

CHAPTER ONE

RELEVANCE OF ECO-THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The essence of this mini-dissertation is encapsulated in the following quotation: “No one can afford to ignore the destruction of the environment. The future survival of all is dependant upon our care and protection of the earth and its resources” (De Gruchy & Field 1994:203). This premise will serve as the basis to understand the correlation between the Christian and Islamic faiths with regard to creation and hence, hopefully stimulate dialogue between the two religions to jointly procure a viable eco-theology.

Loader (1987) explains the relevance of eco- theology on two grounds: first the ecological crisis (our physical survival is threatened); second, elements inherent to the Christian faith (which applies to the Muslim faith as well). This twofold vision neatly fits the aim of this mini dissertation.

The environmental crisis is a crucial aspect of contemporary reality. There is a dire need to develop an eco-theological perspective on reality that views all of God’s creation as an interconnected and interdependent system or organism. Every individual creature be it flora, fauna, humans and the inanimate, forms part of this complex, integrated, ecological system. What occurs in one eco-system can have manifold and diverse consequences on other inter-related eco-systems across the entire spectrum.

From a theological perspective the complexity of the relationship between organisms may be seen as the manifestation of God's presence and care for creation. Both Christian and Islamic theologies have recognized the interdependence of the human community. In accordance with this theological premise this dissertation will consider the importance of viewing human beings as an integral and interdependent part of their natural environment: "Human sociality needs to be located within the eco-system" (De Gruchy & Field 1994:206).

1.2 WHAT DOES ECO-THEOLOGY ENTAIL?

Eco-theology is an approach that was born within the context of the world's environmental crisis. The planet in its entirety is systematically being destroyed by the human race through the advancement of science and technology, which ironically has to ensure environmental sustainability. The devaluation of the earth has given rise to a "green" consciousness, which strives "to invite us as members of the Earth community, to return to the Bible and in dialogue with the text, ascertain whether a similar kinship with Earth is reflected there" (Habel 2000:26).

Planet earth has been violently oppressed by the human species. To protect and preserve the planet for future generations, advocates of this "green" movement have become vociferous in their articulation of earth justice - upholding the rights of our planet and vehemently opposing the degradation of the earth.

Eco-theology "has to do with the multi-faced interrelationship of: God, humankind and the world of nature" (Brinkman 1998:203). Eco-theology represents a paradigm shift within Christian circles away from the original conservative and orthodox approach that endeavours to enhance and promote justice on the earth

among human beings. This liberalistic approach to the Bible by modern scholars at times borders on the fringes of subversiveness, as it subverts especially the anthropocentrism of most of the Bible.

By highlighting the Bible's sentiments on ecology, eco-theology challenges Christian theologians and readers not to concentrate solely on the redemption theme of the Bible, but to broaden their perspective. The Christian focus on the "soul", immortality and spiritual salvation of the individual has tended to neglect nature in the theological thinking. "Nature has been left to the sciences, while theology has concentrated on the salvation of the soul" (Loader 1987:9).

In contrast to the Christian viewpoint, one will not find the same critical liberal approach amongst Muslims when it comes to eco-theology. The Muslim's approach to ecology is subject to the will of God. It is conservative and very orthodox. The Qur'anic text is the alpha and the omega to a Muslim and therefore it is taboo to question it critically. Doing the latter could be regarded as blasphemous. Any Muslim transgressing this "grey area" may well sign his or her own death warrant or irreversible *fatwa*. The Salman Rushdie debacle over his controversial book, "The Satanic Verses", is a contemporary case in point reflecting Islam's rigidity and inflexibility when it comes to contentious issues.

1.3 WHAT GAVE RISE TO ECO-THEOLOGY?

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it is to present a brief picture of the extent of the ecological crisis as a primary factor leading to eco-theology. Secondly, it highlights some other "roots" of eco-theology.

1.3.1 Issues of environmental concern

1.3.1.1 Climatic change

Scientists are now in agreement that the Green house effect is bringing about the greatest and most rapid changes in the history of civilization. Carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere act like glass in a green house, letting the sun's rays through, but trapping some of the heat that would otherwise have radiated back into space. Carbon dioxide, at fixed natural levels, is necessary to stabilize temperatures that would make life possible. However, there is evidence that human activities promote overall warming of the climate such as fuel consumption and deforestation. These activities increase the unnatural levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. "Carbon dioxide accounts for over half the increase in warming of the climate" (Drummond 1996:10). Other gases such as chloro-fluoro-carbons (CFC's), methane and nitrous oxide contribute to the Green house effect. As the world climate heats up, rain falls at different times and different places, therefore disrupting crop production. In the USA, China and the Soviet Union an estimated temperature increase of 3°C per decade results in lower harvests in these grain-producing countries.

