration in the change of life for the better.

Technological advances need to be anticipated on behalf of church preaching, so that the faithful have access to the church. To quote Father Pungente, who says the truth of the word applies also through the work of imagination, God is very creative; the imagination given to man is creative. In the spiritual language of creativity united in contemplation, we open ourselves to what we are contemplating as well as what we contemplate open to us. The creative energy of contemplation can influence and change and that is where there is

58 Peter Menconi, *The Intergenerational Church*; Understanding Congregations from WWII to www.com (Littleton, Colorado: Mt. Sage Publishing, 2010), 3-6.

59 Nunuk P. Murniati, "Merayakan Pemulihan Luka-luka 'GAIA': Teologi Ekofeminis Praksis, in Wahyu S. Wibowo and Robert Setio (eds.), *Teologi yang Membebaskan dan Membebaskan Teologi* (Yogyakarta: TPK dan Fakultas Teologi UKDW, 2016).

an encounter with God who works.⁶⁰ In this case, the church can use media technology to proclaim the faith for its members, including children. By showing films on the theme of justice and ecological, economic, and gender equality with their variants of creativity, it helps the churches to contemplate and cultivate a self-transforming consciousness to bring about social transformation in life.

Third, through Transformative Christian Education with ecological themes and consumptive societal and poverty themes, it is hoped that the church will experience the transformation of thought and faith so that church people can become sensitive to and critical of the social situation filled with ecological, economic, and gender injustice. The incarnate Logos needed a certain time and place before confronting the inevitable conflict from Bethlehem to Golgotha, Josef Widyatmadja explains, as well as the praxis of diaconia or church ministry that should condemn or criticize the social sin that occurs in its context.⁶¹ Social criticism indicates that the church is aware of problems in its context—because basically reality always has problems.⁶² According to Banawiratma, the church that lives in and wrestles with and criticizes its social reality is a church that prioritizes the poor and oppressed and strives for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.⁶³ Christianity and the church are called to express a prophetic voice to situations and systems that oppress and exploit nature and people, especially women. Criticism allows new situations to emerge and change life to justice for nature, neighbor, and also for women.

Fourth, Transformative Christian Education that transforms the thinking and faith of its citizens will bring Christianity and the church to work towards transformative diaconia. The transformative diaconia is the empowerment organizing people. In it there can be advocacy and empowerment activities. This means that the church is willing and courageous to advocate against ecological destruction by the desires of human greed; the church is also willing to advocate for oppressed and persecuted women, daring to fight for women to

60 Y. Iiswarahadi, *Media dan Pewartaan Iman; Usaha Mencari Model Pewartaan Iman pada Zaman Digital* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2013), 32-33.

61 Josef P. Widyatmadja, *Yesus dan Wong Cilik; Praksis Diaconia Transformatif dan Teologi Rakyat di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010), 71.

62 Bdk. E. Gerrit Singgih, *Mengantisipasi Masa Depan; Berteologi dalam Konteks Awal Milenium III* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2005), 56-57.

63 J.B. Banawiratma, *10 Agenda Pastoral Transformatif; Menuju Pemberdayaan Kaum Miskin dengan Perspektif Adil Gender, HAM, dan Lingkungan Hidup* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2002), 21.



get their rights as human equivalent to men. The church then also sincerely and consistently, along with women, engages in empowerment activities of, by, and for women for a just and hopeful common life.

Finally, every Christian and every community is called to be God's means to liberate Mother Earth from destruction, liberating the poor and oppressed, including the persecuted women. The church is motivated to enable them to become fully human and part of society.⁶⁴ Therefore, theological activity demonstrates the ability of theology to liberate, as well as liberating theology from the ivory tower that cages it away from the concerns of the people.⁶⁵ Such a theology is what Banawiratma says is a functional theology.⁶⁶

64 Matheus Purwatma, *Berteologi Bersama Kaum Miskin Tantangan bagi Teologi Kontekstual Masa Kini*, in Wahyu S. Wibowo and Robert Setio (eds.), *Teologi yang Membebaskan dan Membebaskan Teologi* (Yogyakarta: TPK and Fakultas Teologi UKDW, 2016), 83.

65 Wahyu S. Wibowo and Robert Setio (eds.), *Teologi yang Membebaskan dan Membebaskan Teologi* (Yogyakarta: TPK and Fakultas Teologi UKDW, 2016), vi.

66 Lih. J.B. Banawiratma, "Teologi Fungsional-Kontekstual" dalam Konteks Berteologi di Indonesia, Eka Darmaputera (ed.), (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1997), 51-52.

M(other): The Margin of the Margin

When Church Recognizes the Margins

Leidi Asterina Lontaan

Introduction

My experience as a woman living in Indonesia equips me to talk about “margin.” Just as in other third world countries, living in Indonesia gives me many experiences to live as and with the margin. Some people may have the multiple margins because of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion, educational background, social and economic status, etc. Margins are everywhere. That is why any issue around those who live in the margins both in church and society must be an important issue about which the church has to think and do something. It is not an option but a must. Every margin is important to care about.

The Margin of the Margin: Church’s Unfamiliar Issue

When I started writing my final assignment about an unfamiliar topic called “theology of the womb,” a feminist perspective of woman’s womb discourses in Indonesia, someone reacted spontaneously, “Why don’t you write on a useful, familiar, and important issue?” For a couple months, while I kept writing my assignment, that rhetorical question returned to my mind. It bothered me on the one hand, but challenged me on the other. It bothered me a lot because it seemed to suggest that the issue about “woman’s womb” was *not* useful, *not* familiar and *not* important. But it also challenged me to realize and think deeply about the reality of the church today. Many churches have a tendency to think like anyone else reacting to my unfamiliar topic. Churches can easily judge some issues raised among their community in particular, and society in general, as useless, unfamiliar, or unimportant.

I think this is a very serious problem. Of course, there are so many large and contemporary issues in our own context. There are many more familiar and actual issues that exist within society. However, if the church cares about the big issues, what about the “little-but-real” issues? What about the unfamiliar issues that are unfamiliar because people refuse to recognize them? That is why I consider this to be a very serious problem. There is a kind of superior sense to taking care of the big issues. If the church were able to provide a solution for those issues, then it may be considered to be a hero. It would be a great achievement. This can provide an incentive for the church to focus on the big



things and forget the little things. This is so ironic! There is a lot of talk about margin, but in some ways, the church can create other margins, including by ideology.

Thinking about this gives me courage to write about this unfamiliar issue of being a woman living within the patriarchal society of Indonesia, which is challenging especially when the woman gets married. This where my unfamiliar issue began. Once the woman gets married, her womb does not belong to her anymore. It belongs to her husband, her extended family, community, country, and society. There is only one main intention about a woman's womb in Indonesia: to giving birth in heterosexual marriage relationship.

We have a long political history that placed the status of mother as a part of government's development agenda. The government called women "*Ibu Bangsa*" (Mother of the Nations). It sounds like a privilege to women that the government gave them a special place as an integral part of development. They are wives who support their husband's positions, and they are mothers who are fully responsible for their children. They are the queens of their households. But it means that their rightful place is in domestic sphere. Domestication of women was a main purpose behind that government's specific agenda as Saparinah Sadli, one of the feminists in Indonesia, states below:

Women as 'Mother of the Nations' or equating women with motherhood was the main call to women during the previous regime. Domestication of women's role was the ultimate destination for women. It was a patriarchal construction that places mothers outside the realm of the public and political sphere!¹

This political agenda is known as "*Ibuisme Negara*" (state ibuism).² Further, it was no longer just a political agenda. In "state ibuism" it became an ideology designed to perpetuate the patriarchal system over women's wombs in Indonesian society.

Then, how could this state ibuism become so strong in Indonesia? It has strong roots because of contributions from culture and religion. Indonesia has so many

1 Saparinah Sadli, "Indonesian Women and Crises: Opportunities and Threats, Past and Present" in *Berbeda tetapi Setara*, ed. by Imelda Bachtiar (Jakarta: Penerbit Kompas, 2010), 457.

2 *Ibuisme* (eng. "Ibuism") is the Indonesian term taken from the word *Ibu* (mother) + *-isme* (-ism), refer to an ideology).

cultures, most of them in line with patriarchal values, especially about woman. First, they believe that the important purpose of marriage is producing children. There was a very long time in Indonesian history when people lived with the slogan, “*banyak anak, banyak rejeki*” (the more we have children, the more we have got blessings). Second, the society has its own standard for the “perfect ideal woman” based on the ability of a woman to bear children. People will not say this “compliment” unless the married woman has gotten pregnant and given birth. It is common in Indonesia when a woman visited another woman who has just given birth, to say: “Finally, you are a perfect woman now!”

The “crazy” part of this social construction does not stop there. People continue to categorize: boys are better than girls, normal childbirth is better than a C-section, breast milk is better than infant formula, a full-time mother is better than a working mother, and so on. I called it “crazy” because those categories are not just subjective opinion, but the tendencies of these categories is to create multiple margins in women’s lives. The sisterhood and solidarity among women is becoming rare. Threats for women do not come only from the patriarchal system, but also from the superiority of one margin over another margin.

How about religion? Mainstream religions in Indonesia are Islam and Christianity (Protestant and Catholic). More than culture, people in most of Indonesia honor their religions as the most important thing in their lives. That is why we cannot deny that in those religions, patriarchal values have great influences on social construction about the woman’s womb, at least in three ways. *First*, the mandate to multiply, contained within creation narrative in both the Bible and also within the stories in the Al Qur’an, has become the religion foundation for woman’s womb discourse in Indonesia. *Second*, womb is God’s gift to every woman. Womb is woman’s nature. So, instead of a free choice, having children is a woman’s nature, too. That is the simple logic in woman’s womb discourse in Indonesia. *Third*, children are God’s blessings in marriage. This one sounds very familiar in Christian family life. There is nothing wrong with the statement, but people’s understanding about this then become more like “if children are God’s blessings in marriage, then no children means no blessings.” Those three values have socio-religious consequences if they are not achieved, which confirms the notion that woman’s womb discourse in Indonesia is unbalanced and unjust. That discourse, whether intentionally or unintentionally, marginalizes barren, childless, and child-free women. This is a very serious problem.

The title of this paper tried to express in a simple way the problem that I pointed out: “M(other): The Margin of the Margin.” “Mother” is important in Indonesia,



as I already said. Mother, meaning biological mother, is a final phase in which society crowns a woman as a “perfect ideal woman.” But, being a mother is also the starting point to enter the “crazy” competition on “who is the *real* mother?” Being a mother become the pursuit of more and more “award.” Being a mother is no more than an opportunity to show off and strive to become superior over others. So, “mother” (as woman = margin in patriarchal society) become a new oppressor over “other” (as woman and “non-mother” = the margin of the margin).

Urgency for the New Discourse

The key question of this paper is: Where is the place of the barren, childless, and child-free women—who are excluded from unbalanced and unjust discourse of woman’s womb in society—in the church? How does the church recognize and empower them? How does the feminist perspective create and offer a new discourse regarding woman’s womb in the church?

Learn about Margin from Russell and Wickeri

The main sources for this paper are the thoughts of Letty M. Russell, one of the feminist theologians who wrote on mission and feminist theological topics, especially in her book *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*. The second source is from a Philip L. Wickeri paper entitled *Mission from the Margins*. I name it “second source” because it is relevant to my topic in just a few parts, while Russell’s thoughts are primary.

What I find as an important part from Wickeri’s paper is, first of all, the definition about margins in term of *Missio Dei*:

There were different interpretations of how the church stood in relationship to other movements for humanization, but there was general agreement that *missio dei* was about the renewal of the world, not just the renewal of the church. The church came to be understood as the “church with others” not the “church for others,” and the Christian community became known through the rhythm of its relationship with the whole human community.³

“Church with others” in Wickeri’s paper is a significant change on church’s self-understanding about its identity in God’s world. Rather than become “church

3 Philip L. Wickeri, *Mission from the Margins* – Theology & Worship, Occasional Paper No. 18 (U.S.A: Presbyterian Church, 2004), 8-9.

for others," this new identity as "church with others" challenges the church to be humble and dare to go outside to stand with those people in the margins. This new identity also wakes up the churches from their sweet dreams about God's Kingdom of heaven, then pushes them to keep working to create God's Kingdom in this present times. This new identity reminds the churches explicitly to leave their comfort zones for the struggling reality outside, where many people live among every day's battle to survive. As Wickeri said in metaphor, "to go outside the camp" means that we can expect to encounter Christ in the faithful people whom we meet there, and begin to rediscover the meaning of *missio dei* for these times of crises in world Christianity.⁴ Without this new identity, until they stand with the others, church will never know how much they can do with those people in the margin.

The new identity as "church with the others" then brings a consequence in the definition of *mission* in the church. Wickeri emphasizes this part, "I am speaking here about mission from the margins, not simply mission *at* the margins *or* on the margins, and certainly not mission *to* the margins."⁵ Mission *from* the margins put forward the involvement of those people in the margins to speak up, to be empowered, and to have confidence to bring something positive out of their own situations. The theology can flow out of their reflection upon their own experiences. They will become stronger, able to break out the system of oppression that is marginalizing them. They will be able to participate fully in the church community and in the society as subjects, not as objects.

These few aspects about the church identity from Wickeri's paper then became an entrance to understand several aspects on Russell thoughts below.

Experience in the Margins

Russell begins her book with a summary of the long story about her own experience of alienation and marginality as a woman in the church. This is the one sentence conclusion for her very long journey as a woman who found it difficult both to walk away from the church and to walk with it.⁶ This kind of paradox is interesting to think about because it is representative of so many people's experience in the church. Russell asks us to realize and think seriously

4 Ibid., 17.

5 Ibid., 15.

6 Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), 11.



about what kind of alienation or marginalization experience we have ever found in our church. As a clue to those kind of experience, Bell Hooks's statement about the margin could help us, "*To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.*"⁷ Starting with experience make us easier to recognize the oppressive, marginalizing, alienating, exclusionary, and hierarchical structure around us.

"Church in the Round"

Russell explains that this book is called *Church in the Round* because a metaphor is needed to speak about the vision of Christian community of faith and struggle that practices God's hospitality.⁸ She emphasizes the importance of a metaphor to understand something or some idea which is still unknown. Imagination is also important and a metaphor helps us to imagine the vision of certain Christian community.

A metaphor is an imaginative way of describing what is still unknown by using an example from present concrete reality. To speak of "church in the round" is to provide a metaphorical description of a church struggling to become a household of freedom, a community where walls have been broken down so that God's welcome to those who hunger and thirst for justice is made clear. This unknown reality is described in terms that we have all experienced: gathering in the round, with or without tables, and experiencing the welcome of others.⁹

Further, Russell continues that Church in the Round describes a community of faith and struggle working to anticipate God's New Creation by becoming partners with those who are at the margins of church and society.¹⁰ I emphasize "the margins of church and society" to remind the church of its capacity as a community of faith and struggles. The margins are not only internal to the church. Margins are also outside the church. Whether inside or outside, people in the margins must be the priority of the church with whom to partner. To become God's new creation, church must be, unavoidably, the inclusive community that stands with the margins. In the other words, partisanship of the church must be with the margins.

7 Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), ix.

8 Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), 12.

9 Ibid., 12.

10 Ibid.

Faithfulness to Christ calls us to be constantly open to those who are marginal in our own church communities and in the wider community and to ask critical questions of faith and practice from the perspective of the margin.¹¹

Russell acknowledges that it can be said that in Christ there is neither margin nor center, but inclusiveness to others needs to be put into practice in the churches.¹² In an ideal imagery, we should not have any kind of classification such as margin or center, but that is not our reality. If we eliminate the terms “margin” and “center,” we close our eyes to the reality around us, pretending that everything is fine.

The Margin of the Margin

Implicitly, Russell talks about “the margin of the margin” in this book. She reminds the reader that the imagery of margin is preferable over that of above and below, because one of the ways persons are marginalized is by hierarchical thinking.¹³ Church partnership with the margins demands seriousness and high sensitivity to recognize the margins. It means that church has to be proactive and full of initiative to observe, analyze, and explore the margins itself. Churches must be aware that margins may have multiple layers of other margins. The margin of the margin could be very difficult to see, that is why the church should always be aware of the possibility that a margin creates another margin.

Woman’s Womb New Discourse from Feminist Perspective: From Margin to Center

To see “the margin of the margin” in feminist perspectives is not a difficult task. Feminist style of rereading text and context makes it easy to recognize the margin of the margin. The question is, what will we do when we find the reality “the margin of the margin” in our community or society? In this part, we will see the possibilities to offer a new discourse about woman’s womb based on several aspects of Russell’s feminist perspective.

The Table Talk of Solidarity

When the reality in which we live is so complex and so often painful, we need a means of table talk that can respond to that complexity and pain by

11 Ibid., p. 25.

12 Ibid., p. 27.

13 Ibid., p. 26.



going more deeply into our own situations before moving toward dialogue.¹⁴

It is not always easy and comfortable to women being “others” amongst the “mothers.” Without any intention to underestimate the role of women as mothers, I will examine this issue from the “others” point of view, those who have become “others” because they do not, could not, or choose not to have an experience of being what culture and society say constitutes being a mother. Simply understanding that every woman has her own unique experience will help us to sit together in table talk of solidarity.

Table talk of solidarity gives every woman the same opportunity to share her stories, her experiences, her feelings. The truth is not all the “others” are unhappy, and not all “mothers” are happy. Life experiences are so wide, not only about having children or not. This important awareness need to be a central part of women’s perspective to see other women. From this awareness, they will respect and appreciate each other more easily. Russell describes this table talk as a spiral, not a circle, because people’s experiences depend to a large extent on their own particular context.

The reason that table talk is described as a spiral rather than a circle is that the movement of action and reflection does not simply go around the same circle. Rather, it moves to discover new clues and new questions in a continuing spiral that never comes out in exactly the same place. This is because our experience and contexts are always changing, and each time we see from a slightly different point of view or with a new set of questions.... The order of doing table talk is not the same each time. It depends on the particular context of those doing the theology and the point of entry that is most helpful in that circumstance.¹⁵

Table talk of solidarity is also a place where women learn to be in the same position as others. Superiority is not allowed here. All women try to put themselves in other womn’s position. If mothers can experience empathy towards “others,” and vice versa, there should be no reason to hurt each other. This table talk of solidarity can be a feminist model to eliminate “the margin of the margins.” Russell says that recognizing a theology connected to the margin must include the experience of those women who are “the oppressed of the oppressed”; feminist theologies work contextually out of communities of faith

14 Ibid., p. 34.

15 Ibid.

and struggle.¹⁶ So, all members could become one united group as women, not especially as “mothers and others” any more.

What about the men’s position in this table talk of solidarity? Russell gave the clear explanation with the note, once again, about women’s experiences as the sources for making decision.

This community does not exclude men from participation, but its focus is on those who have been the outsiders, the marginal ones who are able to articulate their hope for new life and dignity. Men can be feminist advocates of justice for women in the community of struggle, but the discernment of what oppression and liberation mean for women has to be rooted in the experience of women.¹⁷

Theological Table Talk

To read the scripture and tradition is to place ourselves as interpreters in front of text and context. But, as interpreters, we cannot deny our subjective situations and opinions. We have our own experiences, insights, and wisdom. So, as interpreters who live as the margin, we need to reread scripture and tradition from the margin.

One way to move ourselves to the margin or to claim the margin as a base of insight into the meaning of faith and struggle is to reread scripture and tradition from the margin.¹⁸

In this part, Russell talks about how to intentionally move ourselves to the margin. This is a decision beyond empathy. To become voluntarily marginal sometimes reminds us of the radical decision take by some great people, like Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, St. Francis Assisi, and more. Not everyone dares to take that radical decision. What Russell offers here was not only about taking a radical decision; it can be as simple as visiting those who live in the margin, doing what we can do to demonstrate solidarity with them.

Rereading scripture and tradition as a non-mother “other” woman could be an interesting and challenging activity. One should understand that the barren women in some texts in the Bible mourn because their patriarchal society keep telling them about barrenness as a curse from God. The contemporary situation

16 Ibid., 30.

17 Ibid., 39-40.

18 Ibid., 27.



is similar because society nurtures people to think that the primary purpose for women is to get married and have children. The Indonesian culture also participates in shaping views about what it means to be a woman. There are many people around us who believe and advocate that becoming a mother is an important part of every woman's life. The local cultural way of thinking is mostly based on social construction in the society that can help us to reconstruct positive thinking about the situation.

When women keep telling us how blessed they are because they have children, of course we know that children are a blessing from God in a marriage, but children are not the one and only blessings in a marriage. When society keeps bothering us about the idea of "mother" as a perfect woman, we can see ourselves with all the potencies, strengths, skills, and opportunities that make us strong women. We do not need to be perfect; perfection is just delusional. We have to be honest and objective to always be proud of the way we are. That is all the simple example on how to reread the scripture and tradition. How we deal with our situations and how we handle people around us can influence us with the things that are not so important.

To reread the scripture and tradition, Russell also talks about feminist methodology. This method assumes that we each view our theology, our understanding of how God is at work in our lives, through a particular lens of language, thought, and action.¹⁹ She says that the complexity between texts, contexts, and interpreters has led both feminist and liberation theologians to develop a spiral method of action and reflection that makes connections between context and tradition a means of theological table talk.²⁰

It is very interesting when Russell treats the connection between context and tradition as a meaning of theological table talk. It means that nothing is in a higher position than the other. Just like the principle in table talk of solidarity, theological table talk also does not allow superiority over others. Russell summarizes this theological table talk:

This style of theologizing in a continuing spiral of engagement and reflections begins with commitment to the task of raising up signs of God's new household with those who are struggling for justice and full humanity. It continues by sharing experiences of commitment and struggle in a concrete context of

19 Ibid., 30.

20 Ibid.

engagement. Third, the theological spiral leads to a critical analysis of the context of the experiences, seeking to understand the social and historical factors that affect the community of struggle. Out of this commitment to action in solidarity with the marginalized, and out of sharing of experiences and social analysis, arise questions about biblical and church tradition that help us gain new insight into the meaning of the gospel as good news for the oppressed and marginalized.²¹

From Object to Subject

Finally, the last part of this effort to found a new discourse of woman's womb in Indonesia is the call to action. The call not to remain silent. The call to speak out. Russell talks about this in a hard sense.

In societies and churches where they have been considered of no importance, women not only speak out for themselves and all those on the margin but also move from margin to center so that their voices may be heard.²²

This part sounds like a rebellion. Movement from margin to center admittedly does not always happen quickly. The process to speak out from the margin is not always easy. In some cases, the more those margins have oppressed, the more they are strong enough to fight back. At the edge of patience, voices from the margin can suddenly surprise community and society.

Related to the woman's womb discourse in Indonesia, I have been a member and observer of a kind of community that has named itself "Komunitas Childfree Indonesia" (Indonesian Childfree Community) in social media. This is a closed group; not everyone can join. Members need to be fifty to a hundred percent decided not to have children. The members of this group have become more and more connected, and recently they began to meet each other face to face. I would not say that this community is like a rebellion against society, but I do see that they become a little bit extremist when they talk about women or parents who have children. Even though their principle is that having children or not is a free choice, most of them have ended up becoming "anti-children" and "anti-parents." This is just one example about what Russell called a "move from margin to center."

21 Ibid., p. 30-31.

22 Ibid., p. 26.



Of course this part is very important. What we hope from the margin is not to remain on the margin forever. We hope the margins can move to the center. We hope the barren women, childless women, and child-free women can enjoy the community of faith and stop struggling with feelings of inferiority. We hope that women in this margin keep walking with their lives and self actualization. We hope this margin can move to the center to celebrate the diversity of women's womb experience in the community. We hope all the women in this margin will become mature in their self confidence as a subject, not as an object anymore.

Conclusion

Using Russell's thoughts to seek a new discourse of woman's womb in Indonesia seems like a risky effort, mainly because Russell does not talk specifically about the woman's womb discourse. But, since she talked about the margin and feminist perspective, her writing became the right entrance to analyze this issue.

I'm not sure I can fully conclude the ideas raised in this essay. The woman's womb discourse that has led many women to become the margin of the margin is just one example of what happen every day in our society. Margins create another margin and so on, making the scope of the church's work more complicated. This indicates that the church lives in the midst of crisis.

The unbalance and unfair discourse about women's womb in Indonesia is a proof that many churches are still busy with the "big" issues. There are so many "little-but-real" issues in our community and society. If the church keeps denying those little issues in determining with whom the church will stand, it means that the church needs to renew its identity as a "church with others." The question is not "what does the church do for the margin?" any more, but "what does the church do with the margin?" The love and hate paradox about the church makes Russell state, "There is no perfect church, and our imperfect church is the only one we have as we seek to point beyond ourselves to God's new household."²³ After all, our imperfect church should never stop the efforts to recognizing and connecting to the margin.

23 Ibid., 45.

Maidan Theology: Re-inventing Barmen, Transforming Ukraine

Viola Erbach

Maidan theology, a work in progress

“Maidan theology” emerges as an attempt to recognize the theological sense of social transformation. This theology is not confined inside churches or seminaries, rather it is overwhelmingly socio-practical, i.e., the theology of the Kingdom, as it reveals itself in various areas of human reality.”

—Michael Chrenkoff, 2017¹

In its 26 years of independence, Ukraine has been through many significant transitions; political turmoil, election fraud, corruption are just a few of the challenges Ukraine constantly faces, waiting for her voice to be heard. In 2013 her cry began to echo throughout the nations and the world.

Until the events of November 2013, Ukraine’s main square, Maidan, was known for being the setting of the Orange Revolution of 2004. The year 2013 has changed this forever. Although the reasons behind both uprisings were the same—injustice, repression of free speech, corruption, election fraud, and so on—the consequences of the latter turned out to be far more serious.

The protests, originally known as #Euromaidan, started on November 21, 2013, when the government suddenly dropped its plans to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU). Many of the protesters saw the EU-Ukraine Agreement as a chance finally to join the progressive European Union, to be entitled to better education, health care, and social services in general. Nonetheless, “the text of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement envisioned neither the prospect of EU membership nor a visa-free regime. In other words, from the very beginning of the protests, the expectations of those involved substantially exceeded the content and purpose of the document that was to be signed in Vilnius.”²

The protest that later became known as the “Revolution of Dignity” revealed

1 Michael Chrenkoff, “Theologizing on the Maidan,” *Chrenkoff Online* (2017), <http://chrenkoff.blogspot.com/2017/06/theologizing-on-maidan.html> accessed March 2017.