The melting polar caps increase sea levels and flood lower lying coastal areas. "A one meter rise could make 200 million people homeless" (Drummond 1996:11). Current research suggests that up to 18% of Bangladesh is made up of the delta of the Ganges, Gramaputra and Maghna rivers, with half of the land less than 4.5 meters above sea level. There are also predictable damaging effects to ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves. Almost all the 1196 islands of the Maldives are

less than three meters above sea level at their highest point. Most people living on these islands are only two meters above sea level.

1.3.1.2 Depletion of energy resources

Global commercial energy use increases each year by 2-3%, especially in industrialized societies using energy resources, which are traded, such as electricity. According to Drummond (1996:5) “recent estimates in the *Atlas of the Environment* (1990), oil supplies about half the world’s energy, coal one third and natural gas one fifth.” For decades the nuclear industry won popular support because of its perceived efficiency in electricity production. However, the long-term cost of nuclear power is approximately three times more expensive compared to coal. The apparent advantages to the environment are obvious when compared to burning fossil fuels, but the threat of a nuclear accident is horrendous.

The Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1996 is cited as an example. Because of this nuclear accident, thirty-one people died, about 135000 people had to evacuate from the affected area and it is estimated that between twenty thousand and forty thousand people will die of cancer because of the radiation dosage in the atmosphere. Radiation also contaminated foodstuffs by entering the food chain. Reindeer for example, feeding on contaminated lichens in Scandinavia are unsafe for human consumption many years after the accident.

1.3.1.3 Loss of species

“The problem is that in general, as far as the scientific community is concerned, the value of species is linked with human interest. Different species now become

merely resources for human management” (Drummond 1996:5).

It is expected that by the turn of the century a million kinds of animals, plants and insects will be driven to extinction by human activities. By the year 2050 half of the existing species could be lost forever. This horrifying reduction in species amounts to a loss of bio-diversity. Some species are endemic in specific areas of the world, for example the Seychelles has 90 endemic plant species, and 81% are threatened with extinction. One of the main causes of extinction is the loss of wild habitats to farming, fuel industries and other human activities. According to the *Atlas of the Environment* (1990), there are only 50% of the mature tropical forest left, that is 750 to 800 million hectares of the estimated total of 1.5- 1.6 billion hectares (Drummond 1996:4). The percentage of the forest left is likely to be lower today. A serious threat to human survival is our dependence on three plant species: wheat, rice and maize. Inbreeding to increase crop yields has given rise to monoculture (single varieties of crop species, developed through plant breeding). This type of practice has a higher vulnerability to pests and disease, hence the extensive use of pesticides. Pesticides in turn have damaging effects on other species in the ecosystem and spread to other areas via natural river systems.

1.3.1.4. Land degradation

In the third world countries poor farmers often occupy land, which results in a particularly destructive environmental degradation of the land. Their dire situation may also contribute to land degradation through harmful practices common in this group, such as the burning of manure and crop residues. In the short term this practice may contribute to fertility, but in the long term it has the opposite effect. Another harmful practice is allowing livestock to overgraze the land. In America,

the poor families of the South, do not own the land they work (Drummond 1996:2). Those poor families who own land cannot compete with the wealthier landowners because the latter has the necessary resources and financial muscle to abuse and exploit the disposition of the former. Certain groups are now arguing for land reforms and returning land to those who till it. The policy of land reforms is coupled with a policy to protect the environment. Poor families also lose land through population growth. The security offered in land reforms means that the poorer farmers would not seek security in having larger families (Drummond 1996:3). On the contrary, giving land back to farmers may be seen as an incentive to reduce the rate of population expansion.

In South Africa the problem has been exacerbated by Apartheid. The “homelands” have become ecological deserts due to over population. The failure to provide basic water and energy supplies to urban and especially rural blacks, has led to increasing pollution and deforestation. Poverty and violence have turned the lives of the majority of South Africans into a struggle for survival. People were forcibly removed from areas to create nature reserves and the authorities sanctioned projects that were environmentally destructive. De Gruchy and Field (1994:203) concur by stating: “permission was given to pursue environmental destructive projects from those affected.”

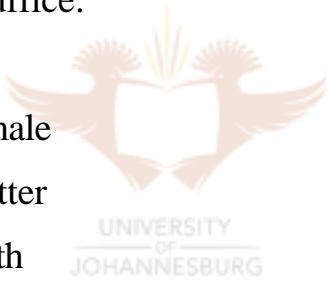
The far-reaching dangers of the ecological crisis worldwide have contributed significantly to a new awareness of environmental sustainability. This has further aroused interest in eco-theology.

1.3.2 Other factors contributing to the birth of eco-theology

Apart from the ecological crisis, two other factors contributed to a new environmental awareness, culminating in eco-theology. They are the wrongs of Western dualism and positive insights from feminism.

1.3.2.1 Western Dualism

According to Habel (2000:30), there is a realization that much of the destructive action against the earth was grounded in a set of hierarchical dualisms that were typical of Western thought. These dualisms are assumed to be part of reality, and the following examples will suffice:

Male	female	
mind	matter	
heaven	earth	
reason	emotion	
spiritual	material	
culture	nature (non-human)	

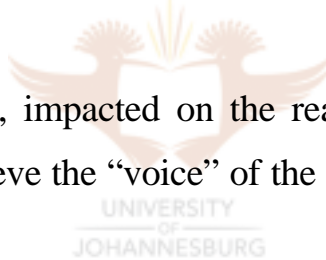
This way of thinking assumes a hierarchy in which the first component of the duality is superior and more valued than the second. This normally leads to the domination of the second by the first, sometimes unconsciously. It is clear from the above that earth, matter and nature are viewed as inferior. These dualisms became part and parcel of traditional biblical hermeneutics and life in general.

1.3.2.2 Feminist theology

Feminist scholars in particular have highlighted how pervasive and powerful the Western dualistic view of reality has been, influencing the way in which we must interpret the scriptures. The dominance of patriarchal readings of the Bible, which has underlying connotations of male/female dualism, has silenced the voices of women.

Feminists therefore developed a hermeneutic, which is cynical and critical of the texts. This hermeneutic exposes the patriarchal and oppressive aspects of the texts. It also endeavours to detect and retrieve anti-patriarchal elements and functions in a text, namely the “voice” and interests of women.

This hermeneutic has in turn, impacted on the reading of anthropocentric texts, resulting in an attempt to retrieve the “voice” of the earth “between the lines”.



1.4 SYNOPSIS OF THE PRAXIS OF ECO-THEOLOGY

1.4.1 A new way of reading a text

Due to the aforesaid factors, the Earth Bible series, advocating eco-theology, has formulated a new and fresh approach to reading the Bible: “Rather than reflecting about the Earth as we analyze a text, we are seeking to reflect with Earth and see things from a different perspective of Earth” (Habel 2000:33-34). Just as civil rights groups are concerned with the rights of people, so too are the Earth Bible scholars concerned with the oppressed Earth in their dialogue with a text. Their approach could therefore be termed an eco-justice hermeneutic, implying that one

should identify as far as possible with Earth or Earth community in one's analysis of the text. This new perspective implies that when we are reading a text we are sensitive to whether it reflects an orientation where humans act with and within Earth or whether humans act upon Earth. Simplified, it means treating Earth as a subject rather than an object in the text. When reading a text in this mode, the following questions should be asked :

1. Is Earth an active voice in its own right?
2. Is Earth an active recipient or subject whose voice is oppressed?
3. Are all the members of the Earth community invited directly or indirectly to celebrate together, praise together, lament together or resist evil together.
4. Is celebrating with Earth encouraged or neglected?
5. Are Earth and its components merely lifeless entities upon which God and humans perform greater or lesser deeds? (Habel 2000: 34).

This new perspective also implies a consciousness of the eco-justice principle inherent in a text. It involves enquiring whether Earth is being treated unjustly. Is there evidence in a text of resistance by non-human members of the Earth community when humans devalue, desecrate or destroy Earth or is this concept of exploiting and oppressing of the Earth strictly a contemporary one? To repeat again: just as feminists have adopted an approach that exposes the reading of texts with an androcentric and patriarchal orientation, the Earth Bible series suspects that because the Bible was written by humans for humans, it is not only androcentric and patriarchal but also anthropocentric. And as feminists try to retrieve "the voice" of oppressed women, likewise an earth justice reading tries to retrieve the voice of the oppressed earth.

1.4.2 Aims of the Earth Bible Series

Habel (2000:37) summarizes the aims of the Earth Bible series as follows:

1. Acknowledge, before reading the biblical text, that as Western interpreters we are heirs to a long anthropocentric, patriarchal and androcentric approach to reading the text that has devalued Earth and that continues to influence the way we read the text.
2. Declare, before reading the text that we are members of a human community that has exploited, oppressed and endangered the existence of the Earth community.
3. Become progressively more conscious that we are also members of the endangered Earth community in dialogue with ancient texts.
4. Recognize Earth as subject in the text that we seek to relate to empathetically rather than as a topic to be analyzed rationally.
5. Take up the cause of justice for Earth to ascertain whether Earth and Earth community are oppressed, silenced or liberated in the biblical text.
6. Develop techniques of reading the text to discern and retrieve alternative traditions where the voice of the Earth community has been oppressed.

1.4.3 Eco-justice principles

Habel and his team (2000:42-53) have formulated six eco-justice principles.

These principles are not finite nor are they the alpha or omega of eco-theology, but they form the basic understanding of the Earth Bible Series' orientation for eco-

justice for the Earth. A prominent feature of these principles is the omission of the words 'creation' and 'God'. It was done to facilitate dialogue with biologists, ecologists and scientists who may not endorse the idea of God or God's creation as a prime assumption. This approach also inclines the interpreter to focus on Earth itself as the subject of investigation in the text, rather than Earth as God's creation or property.