2 Andrii Portnov, “Post-Maidan Europe and the New Ukrainian Studies,” *Slavic Review*, 74:4 (2015), 8.



the numerous problems with which Ukrainian society was struggling from day to day. Organizations, political parties, and churches were faced with the immediate issue of taking a stand either for or against the revolution.

At this point, allow me to explain some significant aspects behind the ideas of Maidan. Rooted in the historical experience of the post-Soviet nations, one finds a tendency to portray Europe as the realm of social justice, free self-expression, and the supremacy of law.³ In contrast to this, the existing social reality of Ukraine has been and continues to be perceived as either not fully acceptable or wrong and needing to be put right. Yet, in terms of Christian morality, several Ukrainian churches have portrayed Europe, with its tolerance towards sexual minorities, abortions, and civil marriages, as “the rotten Western World” in opposition to the Russian World, portrayed as the bringer of the light to the world.

It is amid debates like these and the challenges of the revolution that people have hoped for the churches to provide them with moral direction, justify their actions as a quest for social justice, and grant them their full support.⁴ Ukrainian churches, on the other hand, have found themselves to be in a situation described by Harvey Cox in the 1960s, many years before the events at the centre of this paper. Ukrainian churches were “...trying to live in a period of revolution without a theology of revolution. The development of such a theology should be the first item on the theological agenda today.”⁵

Because of this call for development seen and heard from the masses, “Maidan Theology” was born and has become the first significant manifestation of Ukrainian theology. It was a theology responding to the urgent needs of the society, a theology from the margins, to the margins, by the margins. It was a theology called to reform and reinterpret the Ukrainian understanding of the church, a theology called to question the church that has lost its saltiness, a theology of responsibility, not only for the spiritual but also for the social aspects of our society. The Revolution of Dignity has given Ukrainian churches the opportunity to rethink their relationships with authorities, to recognize their role in the society, and to join the Ukrainian citizens in their fight for human rights

3 Ibid.

4 Nicholas Denysenko, “Chaos in Ukraine: The Churches and the Search for Leadership,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 14:3 (2014).

5 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: A Celebration of Its Liberties and an Invitation to Its Discipline* (London: The MacMillan Company, 1965), 127.

and justice. It is in this context of reinterpreting church and state relationships, Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun wrote:

Ukrainian churches now have the opportunity to step out of the grey zone of collaborationism with the criminal authorities and stand their ground as the 'Confessing Church,' which stood against the Nazis in Germany. It is time to change our relationship with the authorities. It is time to establish our relationship with human rights. It is time to learn from the people how to appreciate and stand for dignity, decency, and humanity.⁶

In their quest for a new kind of theology, a theology that responds to the reality of a divided church and nation, a theology that would draw concrete borderlines between the church and state, many have turned to the Theological Declaration of Barmen. In its own time, the Barmen Declaration became a beacon of hope and an example to follow in times when society longed for justice and redemption.

The goal of this paper is thus manifold. By providing the reader with differences and similarities between the two contexts, as well as focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of Maidan Theology, I would like to answer the question: Is there legitimacy for the Ukrainian churches to use the Theological Declaration of Barmen as an example for building up their own theology of revolution? And if yes, should it be adapted to the Ukrainian context? How much of the churches' response should be an authentic, contextualized, local theology responding to the needs of the Ukrainian society? What are its main weaknesses?

Due to this contextualization, as well as to the specific situation in which the Barmen Declaration was written, only some of its statements were applied or rather reinterpreted to the Ukrainian context. The two theses of the Barmen Declaration I would like to discuss are theses 1 and 2. It is these theses, relevant to the Ukrainian experience, I will look at in the remaining part of my paper.

Many have critiqued Maidan Theology for its inappropriate use of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, as the situations in which the two theological movements were born and interpreted differ significantly. For example, in Vítor Westhelle's opinion, any theological declaration or confession is "nearly impossible to recover in times and places other than when and where they were

6 Nicholas Hovorun, "Chaos in Ukraine: The Churches and the Search for Leadership," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 14:3 (2014), 242-259.



birthed.”⁷ Although crucial aspects of the content may be transposable, the context is not, thus the translated text turns into a counterfeit when applied to a different context. What aspects of the Theological Declaration of Barmen are the ones that have proven to be possible to translate into the context of Ukraine?

Ukraine was facing the need to develop a political theology, with a clear opposition towards the unjust state, and while it is impossible to deny the political importance of the Barmen Declaration, Ulrich Mauser also makes an important point that the goal of the Declaration was “not so much to oppose the secular government, as to oppose the national church government itself.”⁸ And although the Ukrainian theology of revolution, in my opinion, is more straightforward with its goal to confront the unjust state as much as the false teaching of the church, some interesting parallels can still be drawn between the ideology of the German Christian and that represented by the officials of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate⁹ (UOC MP) as well as its Mother Church, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

It is of utmost importance to clarify that I am not proposing a direct connection between these two ideologies. They have originated from two totally different contexts and have shaped the mindsets of those involved in very different ways. Yet, just as the issue of the division within the church itself was relevant in the times of the German Christians, so was the religious background of the revolution shaped by the different approaches represented by the divided

7 Vitor Westhelle, “The Barmen Theological Declaration: On Celebrating a Text out of Context 75 Years Later,” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 36:2 (2009), 137.

8 Ulrich Mauser, “The Theological Declaration of Barmen Revisited,” *Theology Matters*, 6:6 (2000), 1.

9 It is important to note that the issues arising from the context of revolution have also split the UOC MP’s clerics into two groups, those against and those supporting the revolution. For instance, the head of the UOC MP, Information Service Archpriest Georgy Kovalenko, asked the Russian mass media not to address all Ukrainians as fascists and Nazis. At the same time, he suggested that Ukraine’s revolution was sponsored by the West and a threat and an attack against the Russian Orthodox Church.

Orthodox Churches of Ukraine.¹⁰ Churches traditionally associated with the aggressor country of Russia were often portrayed as in support of the unjust government, choosing to remain neutral or deaf to the cries of their own nation. It is not to say, however, that churches such as the UOC PM or ROC have not supported their stances with clear theological reasoning. In many cases, as in the German situation, ideas of national unity and national churches were the main reasons used to justify the theological position of these churches.

Volk vs. Etatism: Times When Ideologies Crash

The first thesis of the Theological Declaration of Barmen rejects the teaching of the German Christians, according to which, “the historic hour of Germany’s re-awakening, the arrival of an almost messianic political ‘leader,’ the trust in the powers of restoration engendered by the cultivation of a genuine national spirit, the pride in indigenous traditions...”¹¹ were manifestations of God in the contemporary reality, offering a vision of the future and its ideology. Ukraine, on the other hand, has experienced the revival of the etatist¹² ideology, adopted

10 Currently there are three Orthodox churches in the Ukraine: UOC MP, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC KP), and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). UAOC was formed after Ukraine demanded independence from the Russian Orthodox Church. The first independent Ukrainian parish under UAOC was formed in 1919. The same year the All-Ukrainian Orthodox Church Council was named the governing organization over the Autocephalous Church, which gained its official status as the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church on August 5, 1920. However, this UAOC existed only until 1930. Another stage of the UAOC church is closely linked with the Western region of Ukraine, and its belonging to Poland, since a certain kind of autonomous church, known as the Polish Autocephalous Church existed here until the Russian troops occupied the region and forced the church to join ROC. After Ukraine gained independence, new ambitions concerning autonomy surfaced, being as well supported by the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk. UOC KP fully gained its independence from UOC MP in 1992, combining in itself the UOAC and some segments of UOC MP. “History of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: Kyiv Patriarchate,” 2011.

11 Ulrich Mauser, “The Theological Declaration of Barmen Revisited,” *Theology Matters*, 6:6 (2000), 8.

12 Etatism is the political doctrine aimed at becoming (or rebirth of) an “Orthodox state” and “Orthodox monarchy” as the only possible model for a further coexistence of true believers, which is coming into being under the assumption that they will recognize the Empire as “not just a secular apparatus, but a mysterious soteriological body, which prevents the Antichrist’s coming” Ischuk, N., “Russian Orthodox Church: From Orthodox Patriotism to Etatism,” *American Journal of Social Science Research*, 1(40), 459.



by the Russian Orthodox Church and therefore playing an important part in the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate. According to Natalia Ischuk, “as a cultural and historical phenomenon etatism is rooted in the ideological and civilizational occurrence of Byzantinism and as a component of the latter meets some of the following requirements: restoration of the symphony between the church and state, as well as between politics and religion; subordination of all spheres of public life to religion, the recognition of the monarch as a substance of good and light and the recognition of the messianic role of single nation to be a way of salvation for other peoples.”¹³ Ukraine’s attempts to break its centuries-long bond with Russia have thus been seen by the Russian Orthodox Church as a betrayal of true Orthodox values, a surrender to the rotten ideas of “Eurosodom,”¹⁴ and, most importantly, severe damage to the unity of the so-called “Russkiy Mir.”¹⁵

It is precisely this idea of Russkiy Mir that stands at the core of this renewed etatist ideology, a concept that has been foundational to the legitimization of Crimea’s annexation.¹⁶ The driving force behind this renewed notion of etatism is the idea of ever-so-important and untouchable unity, a unity that cannot and should not be broken, a unity based on the shared Christian past of the Orthodox Christians of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

As Patriarch Kirill states in his speech:

The unity of the Church is higher than any political borders. The Russian Orthodox Church is deeply concerned about the spiritual unity of those nations that originate themselves from the baptismal font of Duke Vladimir. The creation of the United Russian Church has been happening for over one thousand years. ...We have inherited this spiritual unity from our ancestors and we must pass it on to our descendants....”

This idea of a common unity and common heritage originates in the common baptismal experience of Kyivska Rus when in 988 Prince Vladimir of Kiev

13 Ibid, 458-464.

14 Eurosodom is a term often used to describe the Western world, with its tolerance towards abortions, LGBTQ minorities, etc.

15 The Russkiy in this context, as Ischuk points out, is not identical to the word “Russian” and has a much broader meaning that is not associated with any ethnicity or national origin.

16 N. Ischuk, “Russian Orthodox Church: From Orthodox Patriotism to Etatism,” *American Journal of Social Science Research*, 1(40), 458-464.

introduced the Orthodox religion to the Eastern Slavs. This act has forever bound the Slavic nations together, making the Ukrainian capital the cradle of Eastern European Christianity and the mother of all Russian cities.¹⁷ An idea of a common heritage was born, a heritage of shared culture and unity, that would later become the main motivation for the unification of greater Russia. Officially throughout the years ROC have made statements in which Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus are one nation, a part of the greater Rus. It is interesting to note how this idea of a common nationality developed, obscuring the unique traits of Ukrainian and Russian identity and making Ukrainian nationality appear collectively Slavic in nature rather than individually Ukrainian at its core. As a result, Ukrainians are not considered to be a separate nation, but rather citizens of Greater Russia, a view strongly rooted in the past, when Ukraine was known as “Little Russia” (Malorossiya).¹⁸ This has largely been followed by the Russian notion of the political and spiritual world. This concept of the *Russkiy Mir* was later used as a justification for the Russian annexation of Crimea, since it was seen as a way of protecting their own nation, not to mention protecting the cradle of Orthodox Christianity (Crimea) from the influence of the Western world. Thus, as one can see, the theological motivation of the UOC MP significantly differs from that of Maidan Theology. Maidan Theology was born to meet the needs and expectations of the Ukrainian society, an independent theological movement for an independent country, while the theology of the Russian Orthodox Church set out not to reform but to preserve, not to change but to remain.

How did the Ukrainian churches respond to the theological stand taken up by the ROC and the UOC MP? And most importantly, how can all of this be linked to the Theological Declaration of Barmen? As I have already mentioned, it would be an overstatement to suggest that there is a clear connection between the situation in which the Barmen Declaration arose and that of the revolutionary Ukraine of 2013. Yet, if one is trying to establish what exactly made the Ukrainian Protestant theologians turn to this document for help, one cannot help but spot the similarities, insofar as they may exist between such specific contexts. Driven by the idea of “one Volk, one Reich and one Church,” the German Christians opted for preaching the message of unity over preaching the message of solidarity with those who were suffering under the regime. They equated nation

17 Katja Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church* (Croydon: Routledge, 2013), 101.

18 Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).



and God, Germany and God's chosen nation. A similar behaviour can be traced in the UOC MP and ROC's standpoint on the revolution. Unity before all, the sacred bond between the countries of the former Kyivska Rus, must be preserved by any means.

In contrast, the Protestant theologians of Ukraine have taken a different approach to the situation. According to Roman Lunkin, it is indeed the Protestant churches that have been the most affected by the events of Maidan. "Many significant Protestant theologians and Churches have joined the conversation on the messianic role of Maidan and on the new mission paradigm this event has brought to Ukraine."¹⁹ In his view, Maidan became a new opportunity for the churches, an opportunity for them to take a greater role in the public sphere of the society and the development of a more democratic country.

How can one characterize this developing Ukrainian theology, then? First, as already mentioned, this theology is messianic in its nature. It emerges as an attempt to recognize the theological sense of social transformation as it is overwhelmingly socio-practical, i.e., the theology of the Kingdom, revealing itself in various areas of human reality. Second, this theology is critical towards itself, social reality, and its interpretations. It is based on critical hermeneutics; it questions interpretations that justify and support the status quo. Maidan Theology creates a demand for a prophetic understanding of the future as an open horizon of human responsibility.²⁰

Thirdly, just as the Barmen Declaration did, it draws a clear boundary and distinction between Ukraine and Russia, not in a geographical sense, but rather in the ideologies they represent. While Ukraine is portrayed as a European country free from its own Soviet past, Russia still holds onto it, a fact that impacts not only Russia's political but also theological perspective. To quote Anatoliy Kaluzhnyi: "Russia is still affected by its idols, and it is our call to bring the Word of God to them."²¹ And it is precisely this notion of the supremacy of the Word of

19 Vladislav Maltsev, "Ukraine and the Theology of Revolution," *Religion.In.Ua*. (March 10, 2015), https://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/foreign_zmi/28515-ukraina-vooruzhilas-bogosloviem-revolycii.html accessed March 2017.

20 Michael Cherenkoff, "Theologizing on the Maidan," *Cherenkoff Online* (2017), <http://cherenkoff.blogspot.com/2017/06/theologizing-on-maidan.html>, accessed March 2017.

21 Vladislav Maltsev, "Ukraine and the Theology of Revolution," *Religion.In.Ua*. (March 10, 2015), https://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/foreign_zmi/28515-ukraina-vooruzhilas-bogosloviem-revolycii.html accessed March 2017.

God, and God in general that in the Ukrainian context binds together the first and second theses of the Barmen Declaration, thus leading us to the second point of this paper.

Responsible Church, Responsible Society?

We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

First, evangelical theology does not justify a detached attitude to war, the greatest tragedy of people. We cannot oppose a spiritual calling to the civil liability of Christians. On the contrary, Christian calling is embodied in the forms of civic participation. The opposition of Church to society, religion and politics have no biblical foundation. Anyone who professes lordship of Jesus Christ cannot today say: "It is not our concern."

An Appeal to the Evangelical Churches of Ukraine

The role of the church in the public sphere is a question probably as old as Christianity itself. Obedience, state authority, attitude towards an unjust state, the notion of Holy War are blatantly real issues, many of which we are afraid to face. That these issues for many centuries have been pushed out to the margins of the public sphere makes them difficult to relate to the religious causes of our lives.

The second thesis of the Theological Declaration of Barmen was written with the intention to "envision the whole Christian life to be subject to and ordered by our justification through the grace of Jesus Christ alone..."²² There is no area of life in which God would not be present, and compartmentalizing life into public and private, religious and secular, should be avoided. Vitor Westhelle defines this thesis to be the theological nucleus of the declaration, with its basic claim that there is no other Lord apart from Christ. And it is this exactly claim Westhelle finds inapplicable to any other context, saying: "...while this thesis may be effective in targeting Nazi idolatry, if used literally in other contexts it will

22 Ulrich Mauser, "The Theological Declaration of Barmen Revisited," *Theology Matters*, 6:6 (Blacksburg, VA: Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry, 2000), 12.



cause significant collateral damage."²³ Many would agree with Westhelle; while reviewing Archimandrite Hovorun's previously mentioned article, Alexander Schipkow does precisely that. Westhelle worries that a theoretical danger of reinterpreting this statement in non-totalitarian, pluralistic circumstances can lead to a totalitarianism of the church and its mission. Schipkow goes even further and takes this danger from a theoretical into a material level. In his opinion, the view that connects the Theological Declaration of Barmen to Maidan Theology fails to recognize the true nature of Ukrainian nationalist ideas; as an ideology that may become a cult, it encourages division and thus endangers the unity of the Orthodox Church.

To understand the Ukrainian context in its full scope, it is important to take the critiques mentioned above into consideration. However, when basing the uniqueness of the Barmen Declaration on the totalitarian nature of Nazi Germany, one fails to examine the church and state relationship model followed by the ROC and the UOC MP, a model that was and is still hugely influenced by the experiences of the past.

After the Bolsheviks claimed power, they did everything in their ability to annihilate the Russian Orthodox Church, which for them was the last representation of tsarist Russia, an organization defending the old regime. This resulted in one of the most controversial decisions in the history of Russian Orthodox Church. After examining the realities of post-revolutionary Russia, Metropolitan Sergiy on June 29, 1927, issued a declaration that stated that the ROC will share "the joys and sorrows of the (Soviet) Motherland... any attack against the state will be considered as an attack against us (the Church)...." With this statement, the church granted its support and obedience to the state.²⁴ While with the release of this document the Metropolitan in some ways preserved the church in times of persecution and the Stalinist regime, many have seen this decision as the turning point when the church started to lose its distinctive spiritual character.

Traumatized by this sorrowful experience of the past, the Russian Orthodox Church established clear borders between church and state, compartmentalizing public life into issues concerning only the church and issues concerning only the state. The document intended to provide clear guidelines of

23 Vitor Westhelle, "The Barmen Theological Declaration: On Celebrating a Text out of Context 75 Years Later," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 36:2 (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2009), 13.

24 Gerd Shtrikker, *Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Era* (Moscow: Propilei, 1995), 46.

this division for the Russian Orthodox Church and its affiliated churches was adopted by the bishops' council of 2000 and presents the Moscow Patriarchate's stance on questions involving church-state relations, property rights, war and peace, mass media, and contemporary society in general. According to this document:

The church remains loyal to the state, but God's commandment to fulfil the task of salvation in any situation and under any circumstances is "above this loyalty. ...If the authorities force Orthodox believers to apostatise from Christ and his church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the church should refuse to obey the state."²⁵

Based on these statements one could easily assume that the ROC tries to stay as far away from Russian political life as possible. Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev even goes so far as to state the opinion that "The Bases of the Social Concept" is the first document in the history of world Orthodox Christianity to recognize the possibility of a civil disobedience to a state that forces the church to commit sinful or spiritually harmful actions. Thus, like the Catholic perspective on the just war developed by Gratian and Thomas Aquinas, after looking at the "Bases of the Social Concept" one can say that civil disobedience is definitely an option; however, it must be preceded by given preconditions. Once again, one is left with an assumption that disobeying an unjust state would not be against the moral code of ROC; as one can also see, the Revolution of Dignity is an example of exactly the opposite.

The Revolution of Dignity has brought up the issue of a clash between Ukrainian and Russian identities, endangering the integrity of the Russkiy Mir. To answer questions regarding UOC-MP's affiliation during the Euromaidan revolution is difficult, because while one can look for ethical reasoning, the fact remains that UOC-MP is a church with a Russian affiliation in the territory of Ukraine. This unique state of UOC-MP (as compared to the two other Orthodox Churches in Ukraine) raises questions at the core of its loyalty, the very basic question: to which of the countries should UOC-MP apply the "rules" listed in the "Bases of the Social Concept"? If a true Orthodox Christian is required to be a patriot, in the case of UOC-MP does being a patriot mean being a Russian or a Ukrainian patriot? Which one of these nations should be the centre of UOC-MP's concerns? And more importantly, with which one of these nations should UOC-MP side? Can it possibly side with both nations and preserve its status as a Ukrainian

25 Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Witness Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006), 115.



national church and a Russian ally? In the case of ROC, protecting the integrity of national unity proved to be more important. An idol of Russian unity, one nationality, and one church was born, and it is the preservation of this unity that was to justify any action taken by the state, or by the church itself.

While in the case of the Barmen Declaration it was the Führer and the Reichsbischof who took upon themselves the role of leading the divided church and state, thus restricting God's power and gift into sectors and fragments, in the case of the Ukrainian crisis it is the person of the all-Russian Patriarch, Kirill, and the ideas of Russkiy Mir and unity he propagates. It is not to say that Maidan Theology does not strive for a unity between churches and confessions; in fact, it may be one of the most significant ecumenical movements Ukraine has seen since its independence. However, in this case, choosing to maintain the unity of Russkiy Mir at all cost also means siding with the ideology of the aggressor country and refusing to answer the call of the society. Choosing Russkiy Mir means choosing spiritual over social, religious over public. Just as in the case of Barmen, Maidan Theology is eager to make it clear that a divide like this is not to happen as it is against Biblical teaching itself. And though as Mikhail Cherenkoff states, the idea of local, Ukrainian Protestants choosing to withdraw from the political sphere of life was a "passive form of protest, originating from the time of the atheist Soviet Union," the protest of Maidan has challenged all Ukrainian churches to rethink their presence in the public sphere and join the people of the country in their struggle for equality. Maidan Theology has set out to create a safe space for an ecumenical dialogue, a dialogue that is driven by the urge to follow the will of God, in the church as well as in public square. Like the Barmen Declaration in its own time, Maidan Theology has not encouraged division, whether between church and state or between different Christian denominations and traditions. The primary reason for the Theology of Maidan to emerge was the urgent need of the society to unite, unite in times of suffering and conflict, and it is indeed in the arms of each other that the church and the society of Ukraine have found the strength to keep on fighting for justice, even when hope seemed to be long gone.

Conclusion

If something has been made perfectly clear by researching the relation between Ukrainian churches and the Revolution of Dignity, between Maidan Theology and the Theological Declaration of Barmen, it is that there are no certain answers. Affected by the events of 2013-2014, the churches in Ukraine are still reshaping themselves and their theology, adapting it to the needs of post-

revolution Ukraine. It is impossible to talk about a clear concept of a Theology of Maidan, as this theology, much like Reformed theology itself, is constantly changing. Maidan Theology was different in 2013, and it is different now, because needs, issues, questions, and motivations change. The unchangeable part of the story is God's call to take solidarity with his people, a message and a call relevant both to Barmen of the 1930s and to Kyiv of 2010s.

The Revolution of Dignity has challenged the spiritual landscape of Ukraine with many new issues and questions. The context of revolution, along with the constant confrontation by the society, has forced churches to rethink their ecumenical relations with each other and try to resolve the problems raised by revolution together, which leads us to the second conclusion: The only scenario in which the Ukrainian churches will be able to deal with the aftermath of the revolution requires them to support each other by creating an inter-confessional dialogue. To create a dialogue like this may prove to be difficult; however, it is Christian unity, unity in the one Redeemer and Saviour, that can point the churches of Ukraine into the right direction. We have the past to learn from, the future to look forward to, and the present to make a difference.



A Creation-Community Approach to Transformation and Renewal

For Myself, My Work and Communities I Serve

Georgina Kwanima Boateng

Introduction: My Story of Eco-Insensitivity

This was one of those Saturdays: I had a lot on my plate and, what's more, I had exams on Monday. Somehow I must fit this shopping in with getting the much needed rest—as well as preparing for church on Sunday—and still prepare for the exam on Monday. As I lay in my bed early morning I literally constructed a plan. "I will step into town early and do the shopping as quickly as I can, be back before noon, hopefully at 11a.m., spend a couple hours or so preparing for Sunday, catch a nap for a couple more hours, and then I will spend a few more precious hours visiting my sick friend. I will then spend the evening preparing for Monday; there will be no time for that on Sunday."

That nicely done, off I went 90 minutes by bus to the main shopping center in Accra Central. To my disappointment, shops were closed! I enquired. This Saturday was government-sanctioned general cleaning in public areas by everybody; shops couldn't be opened until 10a.m.! This was the case the first Saturday of every month. My goodness! I wasn't far away from angry; this didn't sit well with my well-laid plans. What was I to do now? I observed that no one was actually cleaning as they were supposed to; everyone was just hanging around in front of their shops waiting. I smiled because an idea popped up. I approached a shop that was selling what I needed. Immediately the owner approached me, asked if I wanted something. I said yes, and quickly she opened the door a crack and we both slipped in.

Needless to say, I got all I wanted and happily returned home on time. Of course I had my excuse for not caring whether the traders cleaned up or not, or whether I myself joined in the cleanup. When the cleanup is done, the civil government's role of collecting the refuse generated is never undertaken, and it takes the next rain or even human movement to get it right back into the gutters where it originally was. And shouldn't some people be paid to do the cleaning? That's why we pay taxes to the government, isn't it? Why bother then?

When on June 4, 2015, Ghana woke up to the unbelievable news of body counting due to flooding the night before, flooding that also led to a fire disaster, we were disturbed. What was our response as a nation? We set up an

investigative committee made up of people from the Ministry of Defense, Ghana Armed Forces, and the Ghana Fire Service with a hydrologist as consultant!¹ A year down, reports showed we had become less concerned, probably because the trouble was now “old news”—an event in our history only good for storytelling. An attempt to ban plastics, the main source of garbage, did not succeed because people would lose their jobs, structures that were pulled down because they were in waterways had re-emerged, and the country only begins to care when more rains come the year after and flooding occurs again² and of course we still do not clean on national cleaning days. We still have our old excuses.

How did Christian churches respond? By saying prayers: praying for the victims of the disaster, praying for their families, praying against any more such disasters, etc., and providing relief items for affected people, but what else are Christians to do?

Awakening from My Slumber

My conscience was greatly disturbed when I participated in *Confessing the Living God in the Creation Community* class at the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) 2017. It wasn't because I felt we could have done better to avert the disaster that befell Ghana on June 3, 2015, but mostly because of Christian's ignorance of the injustices being perpetuated against the rest of creation, injustices that are grounded in Christian theology. I realized that in all the narrative on why June 3, the rest of the creation community was hardly on the agenda, that all our reactions were largely anthropocentric. It was only an outcry about what could be done to preserve the life of humankind; all of our reactions were panic-stricken ones about preserving our lives as humans as against the creation community. It was clearly an “us” and “them” phenomenon. And so I ask myself, in the context of June 3, what does it really mean to call on the Living God to renew and transform us?