The six eco-justice principles are:

1. The principle of intrinsic worth: the universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic value.
2. The principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other.
3. The principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its own voice in celebration and against injustice.
4. The principle of purpose: the universe and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
5. The principle of custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community.
6. Principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist exploitation and abuse in the struggle for justice.

1.5 IDEOLOGY

From the above it should have become clear already that eco-theology is an ideological appreciation of texts, similar to feminist and other liberation readings, therefore it is necessary to explicate briefly what this ideology comprises.

Ideology can be defined as “an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values that reflects the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history” (Robbins 1996:96).

The primary subject of ideological analysis and interpretation is people (Robbins 1996:95). This infers that analysis of the ideological texture of a text exists at the opposite end of the spectrum to the analysis of the inner texture of a text that concerns itself with words, phrases and clauses of the text itself. Hence, ideological texture concerns itself with the biases, opinions, preferences and stereotypes of a particular writer of an ancient text and especially a particular, ideologically “interested” reader. Texts become “guests” in this endeavour. The starting point for ideological analysis and interpretation is thus:

- 1 The analysis and interpretation of myself as the interpreter of eco-theological traits in the Christian and Muslim faiths, and the reasons for my motivation.
- 2 The analysis and interpretation of other peoples’ interpretations of relevant texts.
- 3 An appreciation of embedded ideologies in a text by the original author (e.g. Bible) obviously comes into play (cf. chapter 2)

It is clear that the two facets of ideological texture are firstly, the interpreter and secondly, the text itself. The interpreter is ideologically orientated and intends to encourage the 'green' reading of texts, trying to retrieve the "green" dimensions in it (if it is indeed there). The subjective element of ideological analysis and interpretation will invariably be present.

Interpreters of texts usually reveal either consciously or unconsciously their "ideological" stances through:

- 1 Their individual locations.
- 2 Their relation to groups, for example, clique, gangs, action set, et cetera.
- 3 Their modes of discourse.

In what follows I explain my personal interest in a "green" consciousness.

1.5.1 The location and ideology of the interpreter

The following thought provoking and stimulating expression anchors and formulates my ecological stance: "My sense is that the divine has revealed something of the view of the world that explains to me the innermost nature of my own being, the being of the world and the meaning of life and death" (Robbins 1996:97).

1.5.1.1 Individual location

I was born and bred in the poverty ravaged squatter camp of the Germiston location. I was raised in a family home that shared the dual faiths of Christianity

and Islam. My mother's family was Christian and my father a staunch Muslim. Even though the dominant Christian culture prevailed, my father ensured a rigid and stringent Islamic culture in our section of the house. My religious orientation was determined and it was further galvanized by the compulsory attendance of Madressa classes (Islamic classes) after school. Here my brother, my sister and I were schooled in the fundamental principles of Islam, recitation of the Qur'an, the *kalimah*, the *sunnats* (or *sunan*) of the Prophet and *shariah* that remains indelibly etched in our minds up to this present day. Needless to say, the indoctrination of my young susceptible mind regarding my Islamic faith affected my later outlook towards Christianity and other religions. It was one of prejudice and bias. As a Muslim you were constantly reminded that Islam is the only perfect religion and obedient adherents of this faith will inevitably inherit the hereafter (paradise).

The milieu in which I grew up, and which represented my roots, was literally devoid of any natural beauty. It was a shanty town with corrugated houses, wire fencing and an unsavoury stench. The roads were gravel and during the rainy seasons it was a quagmire, because the earth was turned into a mud bath. Air pollution was part of this as the sky was covered in the evenings by a smoke cloud because of coal burning stoves and braziers. The poverty and destitution one had to endure forced us to look at the earth as a resource for food production. The planting of vegetable gardens transformed a barren earth into a green carpet.

Ironically, the Group Areas Act further exposed me to the beauty and the enhancement of nature, though on a very small scale. Suddenly we had our own "matchbox" home with our own small yard. Here the concept of vegetable gardens was pursued, including the planting of some peach trees and patches of grass. The

trees, a green canopy, provided the necessary shade and bird life. My father, a bird lover, filled two cages with canaries and budgies.

During the late sixties, the Group Areas Act once again uprooted us and we were forcefully moved from Germiston to the Coloured area of Boksburg called Reiger Park. The whole process of planting started all over again. By now the seed of 'greenness' was inadvertently and unsuspectingly sown within me. The natural beautification of our new home and the securing of animal life was a priority.

During the mid seventies, the Department of Coloured Affairs promoted a nature conservation programme through its Arbor Day campaign. It was compulsory for every Coloured school in the Republic of South Africa to celebrate and participate in the Arbor Day activities. At our school, Drommedaris Primary, my principal, Mr. Arthur Hare, nominated me as a leader of this project. He instructed me to use the Bible as one of my resource materials and to present my lesson within the framework of Genesis chapter two and three. This was my initial contact, though seemingly insignificant unknown to me then, with the 'green' sentiments of the Bible.

My "green" orientation was gradually cemented during my visits to the panoramic provinces of South Africa. In Cape Town I visited Table Mountain, Seal Island and savoured the breath-taking scenic drive along Chapman's Peak to Cape Point, through the nature reserve to the point where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans merge.

In Oudtshoorn I could only marvel at the scenic beauty of the Outeniqua mountains with their meandering passes, the Kango caves, the ostrich and

crocodile farms set in dry, semi-desert climatic conditions.

Finally, the picturesque Eastern Transvaal now called Mpumalanga, was for me the crown jewel of nature's beauty. It is difficult to find fitting adjectives to describe the majestic panoramas found in this province. The Garden of Eden leading to God's Window, a green canopy of forest trees stretching for kilometers on end is mind boggling. The potholes caused by years of natural erosion, the pinnacle, the waterfalls, et cetera, allow the individual to ponder over Job's inability to comprehend God's creative capacity. God's creation is stupendous and my first words on noticing such natural beauty were, "Who can deny the existence of God?"

After abandoning my Islamic studies at the Waterval Islamic institution called Mia's Farm near Halfway House, I pursued my career in education. After completing my teachers diploma at the Rand College of Education in Coronationville, I accepted my first teaching post at Drommedaris Primary School. The school was a dilapidated, rodent infested, corrugated sheet structure that was later destroyed by fire.

As a student at UNISA, the critical analytical approach I encountered in my English and Biblical courses reformed my entire thinking and life orientation. Conservatism gave way to a more critical approach. The latter approach was later instilled at the Rand Afrikaans University on completion of my Bachelors of Arts Degree. The Biblical Studies Department (Old Testament: Professor Viviers and Professor Coetzee) encouraged this freedom of critical expression and thinking.

1.5.2 Cultural location

The Apartheid policy of the National Party was an ideology indoctrinating racial prejudice and inciting hatred because of its oppressive inhumane and degrading tenets. As a non-white, life under the National Party was nothing but an abyss of hopelessness and suffering. My faith in God and the constant reminder by my father that Islam teaches tolerance and forgiveness fashioned me to be politically nonchalant and acquiescing.

Within the context of ethnicity, both Coloureds and Indians had limited political powers and privileges under the National Party, but with the introduction of the new government in 1994 of the African National Congress (ANC), a significant change ensued. This change necessitated adaptation to a new multi-cultural society. “n Mens besef dat verandering onafwendbaar was, maar indien dit wel vroeër plaasgevind het, sou dit bevolkingsgroepe baie verdriet gespaar het” (Maarschalk 2001:29). Maarschalk’s words aptly summarize the emotional trauma some groups had to endure, while the other groups rejoiced in their new found freedom. As for the future, I am positive, albeit wary in my belief that South Africa will, indeed transform into the ‘new rainbow nation’ we all desire.

1.5.3 Relation to groups

When contemplating one’s ideology it is useful to consider Boissevan’s (Robbins 1996:100) taxonomy with reference to other groups. According to this premise, I identify with any group that sympathizes with ecological matters. I would associate myself with an “Action Set” group. It is a group of persons who join together as a coalition, “a temporary alliance of distinct parties for a limited period” (Robbins

1996:100) to co-ordinate action to achieve a specific aim. In terms of my interest I side with groups who have a “green” agenda. A typical example is the recent World Summit Environment Committee 2002, who visited Reiger Park and various other suburbs to acquaint themselves first hand with the hazardous effects of mine dumps on the environment and the impact the mine dust has on the health of inhabitants of Reiger Park. I further identify with corporate groups who think ‘green’, for example Old Mutual’s subsidiary, Nedbank (uses animal motifs as background to their cheques as indicative of their support for ‘green’ projects). I obviously side with a group such as the Earth Bible team, producing the Earth Bible Series.

1.6 PROBLEMS, HYPOTHESIS AND AIM

The completion of this comprehensive introduction and orientation now gives way to a sharper focus on the specific problem this study is all about and the aim it wishes to accomplish.



1.6.1 The problem of Christianity and ecology

The precise relationship between Christianity and the environmental crisis is a matter for debate. “However, the intricate interrelationship between Christianity and the expansion and hegemony of Western culture poses serious challenges for Christian theology and ethics” (De Gruchy & Field 1994:203).

De Gruchy and Field highlight the following two propositions that are of significance: firstly the urge to progress and to transform the world through the use of science, technology and capitalism, the very master narratives of the

environmental crisis of the past centuries, were often encouraged and accepted by certain forms of Christian theology. In the same vein, there were dissidents in the Christian tradition that were opposed to the exploitation of the environment but these pockets of resistance were suppressed by the dominant culture.