This paper will highlight the situation of injustice against the ecology in the writer's context in Ghana. It will also review available literature in light of what

1 “Committee to Probe June 3 Fire Disaster Inaugurated,” *Graphic Online* (June 16, 2015), <http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/c-tee-to-probe-june-3-fire-disaster-inaugurated.html>, accessed June 25, 2017

2 “Let's Guard against June 3 Disaster,” *Graphic Online* (June 3, 2016), <http://www.graphic.com.gh/editorials/let-s-guard-against-june-3-disaster.html>, accessed June 25, 2017.



has already been done in ecological theology and make proposals on how to adapt a more creation-community centered theology in Ghana, especially as we celebrate 500 years of Reformation.

Current Ecological Issues in Ghana

Two years ago, an estimated 152 lives were lost, years before that perhaps more lives have been lost, but what is sure is that livelihoods have been lost. “A remarkable event occurred in Ghana in August 2007, where floods affected about 350,000 people with 49 casualties in the Northern Parts of the country alone causing an estimated damage of \$130 million (U.S.), not including long term loses.”³ The northern parts of Ghana have some of the poorest societies in the country. Documented history of floods in Ghana dates back to July 4, 1968, when there was flooding as not seen for the previous nine years. On June 29, 1971, floods destroyed homes in Sekondi-Takoradi, rendering thousands of people homeless; floods in the northern parts of Ghana in 1999 rendered an estimated 300,000 homeless, and in 2007 again, 307,127 were displaced in the same regions. Floods are getting more and more prevalent since the 2000s, with flooding in various parts of the country in May and October 2010; February, July and November, 2011; May 2013; June 2014; and the ultimate on June 3, 2015, which caused the loss of 152 lives. The most affected will most likely have been women and the poor.

According to a report, “natural” disasters, including droughts, floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and endemics have affected over 18 million people in Ghana since 1968.⁴ The causes of flooding in Ghana are not far away from preventable human factors—improper waste management practices are a major cause of the problem.⁵ Indiscriminate disposal of refuse has led to blocked drains and silted bodies of water; waterways have become polluted with rubbish. There is also rapid urbanization, leading to disregard of building regulations sometimes due to ignorance⁶ and apathy. Urbanization has also caused the rampant removal of

3 Samuel Asumadu et al, “Impact Analysis of Flood in Accra, Ghana,” <https://www.researchgate.net> accessed on July 18, 2017, 53.

4 Ibid, 55

5 Ibid, 57

6 Ibid, 57.

vegetation to make room for construction of buildings, roads, pavements, etc.⁷ UN-Habitat published a document on Accra flooding that stated that “In Accra, there are an estimated 172,000 residents at risk of a 10-year flood. Of that total, 33,000 residents are located in slums or substandard housing units.”⁸

The impact of global-level climate change is also expected to cause higher levels of migration and population displacements and this will mostly affect eco-system-dependent livelihoods such as rain-fed agriculture societies like Ghana.⁹ Climate change is again affecting the water supply in Ghana, because “in addition to affecting surface water, climate change in Accra may deteriorate groundwater resources due to saltwater intrusion.”¹⁰ The UN-Habitat report echoes my concern that “the dwindling water supply from the Lake Volta is a topic of concern among environmental planners and others in Ghana, but as yet the concern is more over the future of power generation than the loss of water.”¹¹

Surface mining, or what is popularly known as *galamsey* (derived from “gather them and sell”), is yet another major environmental challenge confronting Ghana in more recent times. It threatens water bodies and livelihoods in more real terms than flooding, and it is mostly caused by human greed. *Galamsey* is mostly practiced in the middle belt or forest region of Ghana and by a wide range of people, from community leaders to politicians and even the church. *Galamsey* causes deforestation at alarming rates; Ghana had 8.2 million hectares of forestland in 1957 but now has only 1.2 million hectares. It has also caused the destruction of farmlands and displacement of people alongside the pollution of water bodies that served as sources of drinking water to many communities.¹²

7 George AgboKlu, “Why Accra Floods Occur: Reasons from a Scientific Studies,” *Labone Express* (June 2015), <https://laboneexpress.com/2015/06/why-the-accra-floods-occur-reasons-from-scientific-studies/> accessed July 18, 2017.

8 David Rain, Ryan Engstrom, Christianna Ludlow, and Sarah Antos, “Accra Flooding: A City Vulnerable to Flooding and Drought-Induced Migration,” <http://www.unhabitat.org/grhs/2011> accessed July 18, 2017, 3.

9 *Ibid.*, 6.

10 *Ibid.*, 14.

11 *Ibid.*, 15.

12 *Ibid.*, 15.



The government has responded to perennial floods by intermittent brutal demolition of homes on waterways.¹³ There is also sometimes half-hearted dredging of silt in water bodies¹⁴ and of course the announcement of monthly national sanitation days. There are relief efforts for those displaced by providing them with some relief items through the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO). The current Akufo-Addo-led government of Ghana has pledged to put his re-election on the line to fight *galamsey* operations,¹⁵ and we wait to see just how this will truly materialize.

As I stated earlier, the church in Ghana has done a lot of praying concerning the matters that take away human life and destroy property. The church in Ghana has also done much in relation to relief for human victims of environmental crises. But not much has been done by way of concern for the environment. A contributor to features on Peace FM Online has put it beautifully this way:

Even though there are a lot of factors that have caused the current (environmental) situation, as far as I am concerned, the religious bit is the crucial reason. When there are no strong biblical teachings on the environment, other factors will influence how people treat the environment. The church has only focused on teaching Christians to maintain godly relationship with God and fellow human; but has left out the need to also maintain godly relationship with the environment. Pastors and teachers like myself have vehemently spoken out against corruption but few have spoken against pollution.... What I am trying to put across is that the Church has too often emphasized human-divine and human-human relationships in its theologizing and has sadly ignored the human-environment bit.¹⁶

13 "Accra: Demolition of Houses on Waterways Begins on Achimota Mile 7" (June 5, 2015), <http://www.graphic.com.gh/general-news/accra-demolition-of-houses-on-waterways-begins-at-mile-7.html> accessed on July 18, 2017.

14 Government of Ghana, <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/nwes/1473-government-developing-a-comprehensive-response-to-tackle-floods>, accessed July 18, 2017.

15 "I Will Put My Presidency on Line to Stop Galamsey: President," Government of Ghana, <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/3829-i-will-put-my-presidency-on-line-to-stop-galamsey-president> accessed July 18, 2017.

16 "Christians Are Both the Cause of and Solution to the Galamsey Menace in Ghana," *Peace FM Online* (April 2017), <http://m.peacefmonline.com/pages/comment/features/201704/310794.php>, accessed July 18, 2017.

In a joint statement by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference in May 2016 touching on issues of national concern, the only statement made under "sanitation and environmental destruction" was this:

In many parts of the country, there is monstrous and reckless exploitation of our forests and land resources, indiscriminate mining activities, pollution of rivers and other water bodies and general lackadaisical attitude towards sanitation. We urge fellow Ghanaians to understand that we have a God-given duty to care for the earth our common home for our own good and for the good of the generations of people to come after us.¹⁷

The environmental situation in Ghana is a source of concern only as far as it affects the survival of humanity; it is still very far removed from a concern for the Earth as a sacred place of God's dwelling (Isaiah 6:3), as a part of humanity itself (Genesis 2:5-15), and as a sacred vocation of humanity (Genesis 2:15). All Creation, however, is waiting in earnest anticipation for the revealing of the children of God (Romans 8: 18-25); the earlier we realize that God created all for his glory and all the creation community alike are to praise God in their respective roles (Psalm 148), the better it will be for humanity, for "there is only 'all of us,'"¹⁸ and in a community, what affects one affects the other. The church in Ghana is called upon in this time of deep crises, in this time when the Earth is crying out louder than ever before to be liberated from oppression and injustice at the hands of humanity. Rhoads and Rossing call for an eco-Reformation. "This is a reformation that will involve deep repentance, a *metanoia*—a mind-change and a practice-change. This is a reformation for the whole church."¹⁹

We must urgently rethink our actions that contribute to global warming; we must look at our interpretation of the command to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28) *vis a vis* our traditional belief that it is God who cares for children and we have

17 "Press Statement by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, Issued in Accra (May 18, 2016), <http://marshallan.org/press-statement-by-the-christian-council-of-ghana-and-the-catholic-bishops-conference-issued-in-accra-may-18-2016/>, accessed July 18, 2017.

18 Revelation Velunta, "There is only 'All Of Us,'" *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme* (Hannover: WCRC, 2017), 13.

19 David Rhoads and Barbara Rossing, "A Beloved Earth Community: Christian Mission in an Ecological Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 43:2 (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2016), 10.



more children, in light of population growth and its environmental effects. We must assess our responsibility in the “natural” disasters, seeing them as the voice of the Earth crying out urgently to us. We must, as a people of God, begin to appreciate our own responsibility, as Christ is not asking God to take us out of this earth, but prays for us as we remain a part of this Earth (John 17:15,18), because as Rhoads and Rossing state, “We have separated human justice and Earth care to our detriment”²⁰

In keeping with Norman Habel’s “The Third Mission,” I believe Christians in Ghana need a third mission; an Earth Mission. We have spent enough time on evangelism to convert souls and discipleship to make ready a people for heaven, we have spent enough time speaking out on the political corruption that is prevalent in Ghana, we have spent enough time speaking out about peace and fairness during electioneering periods, and have played our part in fostering an enviable democratic system in Sub-Saharan Africa, we have spent enough time trying to bring healthcare to even the remotest areas where the civil government has yet to reach, we have spent enough time on poverty alleviation measures and relief measures for people who fall into crises, but in keeping with Patricia Hill Collins’ use of the word *intersectionality*, all forms of oppression simultaneously overlap.²¹ Ecological injustice in Ghana cannot be overlooked in the quest for harmony and justice, in the quest for development, rather they intersect and should be equally addressed.

Environmental Crisis and 500 Years of Reformation

The Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council of 2004 was a response to the reading of the signs of the times. The confession recognized the unjust political systems that deny life for all. It also recognized the suffering of people and the woundedness of creation and how the policy of unlimited growth by industrialized countries was hurting the ecology. It identified climate change, depletion of fish stock, deforestation, threats to fresh water, and soil erosion as some of the visible signs of today. These injustices are fueled by a system that suggest that aggressive creation and accumulation of wealth—with complete disregard for the Earth and marginalized groups at whose expense it is done—can save the world. These signs of the times became the background for the need for such a confession, which affirms

20 Ibid, 11.

21 Amritha Bosi Perumalla, “Gender Justice: Who Speaks for Whom?” *Reformed World*, 66:2 (Hannover: WCRC, 2017), 49.

our belief in God, creator and sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world and rejects the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) theme for its 2017 General Council, which coincided with 500 years of the Reformation, "Living God, Renew and Transform Us," invites us to a "theological and spiritual encounter with the God of Life as revealed through the Scripture and through Jesus Christ."²² The theme reminds us that God is present today and invites us to reflect on what it means to be reformed in our present time. Confessing the living God would mean to embrace a God who is present, "to affirm God's power to give life"²³ in our present situations and to reject all the false gods. The cry to renew and transform is an awareness of what a Christian is to be in a world full of injustice to all the created community. The Christian is to affirm the power of God and resist the power of false gods, even unto the giving of body and mind for the will of God to be done against the will of forces and powers of false gods. "Believers are to be 'transformed by renewing their minds,' for the purposes of vigilance, namely to develop the capacity to 'discern what is the will of God' so that they do not err or move from the mercies and will of God."²⁴ "Us" in this prayerful theme is a call to communion. It shows in the contrast between Jesus' Kingdom of God, which includes every one of "us" instead of the Roman Empire's exclusivist kingdom. The Roman Empire, which ruled during Jesus' and the Early Church times, represents every kind of empire, including the "systems and structures" empire of today, which depend on a law of exclusivism. Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4:18-19 tells us that Jesus came for the excluded to bring them relief and inclusion to the fullness of life. In this manifesto Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the

22 Chris Ferguson, "Preface," *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme* (Hannover: WCRC, 2017).

23 Dario Barolin, "Bible Studies; Wake us from the Nightmare (Jeremiah 10:1-16)," *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme* (Hannover: WCRC, 2017), 7.

24 Musa Dube, "On Being God's Living Sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2)," *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme* (Hannover: WCRC, 2017), 11.



prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.²⁵

Judging from Jesus' life and ministry, this passage, amalgamated from Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6, obviously does not refer to the kind of freedom that Americans, for instance, are used to, as a license to do as one wishes, but a freedom which is a release from human captivity, the will of others and the will of self.²⁶ "The year of the Lord's favor" is a reference to the Jewish Jubilee Year, which is spoken of in Exodus 21-23. "Exodus 21:2-6 discusses the release of slaves while Exodus 23:10-11 makes provision for the provision of Sabbath rest for the land."²⁷ "Throughout the Jubilee Year mandates, we see that the ecological well-being of the land is intimately tied to the spiritual and material well-being of the people of Israel."²⁸ Five-hundred years of Reformation therefore calls us as reformed Christians in Ghana to be vigilant to the signs of our times and renew our minds by acquiring knowledge of the ecological situation in Ghana so that we may pursue transformation according to the will of God.

This paper employs ecotheology as liberation theology in the context of global environmental crisis with the particular case of Ghana.

Theological Perspectives

To create space for an issue to be discussed usually begins with naming it. It is therefore important that *ecotheology* came into prominence in the late twentieth century.²⁹ That this is a relatively new area in theology tells us that ecological issues have not been high on the agenda of theology. Indeed, theologians only began to take ecological issues seriously after Lynn White, Jr.'s book *The*

25 New International Version (NIV) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)

26 Roy Harrisville, "Commentary on Luke 4:14-21," *Working Preacher*, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=502, accessed July 24, 2017.

27 Antony Billington, Tony Lane, and Max Turner (ed), *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 1995), 45.

28 Dawn M. Nothwehr, *Ecological Footprints: An Essential Franciscan Guide for Faith and Sustainable Living* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 25.

29 "Ecotheology," *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/education/encyclopedia-almanacs-transcript-and-maps/ecotheology>, accessed July 26, 2017.

Historical Roots of Ecological Crisis of 1967.³⁰ White pointed out that Christians' view of a command of God to dominate the Earth (Genesis 2:26) is the reason for the profound ecological crisis the world faces today. White further stated, "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."³¹ J.O.Y. Mante may seem to agree with White's assertion of Christian theology standing at odds with other religions with more focus on African religions which had the non-human element at the center.³² The second account of the creation story in Genesis will present a better expression for humanity's connection and responsibility towards the earth rather than a dominion; that is, human beings are not only made from dust, they will also return to dust; and they are "to till and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Rhoads and Rossing also counter the ideology of dominion by presenting a picture of what leading or being a master means in Christian terms. They present Jesus' statement on who is the greatest; Jesus says the greatest is the least of all and servant of all (Mark 9:5);³³ a servant leader instead of an unloving dictator. Humanity's taking of Earth for granted may be confirmed by the 1910 evangelical meeting at Edinburgh where the decision on the next direction of mission was to civilize people in the Global South through converting them to Christianity, saying nothing about the ecological effects of the heavy industrialization of its day.³⁴ Anthropocentric theology has been a yardstick for human exploitation of the environment because scripture has been interpreted to give humans a superior status over the rest of creation and has made humans think it is right to use the rest of creation to our benefit. Humanity has not felt a part of creation, but set over and above it.

30 David G. Horrel, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future," *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* (2014), 140.

31 Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155:3767.

32 J.O.Y. Mante, in Tony Goldwyn Amoakohene, *Environmental Degradation in the Amansie West District: The Christian's Response*, A Long Essay Presented to Christian Service University College, Kumasi, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Award of a Master of Arts Degree in Christian Ministry with Management (July 2015), 8.

33 David Rhoads and Barbara Rossing, "A Beloved Earth Community: Christian Mission in an Ecological Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 43:2 (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2016), 13.

34 *Ibid*, 9



Another theological perspective that has promoted the exploitation of the earth is the theology which pits heaven over Earth.³⁵ Christians do not feel they have to care for this earth because they are anticipating leaving this earth and going to a better place, heaven, where there will be no weeping or gnashing of teeth, where everything will be perfect. There has therefore been built up a theology of Earth being a lower place where God is not present, a theology held up with Isaiah 66:1, which says heaven is God's throne and the Earth is God's footstool. According to Norman Habel, such theology is propounded through hymns, prayers, and a certain interpretation of scriptures that privileges heaven over the Earth.³⁶ Such popular theology has led the Christian church and its members to be oblivious to the exploitation and suffering of the Earth, since the world is supposedly "not their home"; they are just passing by to heaven!³⁷

Musa Dube has proposed a re-reading of Genesis 1:1-25 in the light of the Lord's Prayer and Revelation 21:3-4 to help humanity appreciate the value of the earth.³⁸ The Lord's Prayer says "Let your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven," which, according to her, supports the theology that the earth is as important to God as heaven, and humans must work to bring the earth to the status of heaven. Revelation 21:3-4 is also suggesting that God will come and dwell on earth, and therefore the earth must be given the importance it deserves not as a place that only seeks to serve humankind's needs, but also as a place whose needs humankind must cater to. This sharply contrast the "rapture-mindedness" where we expect to leave this earth behind and join God in heaven—a notion that Paul presents only in his first writing (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) and does not repeat.³⁹ "At Edinburgh and for the better part of the century since then, the concept of mission has been anthropocentric, focusing almost exclusively on human beings and neglecting human responsibility to care for creation—as though nature were some neutral or benevolent stage upon which humans play

35 Musa W. Dube, "And God Saw That It Was Very Good: An Earth-Friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1," *Black Theology* 13:3 (Nov 2015), 235.

36 Norman Habel, "Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 37:2 (April 2010), 116.

37 Musa W. Dube, "And God Saw That It Was Very Good: An Earth-Friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1," *Black Theology* 13:3 (Nov 2015), 235.

38 Ibid, 236.

39 Barbara Rossing, "River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Ecological Vision for Earth's Future," *Mission Studies*, XVI-1:31 (1999), 145.

out their lives."⁴⁰ Mission has been focused on how to get human beings to make it to heaven!

In Norman Habel's article "The Third Mission," he delineates the various forms of mission that the church has been involved in. This included saving souls (Matthew 28:19) and liberating humankind from all forms of oppression and injustice (Luke 4:18-19). Given the neglect of creation and the current ecological crisis, Habel proposes a third mission, which is a call for mission to all creation (Mark 16:15),⁴¹ for ecological issues are still not high on the agenda of the Christian mission even in this day. The magnitude of the earth's cry in the form of ecological crises or what we like to refer to as "natural" disasters in the last two or three decades, however, calls us urgently to repent and marshal all forces to address this issue with all resources available. It calls us to turn our full attention to issues of ecology, not just to see it as a part of all the other issues we must deal with.

Ecological crisis is a theological issue because people act according to how they think; theology has given the basis for humanity's feeling of superiority over the rest of creation. Theology has offered the reason for humanity's unconcern for the well-being of the Earth, indeed, theology has given ground to humanity's exploitation of the Earth. Sallie McFague, consequently, underlines that who God is and who we are must be central questions if we hope to change our actions in the direction of just, sustainable planetary living.⁴² Therefore, in keeping with the Accra Confession, we must reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.⁴³ Rhoads and Rossing propose five mandates that will help us in Ghana to come out of our slumber when it comes to ecological issues. These are:

1. Learn about the degradation of God's creation,
2. Embrace a Christian ethic that acknowledges the interrelationship between ecological conditions and issues of human justice,

40 David Rhoads and Barbara Rossing, "A Beloved Earth Community: Christian Mission in an Ecological Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 43:2 (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2016), 9

41 Norman Habel, "Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37:2 (April 2010), 114

42 Sallie McFague, "New House Rules: Christianity, Economics, and Planetary Living," <http://www.amacad.org>, accessed July 28, 2017.

43 "Accra Confession," <http://wrc.ch/accra>, accessed June 26, 2017.



3. The Bible presents care for creation as fundamental to our human vocation and mission,
4. Our mission to all creation leads us to see theology in new ways because *how we think* shapes *how we act*,
5. Earth-care action is integral to the mission of our Christian communities and our spiritual discipline.⁴⁴

Habel also proposes four mandates:

1. To celebrate and protect our planet as sacred, a mysterious piece of Stardust and a sanctuary filled with God's presence (*kabod*). This mandate is a call to worship leaders.
2. To enable the voice of Earth to be heard by empathizing with the various domains of our planet as they suffer injustices caused by humans. This mandate is a call for advocacy.
3. To explore the ecosystems of Earth in order to discern just ways to balance the needs of all people and habitats of a planet in crisis. This mandate is a call to recognize the principle of Wisdom.
4. To affirm that our ultimate motivation for healing Earth is grounded in the act of God becoming incarnate, part of planet Earth, to reconcile and heal all things.⁴⁵ This mandate is a call for faith. In embracing a third mission, we may turn to these mandates to assist us.

My Current Situation

I am currently a candidate for the pastoral ministry in my church. This means I spend Monday to Saturday at the seminary for my ministerial formation and Sundays at church for my practical engagement. I preach, teach, lead prayer, lead the liturgy, etc. To date, any kind of work in ecological theology for me has really been zero. I had no awareness of ecological issues in this way as a matter of Christian and church interest; you could safely say I was still in the era of the Edinburgh evangelical meeting and 1967 and ecological justice had yet to happen to me. The class on creation community in GIT 2017 has been an eye-opener for me. As a new theological student and a more recent church

44 David Rhoads and Barbara Rossing, "A Beloved Earth Community: Christian Mission in an Ecological Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 43:2 (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2016), 10-15.

45 Norman Habel, "Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 37:2 (April 2010), 114.

leader, I myself had not been previously exposed to ecotheology in this way. Everything that I had heard or known about environmental issues had not come from a theological or church perspective but from NGOs who are worried about environmental degradation for the sake of human survival alone. Owing to this, I confess that I have never preached an ecological-themed sermon or led an ecological-themed liturgy. My church has fixed liturgies, but they are not amendable. My church also follows a lectionary and proposes themes for each week, but does not prevent a re-reading of the text to reflect how the preacher feels led to present the word.

In my seminary, I have done one year; two more years of a Master of Divinity program remain. I remember having been exposed to environmental issues briefly through a group research on nurturing as a function of pastoral care in which Howard Clinebell's Growth Counselling Model proposed six interdependent dimensions of growth, one of which is "growth in our relationship with the biosphere."⁴⁶ This led me to see that we must have misinterpreted Genesis 1:26-28's "dominion." I must confess that I learned this with an anthropocentric view, being more concerned about the urgency of environmental issues only because "when the last tree dies, the last human dies." I had also heard that my seminary president⁴⁷ had done work in ecological theology, but I never thought it had anything to do with me. The Accra Confession, however, has the right attitude that "we have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8:22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation."⁴⁸ As a member of the WCRC communion that wrote and subscribes to this confession, which was written and adopted in my own city, I am amazed that the churches in Ghana remain in the Edinburgh 1910 and 1967 mission perspectives. What will it take for the WCRC churches in Ghana to wake up to the call of the Accra Confession of 2004 and embark on the third Christian church mission? And what is my role?

46 Howard J. Clinebell and Bridget C. Mckeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), accessed from <http://www.googlebooks.com>

47 Rev. Prof. J.O.Y. Mante is currently the president of Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana and has written a book, *Africa: The Theological and Philosophical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* (Accra: Sonlife Press, 2004).

48 "Accra Confession," <http://wrc.ch/accra>, accessed June 26, 2017.



Creation Community Centered Approach

Scripture encourages us to repent and come to Jesus and then to go out and proclaim the good news to others. When Jesus sent out the disciples, he also gave them authority to manifest acts of power alongside the proclamation (Mark 6:7, 12-13). Like the person who found the treasure hidden in the field and in great joy sold all he had to purchase the field (Matthew 13:44), I feel we who have “chanced upon” this kind of treasure about the sacredness of the earth and humanity’s sacred responsibility to it must with all joy embrace it fully, with all that we have.

I will not wait to overhear information about the state of the earth. I will actively listen to the voice of the earth by taking an interest in the conditions of the environment in Ghana. I hope to use various social media platforms available to me to echo the voice of the earth to people within my circles, because our unconcern has led to our ignorance of what is really happening around us. I will also use various theological platforms, both in the seminary and the church, both in the pulpit and beyond, to sound the sacred responsibility of Christians towards the earth.

I am therefore calling on church-based NGOs in Ghana to rise up to action, since this cannot be treated as just another discussion to engage minds but is a pressing issue that demands all resources marshaled to action. I propose to church-based NGOs take up the cause of environmental awareness and promote concern for the environment as a Christian duty. This will add meaning to Rhoads and Rossing’s first mandate.

I call on churches in Ghana, especially Reformed churches, in the spirit of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, to take the lead in instituting an “Earth month” on their liturgical calendars, a period where ecological education and awareness become paramount. This should be preceded by a period where pastors, teachers, and church leaders in the church themselves receive lectures on the ecological crises and ecotheology so that such an initiative will not become just a white elephant on the calendar. Rev. Prof. J.O.Y. Mante, a pastor in the Reformed Church and an ecological theologian, can help in this regard. I am making an urgent call on churches in Ghana, who by experience I know have not been quiet about other justice issues, to use its voice to sound out the voice of the earth, to use its various platforms to speak out urgently about issues that affect the earth as part of its sacred duty to speak out against injustice. I call upon the church to engage the earth in its liturgy by planning church events which include the earth.

I challenge the church to speak up and influence government policies which enslave the earth.

I encourage youth groups in the church to use their energies to deal with this very urgent issue of ecological crises, to institute Earth Days within their youth camps, where ecological awareness programs are included, to actually dare to go out and camp out in open spaces closer to the earth. I challenge the youth of the church to rise up and champion the cause of an exploited earth instead of fighting for their interest alone.