The second proposition is that the interpretation of the nature and contents of biblical texts by theologians was ambiguous and this resulted in a stalemate that stymied the development of Christian environmental ethic. This ambiguity has caused some Christians to oppose the environmental movement and it simultaneously encouraged others to become active in “green” politics.

De Gruchy & Field (1994:203) summarize the problem of Christianity and ecology aptly: “In the light of this ambiguity and the environmental crisis facing us, it has become critical to re-examine the Christian tradition and to develop a theological framework for the development of a Christian environmental ethic.” This challenge has been accepted already by the Earth Bible Series (cf. chapter two).

The church also contributed to the neglect and negation of the natural world. Theologians and clerics stress the acquisition of the hereafter by employing redemption theology. The eschatological dimensions of the Christian life thus took preference over creation theology as clerics inculcated in their parishes certain dogmas relevant to their specific faith. Although the church has a spiritual and religious duty to perform, it fails to accentuate the plight of the earth (as the voice of creation) in “green” texts where this “voice” is either deliberately suppressed or ignored. The church in this regard has hopelessly failed to educate the ordinary people of their congregation about the relevance and importance of the interrelatedness of creation and redemption.

The historian Lynn White Jr. claims that, “especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropomorphic religion the world has ever seen” (Habel 2000:29). White bases his argument on the Genesis orientation (e.g. Gen 1:26) whereby God explicitly rules that creation was solely for the benefit of humanity. Therefore, according to White, the present day environmental crisis could trace its roots to the interpretation of the Bible. Viviers in his article that analyses the Song of Songs highlights the churches’ contribution to the crisis as follows: “Traditional Christian theology, has been known to teach that we are strangers on earth, we are on a pilgrimage to ‘heaven’ and should strive to leave the earth behind” (Viviers 2000:145-6).

1.6.2 The problem of Islam and ecology.

The Qur’an and the *hadith* provide evidence that reveals the Almighty’s design and purpose for creation and humanity’s responsibility for preserving it. The mere reciting of these relevant texts proves that Islam always embraced an environmental ethic. The three concepts *Tawhid* (unity), *Khilafâ* (trusteeship) and *Akhirah* (accountability or literally the hereafter) also form the pillars on which the environmental ethic of Islam is based. According to Hope and Young (1994:1) some Muslim scholars concede that “Muslims have strayed from the nexus of values and need to return to it.”

Muslims are familiar with these Qur’anic principles, but few are inclined to focus their energy and awareness on an ecological ethic or theology. Some Muslims are leaders or heads of national and international environmental organizations, but the average Muslim citizen is only vaguely aware of the extent of the crisis.

Generally speaking there is little dialogue amongst Muslims about actually applying Islamic principles to environmental practice. A few grassroots leaders have begun to grapple with the question. The attitude of most Muslims towards taking responsibility for our planet is noncommittal as is suggested by the quote of Abdullah Omar Naseef: “We must acknowledge that contemporary Muslim intellectuals are silent about a wide spectrum of human and spiritual as well as social concerns” (Sardar 1998:228). Here he includes ecology and the environment.

To cite some examples: during Friday prayers (*Jumma*) or during the Ramadaan periods, congregations throughout various mosques are instructed to reform their lives according to *sunnahs* of the prophet Mohammed (S) and the *shariah* in order to accomplish *Janna* (heavenly domain). Muslim theologians or Imams stringently advocate the acquisition of the life in the hereafter while in the process relegating the relevance of ecology in Islam. This theology forms the cornerstone of the Islamic lifestyle espoused throughout the world. As has been seen above, the same ideas are evident in Christianity.

The present war against Iraq by the allied forces of America and Britain illustrates the fervour radical Muslims display in their quest to achieve the after life. For example, suicide bombers, who are regarded as martyrs, would not hesitate to sacrifice their lives to acquire this goal. During Muslim rallies the emphasis was on Muslims to go on a *Jihad* (holy war) against the enemy of Islam, but the ecological rationale never came to the fore. Saddam Hussain was never criticized for torching the precious oil fields of Iraq. His callous actions were totally in opposition to the preaching of the Qur’an where Allah clearly states that creation belongs to Him and that it should be protected by his trustees.

I do not for one iota challenge nor question the merits of promoting redemption theology. But is it fair to relegate or suppress Islamic teachings pertaining to ecology with the sole goal of acquiring the after life (*Janna*)? It can, however, be said that the orientation that the world was created solely for human purposes predominated in the early Islamic tradition. The question then is: is the same orientation applicable today?

The quote of Abdullah Naseef clearly reflects the lethargic attitude Muslims display while Rome burns. Because of their silence and abstinence from enunciating the Qur'an's ecological principles Muslims can be termed silent partners in a crime that is acutely threatening our planet and our very existence.

Whenever the prophet Mohammed's name is used in this study it will be followed by an (S). This is the abbreviated form of the Arabic phrase *sallâ `alayhi wa = sallama*, "May Allah bless him and grant Him peace." When the companions of the prophet (S) are quoted their names are followed by the abbreviation (r). This is the short form of *radiya allâhu `anhu* ("May Allah be pleased with him").

1.7 HYPOTHESES AND AIM

The hypothesis of this study can be formulated as follows: *the application and accentuation of "green" sentiments ensconced within the respective Christian and Muslim faiths can facilitate the realization and appreciation of shared ground between these two faiths. It can promote a constructive and purposeful effort by both faiths (also in combination) to contribute to nature conservation and indirectly to religious tolerance.*

The aim is then to determine a common agenda between the Christian and Muslim faiths to actively realize programmes of eco-justice in conserving our natural resources for future generations.

To accomplish this, an *appreciation* will be done of some commendable studies by Christian and Muslim specialists on their faiths, texts and tradition, to highlight the “green” perspectives of their faith traditions.

1.8 OUTLINE OF STUDY

Subsequent to the methodological introduction in chapter one, chapter two will focus on Christianity’s outlook on ecology as depicted in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Chapter three will highlight Muslim perspectives on ecology as depicted in the Qur’an and in the tradition in general. Chapter four will highlight the similarities of both faiths with regard to ecology and supply a common agenda for eco-justice. Chapter five will be a summarized conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

ECO-THEOLOGY: CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

2.1. ISRAEL'S VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD

2.1.1 Introduction

The people of ancient Israel lived close to nature, as it was an agricultural society. They used hunting techniques to survive, however, certain negative connotations concerning their attitude to animals have been detected (cf. Esau in Gen). There is some confusion pertaining to the biblical and rabbinic perspectives of the animal kingdom. On the one hand, charges are levelled against ancient Hebrews that they encouraged cruelty towards animals (cf. offerings). On the other hand, popular works by Jewish scholars attribute to Scripture and rabbinic literature an overwhelming concern and compassion for the natural world, citing various examples.

The approach Schochet (1984) adopts in describing ancient Israel's relationship towards the animal kingdom could be termed as ambivalent. He strikes a balance by illustrating both the positive and negative elements present in ancient Israel. These elements are either defined in terms of compassion and kinship or as derogatory and oppressive.

The assumed caring attitude to the animal kingdom is reflected as follows: "It could be argued that Scripture not only displays, but actually promotes feelings of deep kinship and compassion toward the world of fauna" (Schochet 1984:46).

Paradoxically, the sacrificial rites and restrictions placed on a sacrificed animal bring to the fore the elements the animals share with humans. The prohibition of blood consumption is an explicit example. Blood is the basic ingredient of life and because blood is life, God Himself is the direct source of life. Because blood is life it thus possesses the special qualities of atonement and life. Therefore blood, even of animals, possesses these special qualities and rightfully belongs to God; hence man should not consume it.

The biblical laws of impurity further emphasize basic similarities between the bodies of humans and animals. A principal cause of impurity is coming into contact with corpses of both animals and humans. Even though the degree of impurity is greater in human corpses, the fact remains that the carcasses of all animals are also in a state of impurity except those slaughtered for sacrificial purposes. “Purity and impurity are likewise associated with both man and beast” (Schochet 1984:47).

2.1.2 The dietary laws

Even though the Bible endorses the consuming of animal flesh in the cult there are nevertheless restrictions placed on the consumer. There is a connection between the sacrificed animal, and man’s eating of its flesh. The essence and legitimacy of consuming meat of an animal was dependent upon the slaughter of the animal on an altar. Leviticus therefore condemns the slaughter of an animal outside the precincts of the altar of the sanctuary. Unauthorized slaughter was deemed unlawful and the perpetrator deserved divine punishment. Only when fit animals were slaughtered on the altar and their blood drained were they regarded kosher. Although biblical law required sacrifices, the consumption of blood was prohibited

(cf. above). This requirement for slaughter severely limited the amount of meat to be consumed by man.

2.1.3 Kinship

“It is natural that man should feel a certain affinity for the members of the animal kingdom and incorporate them into his own human community” (Schochet 1984:51). This quote clearly demonstrates the kinship that exists between man and animal and it translates further into a deeper dimension of kinship. The bond binding man to beast is death. Both man and animals are doomed to die because they are both mortals, even though the former lost immortality never possessed by the latter.

The biblical topocosm includes both humans and animals that are “close”. When a shepherd herds his flock, humans detect apparent emotional reactions in animals similar to those experienced by humans themselves, for example, fear, love, et cetera.

According to Scripture animals are held accountable at times for their deeds. The covenant that God established with Noah included responsibility of both animals and humans. Adam and Eve both transgressed in the Garden of Eden and were punished, the serpent is also condemned to crawl on its belly. The ox that gores a human is stoned to death, hence retributive justice is extended to both parties (Ex.21:28).