I call upon the women in the church to rise up and speak up loudly, even as their voices are beginning to be heard regarding gender justice in the corridors of the church. I call upon the women of the church to remember the Akan proverb that literally translates, "if it is sticking to your friend, it is sticking to a tree," which challenges us not to be unconcerned about the problems of our neighbor. I challenge the women of the church to also speak up against the injustices against the earth. I challenge them to use those same channels that have been developed over the years fighting for gender justice to become avenues for promoting ecological justice.

I call upon the seminaries in Ghana to include ecotheology courses in the list of core courses in the seminaries. Because this is a very contemporary, very relevant, and very urgent issue of our time, I daresay, it is a sin not to engage theological students of today in this discourse. Theological students have no business "chancing upon" eco theology because "the signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted."⁴⁹

The Lord calls us as a faith community to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). It is time for an Earth Mission.

49 "Accra Confession," <http://wrcr.ch/accra>, accessed June 26, 2017.



The Crucified Earth: A Theological Response to the Proposed Energy East Oil Pipeline

Kate Jones

Before the beginning, there was God. And God created light and darkness and day and night; God created earth and sky and seas; God created plants and trees and seeds; God created the sun and the moon and the stars; God created birds and fish and animals. And God saw that creation was good. And then God created human beings, women and men, and commanded them to keep the earth—to “maintain the image of God on Earth.”¹ But over time, human beings forgot this commandment from God. They began to see creation as something to be exploited, something to be profited from. They built mines and cities and oil wells. They cut down forests and built buildings and infrastructure. They poured garbage into rivers and chemicals into the air. And God’s creation cried out in pain. The forests cried; the rivers cried; the oceans cried; the earth cried; the ice caps cried; even the stones cried out. Who will listen to the cries of creation?

This essay will explore a particular ecological issue—the proposed Energy East oil pipeline in Canada—and analyze it through a lens of ecotheology and the community of creation. It will argue that this pipeline is a manifestation of our human sin as we fail to live in community with all of God’s creation, and it will call for repentance or turning back to God. The concept of creation community will be developed first, followed by an overview of the proposed pipeline project. This project will then be analyzed and critiqued from the perspectives of the risk of an oil spill, the effects of climate change, the further marginalization of Canada’s Indigenous People, and the project’s anthropocentric nature. The essay will conclude with a call to repentance, looking at the transformation that is necessary to make it possible to turn back to God. Because liturgy is one important way to engage the church and raise the church’s awareness of the community of creation, this essay will be grounded in liturgy with each section beginning with scripture and ending with a short prayer.

The Community of Creation

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it; for

1 This interpretation of Genesis 1:26-29 is proposed in Musa W. Dube, “‘And God Saw that it was Very Good’: An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1,” *Black Theology* 13:3 (2015): 243.

God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.” (Psalm 24:1-2)²

“And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of God’s glory.” (Isaiah 6:3)

Scripture tells us that “in the beginning” God created, and with our senses we can perceive God’s ongoing creative work. Earth then, is the locus of God’s creative activity—God’s sanctuary, as Norman Habel names it, going on to claim that human beings are then the priests of this sanctuary, called to tend and guard it, and to make God known in the sanctuary.³ As human beings, we have been given a specific role. We are at once part of God’s creation and have also been given a specific role to tend and protect the whole community of creation. We are not given permission to exploit the rest of the community of creation, but rather are called to be caretakers, stewards, and priests. In the words of Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, our calling is “to love as God loves.”⁴ God saw creation and named creation as “good” and we are to see this goodness of creation through God’s eyes.

God is also present in God’s sanctuary: As the seraphim in Isaiah proclaim, earth is full of God’s glory. The issue of how God can be fully present in creation while remaining fully transcendent is the *mysterium tremendum* or awesome mystery.⁵ Jürgen Moltmann wrestles with this mystery as he writes about the concept of *zimsum*. In this teaching, God creates spaces or vessels within God’s own self for creation, therefore all of creation is in God and God is in creation, and yet they are separate.⁶ God is able to be fully present and fully transcendent. In the incarnation, God takes on flesh (John 1:14) and becomes even more intrinsically connected with that which God has created. Habel writes

2 All scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

3 Norman Habel, “Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37:2 (2010): 115.

4 Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, “A Haunting Contradiction, Hope, and Moral-Spiritual Power,” Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (eds.), *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 38.

5 Ibid, 46-47.

6 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 156.



that “in Jesus, God joins the web of life [and] becomes part of Earth’s biology.”⁷ God is fully integrated into the creation community, both as its creator and as a participant in it.

Holy God,

Creator of all that we see, and all that we cannot see;

You sang creation into being,

and danced with delight at what you had created.

Help us to find our place in your community of creation,

to see with your eyes,

to love with your heart.

This we pray through Jesus Christ,

your Word-In-Creation.

Amen.

Proposed Energy East Oil Pipeline

“How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away, and because people said, ‘God is blind to our ways.’” (Jeremiah 12:4)

The Energy East pipeline is a proposed oil pipeline that, if constructed, will carry 1.1 million barrels (174,886,024 litres) of oil per day 4500 kilometers from the oil-producing regions of Alberta and Saskatchewan to the east coast of Canada.⁸ The route passes through both remote and urban areas; it includes both segments of older pipeline that will be converted and segments of new pipeline that will be laid in regions that previously have not had oil pipelines.

7 Norman Habel, “Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37:2 (2010): 123.

8 TransCanada, “Energy East Pipeline,” <http://www.energyeastpipeline.com>, accessed July 20, 2017.

As of the time of writing, the Energy East pipeline proposal is being reviewed by the National Energy Board (Government of Canada) to determine whether the project should be approved.⁹ TransCanada, the company that is hoping to build the pipeline, argues that the pipeline will boost the Canadian economy as well as creating jobs, and that pipelines are the safest way to transport oil.¹⁰ Opponents of the project argue that the pipeline endangers the environment through its construction, the risk of a spill, and the harmful effects of burning the oil that it transports; they argue as well that the voices of the Indigenous People through whose land the proposed pipeline will pass have not been properly consulted.¹¹

God of Mystery,

When the issues that we are facing seem too complex for us to understand,
 give us a spirit of wisdom and discernment.

When many voices clamour to be heard in a debate,
 empower us to create a space

so the voices of those who are silenced can be heard.

We pray for your strength and your discernment,
 in the name of your Wisdom.

Amen.

Project Analysis – Risk of an Oil Spill

“The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants;

9 Government of Canada, “NEB Energy East,” <https://www.nebenergyeast.ca>, accessed July 20, 2017.

10 TransCanada, “Energy East Pipeline,” <http://www.energyeastpipeline.com>, accessed July 20, 2017.

11 Kairos, “Interim Pipeline Review Measures Fact Sheet” (February 2016), <http://www.kairoscanada.org>, accessed July 2017.



for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.” (Isaiah 24:4-5)

TransCanada, the company behind the Energy East pipeline, claims that pipelines are the safest way to transport oil;¹² and yet a quick search reveals multiple oil pipeline leaks in the past year in Canada, including in April 2017,¹³ March 2017,¹⁴ January 2017,¹⁵ and July 2016.¹⁶ Oil pipeline leaks contaminate both land and water, causing damage not only to these environments but also to all creatures that depend on these environments for life.

If, as argued above, creation is not only created by God but is also the dwelling place of God, then each of these oil pipeline leaks is damaging not only God’s handiwork but God’s very sanctuary. As the earth and the water are polluted, God’s dwelling place becomes uninhabitable for the plants and animals and microorganisms that are our co-participants in God’s community of creation.

Oil spills are frequent, and yet only seem to attract the attention of the media when they occur in locations that pose a threat to human health, safety, or comfort. Because the proposed Energy East pipeline will run through many areas that are remote and difficult to access, potential spills are less likely to attract media attention and have the potential to be more difficult to access for the purpose of cleaning up following spills. This lack of media attention on spills that don’t impact human beings, however, does not mean that these spills are less impactful on the whole of the community of creation. God’s creation needs

12 TransCanada, “Energy East Pipeline,” <http://www.energyeastpipeline.com>, accessed July 20, 2017.

13 CBC News, “Pipeline Break Spills Crude Oil into Strathcona County Creek” (April 25, 2017), <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/edmonton/pipeline-spill-crude-oil-strathcona-county-cleanup-creek-1.4082296>, accessed June 25, 2017.

14 CBC News, “Husky, AER Assessing Leak of Crude Oil near Bragg Creek” (March 17, 2017), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/husky-cox-hill-creek-oil-spill-1.4031063>, accessed June 25, 2017.

15 CBC News, “Tundra Energy Owns Pipeline that Leaked Crude Oil: Province” (January 25, 2017), <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/saskatchewan/tundra-energy-owns-pipeline-that-leaked-crude-oil-1.3952710>, accessed June 25, 2017.

16 CBC News, “Prince Albert, Sask., Declares State of Emergency Over Oil Spill” (July 25, 2016), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/prince-albert-water-restrictions-council-meeting-state-of-emergency-2016-1.3693396>, accessed June 25, 2017.

to be recognized as having intrinsic value,¹⁷ not just value with respect to the benefit that creation provides to human beings. Any oil spill is devastating to the community of creation—not just those spills that impact human beings.

Holy God,

forgive us for polluting creation—

your handiwork

and your dwelling place;

forgive us for only caring about the pollution that impacts us,

and for the times we have ignored damage to your creation.

Forgive us, and lead us to reconciliation with all of creation,

and to newness of life

as an integrated community of creation.

We pray in your reconciling name.

Amen.

Project Analysis – The Effects of Climate Change

“To you, O Lord, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.” (Joel 1:19-20)

The most immediate risk of oil pipelines is the risk of a leak leading to an oil spill; but the deeper environmental consideration has to do with the effects of burning fossil fuels on the climate of the whole earth. The Energy East pipeline is being proposed not to serve the energy needs of Canadians, but instead to ship

¹⁷ Kairos, “Ethical Reflections on the Northern Gateway Pipeline” (July 2012), <http://www.kairoscanada.org>, accessed June 2017.



oil from the oil sands¹⁸ in western Canada to the east coast of Canada for refining and export. David M. Rhoads argues that climate change, which has been linked with the burning of fossil fuels, is the environmental issue that poses the greatest threat to creation. A list of the consequences of climate change includes “unpredictable weather patterns, an increase in frequency and intensity of storms, drought, rampant wildfires, shifting agricultural conditions, and the rise of sea levels.”¹⁹ The effects of climate change tend to be experienced first and most severely by those who are already the most vulnerable in society—people who are dependent on the land or water for their livelihood, people who do not have the resources to leave a dangerous situation, and people living on low-lying isolated island nations.

Oil extraction from the oil sands is a messy process. Not only does the extraction process leave great scars in the land, but a significant amount of energy is required to extract the oil—an estimated 30-32 million tonnes per year of additional greenhouse gases will be released into the atmosphere in the process of extracting the oil that will be transported in the Energy East Pipeline.²⁰ This amount is in addition to the estimated 172.6 million tonnes per year of additional greenhouse gasses that will be released into the atmosphere through the process of burning the oil that is being transported (1.1 million barrels/day x 365 days/year x 0.43 tonnes of CO₂ released/barrel of oil burned²¹).

The earth is already crying out from the impacts of climate change: The voice of the earth can be heard if we listen, in the storms, the droughts, the wildfires, and the rising ocean levels. The voices of people living on the margins can also

18 There is some controversy in the naming of the region of Alberta where the ground is soaked with bitumen. Environmentalists often favour the term “tar sands” as it sounds more ominous than “oil sands”; Kairos, a Canadian ecumenical justice organization uses the term “tar sands” in their communications. The term “oil sands” has been chosen for this essay for two reasons: it is a more accurate description of the region, and it is a less inflammatory term. See: Wilson, David, “Tar Sands or Oil Sands?” *The United Church Observer*, September 2009, http://www.ucobserver.org/columns/observations/2009/09/tar_sands/.

19 David M. Rhoads, “A Theology of Creation: Foundations for an Eco-Reformation,” in *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (eds.), (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 2.

20 Kairos, “Interim Pipeline Review Measures Fall Short” (February 2016), <http://www.kairoscanada.org>.

21 Ibid.

be heard if we listen, as global hunger increases, as homes are lost in floods and fires, and as environmental refugees are forced from the land. The earth is God's handiwork, and all of creation is God's sanctuary. If we continue to contribute to climate change through the burning of fossil fuels, we will continue to destroy both creation and the other participants in the community of creation.

Holy God,

forgive us for our narrow framework,

when we only see the immediate benefit

of wealth from the sale of oil,

rather than the harm that it does to your creation;

forgive us for our selfish view of your creation

when we see it as a resource to be exploited,

rather than your handiwork and your dwelling place;

forgive us for the times we have closed our ears

to the cries of the earth

and to the cries of your people.

Forgive us, and help us to turn back to you.

We pray in Christ's name,

Amen.

Project Analysis – Marginalization of Canada's Indigenous People

"Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (Jeremiah 6:16)



As noted by Norman Habel, Indigenous People around the world are often more in touch with creation and more sensitive to the suffering of creation than most Western Christians.²² If the voices of Indigenous People are ignored, then not only are their voices silenced, but so too is the voice of creation.

In the case of oil pipelines in Canada, the situation is complicated by the fact that the pipelines run through the land of Indigenous People. A majority of the Indigenous groups whose land will be impacted by the pipeline are opposed to pipeline construction, and there is some evidence that pipeline companies have promised significant financial benefits to Indigenous groups in exchange for expressions of support, calling into question whether the support was “free, prior, and informed consent.”²³

In the Canadian context, Indigenous People are often the people who are most marginalized, living with the intergenerational trauma of the residential school system, and living on isolated reserves that often lack safe housing, clean drinking water, and adequate health and education services. Building oil pipelines on Indigenous land runs the risk of poisoning the land and water that Indigenous People have been connected with for generations; and ignoring or silencing the voice of Indigenous People in the debate about these pipelines further contributes to their marginalization.

Mary Duroux, an Indigenous poet from Australia wrote the following poem expressing her relationship with the land:

My mother, my mother

what have they done?

Crucified you

like the Only Son?

Murder committed

22 Norman Habel, “Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37:2 (2010), 118.

23 Kairos, “Fossil Fuel Projects at Odds with Actions on Climate and Indigenous Rights” (April 2017), <http://www.kairoscanada.org>.

by mortal hand!

I weep, my mother,

my mother, the land.²⁴

This poem both expresses a kinship with the land (referring to the land as “mother”), and compares the land to Christ. This poem can be heard as a prophetic voice, crying out for the damage that has been done and is being done to God’s creation. Creation is being killed by the actions of human beings. Will we silence the voices of creation’s prophets?

God of justice,

open our ears to hear the voices of your prophets,

who cry out for justice for creation;

open our hearts to love your creation,

in the same way that we love a parent or a child,

in the same way that we love you;

open our minds to new ways of thinking,

so that we don’t become trapped in the same old ways;

open our hands and our feet to new ways of doing,

so that we too can live in to our calling

as caretakers of creation.

Amen.

Analysis – Anthropocentrism of the Pipeline Project

“You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving

²⁴ Mary Duroux, *Dirge for Hidden Art* (Morinya: Heritage Publishing, 1992), 20, quoted in Habel’s “Earth Mission: The Third Mission of the Church,” 118.



drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.” (Psalm 104:10-13)

Theology, and indeed all of history, tends to be written by those with power, and those on the margins of any society tend to be ignored and actively silenced. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote in her seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the subaltern, the one who is outside of the dominant power structures, cannot speak, has no voice.²⁵ Whether individuals are marginalized due to gender, race, sexual orientation, geographical location, ability, caste, or a combination of factors, voices from the margins tend not to be heard in common discourse. Theology, traditionally, has tended to be done by older European heterosexual male scholars, though recent work in the fields of feminist/womanist/mujerista theology, queer theology, and various localized liberation theologies are beginning to change this tendency.

It might be argued that on a global scale, the most marginalized voice of all is the voice of creation. The voice of power in all theology has tended to be the voice of human beings, one participant in the whole community of creation. Our reading and our interpretation of scriptures have tended to be anthropocentric, leading to the construction of anthropocentric theology.

One scriptural passage that is often cited to support an anthropocentric theology is Genesis 1:26-28, in which humans are created in the image of God and given “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” and are told to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” One of the beauties of scripture though, is the tension between seemingly contradictory passages. An alternative to the reading from Genesis 1 is found in the next chapter where God creates the first human out of the “dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) in the same way that God creates the rest of creation (Genesis 2:9). This earthling is placed in the garden not to subdue and to dominate, but rather “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Human beings, in this account, have a more communal role as part of the community of creation.

25 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Cory Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 308.

The traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 can be further criticized when examined in the wider scriptural context. The first creation account continues until Genesis 2:3, and so the pinnacle of creation is not the creation of human beings, but rather the Sabbath on the seventh day—the Sabbath, which is given to humans for rest and for honouring God (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). This shifts creation from an anthropocentric focus to a theocentric focus—when speaking of creation, the emphasis should be on the creator (God) rather than on one part of creation. This theocentric focus is made even more clear when Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is read against Psalm 104. While similar in their content with respect to the different parts of creation, Ronald A. Simkins argues that the most significant difference is in the relationship of creation to God. In Psalm 104, it is only God who provides food and even life itself; human beings, like all living creatures, are completely dependent on God alone.²⁶ Humans might till the soil and plant seeds and domesticate livestock, but it is only by God’s action that the rain falls, the sun shines, the seasons turn, and the seeds germinate.

Musa W. Dube gives another alternative reading to the role of humans in the first Genesis account of creation. She suggests that when God says, “let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), the plural pronouns *us/our* indicate that all of the members of the community of creation are co-creators with God in the creation of humans. Humans are created in the image of all of creation, and God is identifying Godself with all of creation, not only with humans. Human beings are not set apart from the rest of creation, “but are intrinsically part of the Earth and the whole universe, and are equally sacred.”²⁷

With this scriptural background, a theocentric rather than anthropocentric understanding of scripture and theology must be adopted, along with an understanding that humans are members of the creation community rather than rulers of the creation community. Returning to Spivak’s essay, how can the voice of the subaltern—in this case, the voice of creation—be heard?

The Energy East pipeline project is a project with a completely anthropocentric focus. It involves humans extracting oil from the ground that will be burned by humans, in order to bring wealth to certain humans and sustain humanity’s

26 Ronald A. Simkins, “The Bible and Anthropocentrism: Putting Humans in their Place,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 38 (2014): 407.

27 Musa W. Dube, ““And God Saw that it was Very Good”: An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1,” *Black Theology* 13:3 (2015), 242.



fossil-fuel-dependent lifestyle. The arguments being made in favour of the project, namely job creation and wealth creation, are all anthropocentric benefits; and it is primarily the non-human members of the creation community that will suffer from the effects of this project. The earth is being torn up and forests are being cut down to extract the oil and build the pipeline; the land and rivers are at risk in the event of a pipeline leak; and the climate itself is changing as a result of both extracting and burning the oil. Even within the human part of the creation community, those most likely to suffer as a result of this project are those who are already marginalized—Indigenous People, people living near the proposed pipeline, and people most affected by the effects of climate change.

Creator God,

you created day and night, darkness and light;

you created land and waters, earth and sky;

you created the sun and the moon and the stars;

you created plants and trees and birds and animals;

you created human beings –

and you saw that all of it was good.

Help us to see creation through your eyes –

help us to see its inter-connectedness,

help us to see its goodness,

and help us to see *you* in every part of creation.

We pray this through your creating Word,

Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Response—A Call for Repentance

“Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent (μετανοειτε), and believe in the good news.’” (Mark 1:14-15)

One of the central concepts in Christian theology is repentance (Greek: μετανοια, *metanoia*). This call to repentance is more than just a call to remorse, but involves a conversion—a change of heart and mind. When Jesus is calling on people to repent, he is calling on people to turn unconditionally to God, and to the kingdom of God.²⁸ When the concept of repentance is applied to the community of creation, it can be understood to be a turning towards God’s understanding of creation—that it is good, that it has intrinsic value, and that it is connected with God.

The proposed Energy East pipeline, therefore, can be argued to run contrary to God’s understanding of creation. It represents a mindset that creation is only valuable with respect to the benefit that it can give to human beings. It can be considered “good” only in an anthropocentric worldview, not in a theocentric worldview. And yet, as has been argued by the pipeline company, pipelines are the safest way to transport oil—safer than by rail or by truck. The company also argues that oil is extracted and transported in more environmentally responsible ways in Canada than it is in other oil-producing countries, and therefore Canadian oil is beneficial to the environment.²⁹

Both of these arguments, however, miss the point. Repentance, a change of heart, mind, and action, is required, not simply to reject the oil pipeline but to turn from our fossil-fuel-dependent lifestyle and to turn back to God. As has been shown above, the proposed pipeline is only a manifestation of the underlying problem, which is our dependence on oil to sustain our current lifestyle. If humans were to stop consuming fossil fuels, there would be no need for either pipelines or other forms of oil transportation; there would be no need for oil taken from the ground in Canada or oil taken from the ground in other countries. If we are to repent and turn to God and to God’s understanding of creation, there must be a radical change in our lifestyles.

28 Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 4:1001-1002.

29 TransCanada, “Energy East Pipeline,” <http://www.energyeastpipeline.com>, accessed July 20, 2017.



Both the oil pipeline and our dependence on fossil fuels can be named as sin. They break our relationship with God, and they break our relationship with the other members of the community of creation. Repentance is the only acceptable response to sin.

This call to repentance is for all people, including the church. The United Church of Canada, recognizing the harmful effects of oil consumption on the community of creation, has passed several motions related to climate change including divesting the church from all fossil fuel investments and re-investing in “green renewable energy cooperatives.”³⁰ With respect to the Energy East Pipeline, the church asked the General Secretary to write a letter to the federal government expressing concern about the project and encouraged members of the United Church of Canada to engage in a letter-writing campaign about the project.³¹

While demonstrating some movement in the right direction, unfortunately the church does not demonstrate a full repentance, noting that the economy and jobs must also be considered,³² along with our “need” for fossil fuels and the employment of church members in the fossil fuel industry.³³ The follow-through on these motions has been partial. As of January 2016, the church had divested the treasury fund from fossil fuel investments; however, the United Church Foundation and the pension board, along with an unknown number of individual congregations, were still invested in the fossil fuel industry.³⁴ In a report to the General Council Executive in November 2016, the pension board spoke of a need to balance financial interests with the United Church of Canada’s value of “respect in Creation”;³⁵ that it “takes very seriously its role as the steward of the assets entrusted to it”;³⁶ and that “divestment for companies of concern to

30 The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 42nd General Council 2015* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2015), 174.

31 Ibid, 179.

32 Ibid, 172.

33 Ibid, 179.

34 Mike Milne, “The Divestment Iceberg,” *The United Church Observer* (January 2016), <http://www.ucobserver.org/faith/2016/01/divestment/>, accessed July 2017.

35 The United Church of Canada, “Pension Board Report,” in *Executive of the General Council Workbook—November 18-19, 2016* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2016), 86.

36 Ibid, 88.

various groups is seldom the faithful or responsible action.³⁷ The pension board of the United Church of Canada plans to continue to invest the finances with which it is entrusted in the fossil fuel industry. This action does not demonstrate a willingness to repent of anthropocentrism and destruction of God's creation in order to turn back to God.

Such repentance will not be easy, yet this is, to borrow a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "the cost of discipleship." Discipleship, in Bonhoeffer's definition, is "obedience to the call of Jesus,"³⁸ and without discipleship, "costly grace was turned into cheap grace."³⁹ Discipleship—living and following in the way of Jesus Christ—is not meant to be easy. The repentance that is required to turn away from an oil-driven lifestyle in order to turn back to God will not be easy. But we, as followers of Christ, are called by the one whom we follow to repent. Engineers and scientists are called to develop technologies that will turn us away from fossil fuel consumption; the church is called to turn away from supporting and gaining benefit from the fossil fuel industry; and all people are called to adopt a lifestyle that frees us from fossil fuel dependence. To borrow again from the words of Bonhoeffer, "faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting."⁴⁰

As difficult as this challenge is, the good news is that we don't have to do it alone. God who calls us to follow in the way of Jesus Christ also enables this repentance through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is active in the world today and in every generation, transforming creation into the likeness of Christ and drawing all of creation into the triune life. It is only by allowing the Holy Spirit to act on our lives that we can repent and be turned back to God and be transformed into what God calls us to be—participants in the community of creation rather than autonomous rulers over creation.

God of all creation,

help us to repent of the damage that we have caused

and continue to cause to your creation.

37 Ibid.

38 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, translated by R.H. Fuller with some revisions by Irmgard Booth (London: SCM Press, 1959), 49.

39 Ibid, 41.

40 Ibid, 53.



Send your Holy Spirit among us

transforming us into the image of Christ,

and turning us back to our true calling—

to be in communion with you

and with all of the community of creation.

We pray this in the name of your Word-made-flesh
who showed us how to be fully human.

Amen.

Conclusion

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now."
(Romans 8:22)

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2)

The community of creation is in trouble. The air, the land, and the water are being polluted by human actions, affecting all of creation. The climate is changing because of human actions, impacting the whole of creation. This essay has explored one project that has environmental concern—the proposed Energy East oil pipeline—from the perspective of ecotheology and its impact on the community of creation. After outlining the project, it was analyzed with respect to the risk of an oil spill, the effects of climate change, the marginalization of Canada's Indigenous People, and the anthropocentrism of the project. The essay concluded with a call to the church and to all human members of the community of creation to repent of our oil dependency and to turn back to God's plan for creation.

There is hope. Not only have we been given the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of Christ, but we also live with constant hope of resurrection. If

creation is aligned with the suffering Christ and if the damage that we are doing to creation is crucifixion (as proposed by Mary Duroux in her poem cited above), then we know that crucifixion is followed by resurrection. Or the metaphor of birth might be used: Creation is groaning with labour pains as Paul wrote to the Romans, yet labour is followed by birth and new life. Our hope can be found in resurrection, birth, and new life.

We must, in the power of the Holy Spirit, repent of our oil dependency and turn back to God. Repentance on both an individual and a communal scale is not only feelings or intentions, but it is concrete action. The liturgical maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*, tells us that how we pray influences belief, which, in turn, influences how we live. Liturgy is important.

Words are important. Beliefs and actions can be shaped by liturgy, and for this reason, this essay has been built on a structure of scripture and prayer. Gathering communities together for worship and prayer is one way that the necessary change can begin. God's vision for creation can once again be realized so that God can look at creation and see that it is very good.





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