2.1.4 Compassion

Apart from what has been said already the following statement is worth noting: “Scripture describes all living things as the direct beneficiaries of divine kindness and wisdom” (Schochet 1984:56). The humanitarian sentiment finds expression in the law: “Thou shall not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out corn” (Deut 25:4). The animal should not be allowed to labour while food is out of its reach.

Another example of compassion is found in the historical legislation for the protection of birds. Man is prohibited from separating both mother and chick from the nest at the same time (Deut 22:6). The mother must be able to depart from the nest before the chick is removed, because “she does not see the taking of her young ones and does not feel pain” (Schochet 1984:58).

The laws prohibiting cruelty to animals reveal compassion as suggested by the words of Schochet: “the tenderness to animals is one of the most beautiful features of the Old Testament” (Schochet 1984:62).

2.1.5 The derogative aspect

The derogatory status of the animal is expressed as follows: “We should nevertheless recognize certain basic realities in Scripture that render the animal more akin to man’s tool than his equal partner in life” (Schochet 1984:63). The animal was a valuable entity, but primarily it was regarded as property (Schochet 1984:76). This attitude is illustrated when Saul summons the Israelites into battle and those Israelites who refuse to go to battle, and their animals were threatened with death (1Sam:11.6). The Israelites succumbed to the order, because their

animals were valuable property to them. The animal as property had thus economical value to its owners.

The superiority of man over nature is further displayed when God presented Adam with the members of the animal kingdom. God calls to Adam to bestow a name upon every animal. To call upon someone to designate a name to something else ensures a mastery and by implication domination over it.

The inferior status of the animal is further relegated by Scripture's demythologization of the animal kingdom. In the world of ancient Israel totemism was a pervading force. The pagans worshipped nature and to them nothing was inanimate because they envisaged life in all forms of nature. Animals were revered and the pagans believed that they possessed human souls endowed with power to influence human affairs.

In contrast, the religion of Israel conceived of God as having a transcended nature, hence both animals and nature were perceived as being devoid of any divinity. Scripture thus demythologized the animal kingdom, because it was a cardinal sin to worship nature, animals or idols. This was regarded as paganism.

The negative attitude by Israel towards animals is further illustrated by the fact that they felt no obligation towards animals, especially wild animals.

We can conclude with an overall impression that ancient Israel appreciates nature with all its beauty, symmetry and diversity, and exerts the right of "stewardship" over it. One can, however, detect a degree of uncertainty and a reluctance on behalf of Israel to accept full trusteeship of nature. This indicates an attitude to nature,

which is rather “cool” and only partially-committal. Viviers (2001:144) reflects the attitude of Israel as follows: “The Israel-Nature relationship is a rather ‘cool’, distanced relationship clearly derived from imitating their transcended creator.”

2.2 ISRAEL’S WORLDVIEW

According to Simkins (1994:13) Israel’s experience of nature was determined by its own peculiar environment. They knew the adversity and calamities of Palestine’s rugged mountainous terrain, the barrenness of Judah’s desert, the vast expanse of the Mediterranean and the fertile lowlands and valleys. They lived in a climate that oscillated between hot and dry summers and mild and wet winters. They withstood earthquakes, thunderstorms and severe winds. They were also surrounded by a wide variety of fauna and flora species that were indigenous in the eastern Mediterranean climate.

The Israelites’ understanding of the natural world was shaped directly by their values toward nature and their worldview in which those values were rooted. Because writers did not articulate or record their worldview and their attitudes towards nature, Simkins utilizes different models to create a perception of their worldview and attitude towards nature. Simkins applies various models for his investigation. The primary models for his study are a model of worldview dynamics and a model for value orientation. These different models culminate in a comprehensive model which will be briefly discussed below. A model according to Carney is simply a “conceptual map, a heuristic tool for organizing diverse data into a meaningful pattern” (Simkins 1994:117).

2.2.1 A comparative model of human-environment relations in ancient Israel

The ancient Israelite worldview expresses the following value orientations pertaining to the natural world:

1. A mastery- over- nature solution,
2. Harmony- with- nature solution and
3. Subjugation-to- nature solution.

The circumstances prevailing during specific times would dictate the value orientation a specific Israelite community would prefer. This was done according to the ingroup or outgroup classification. Within the ingroup context, the relations of the Israelites to their own land and the land of their own fellow members, was based primarily on the harmony- with- nature classification. As for their relation to the land or natural world of their enemies (outgroup) the Israelites will either adopt the mastery- over- nature classification or the subjugation-to- nature alternative. Schochet's "cool" description towards (wild) nature, coincides with these outgroup classifications.

The mastery-over- nature entailed the dominance of the ingroup over the outgroup while the classification subjugation- to- nature entailed the Israelites (ingroup) being dominated by the enemies (outgroup). Simkins (1994:254) developed the following diagram to encapsulate Israel's worldview:

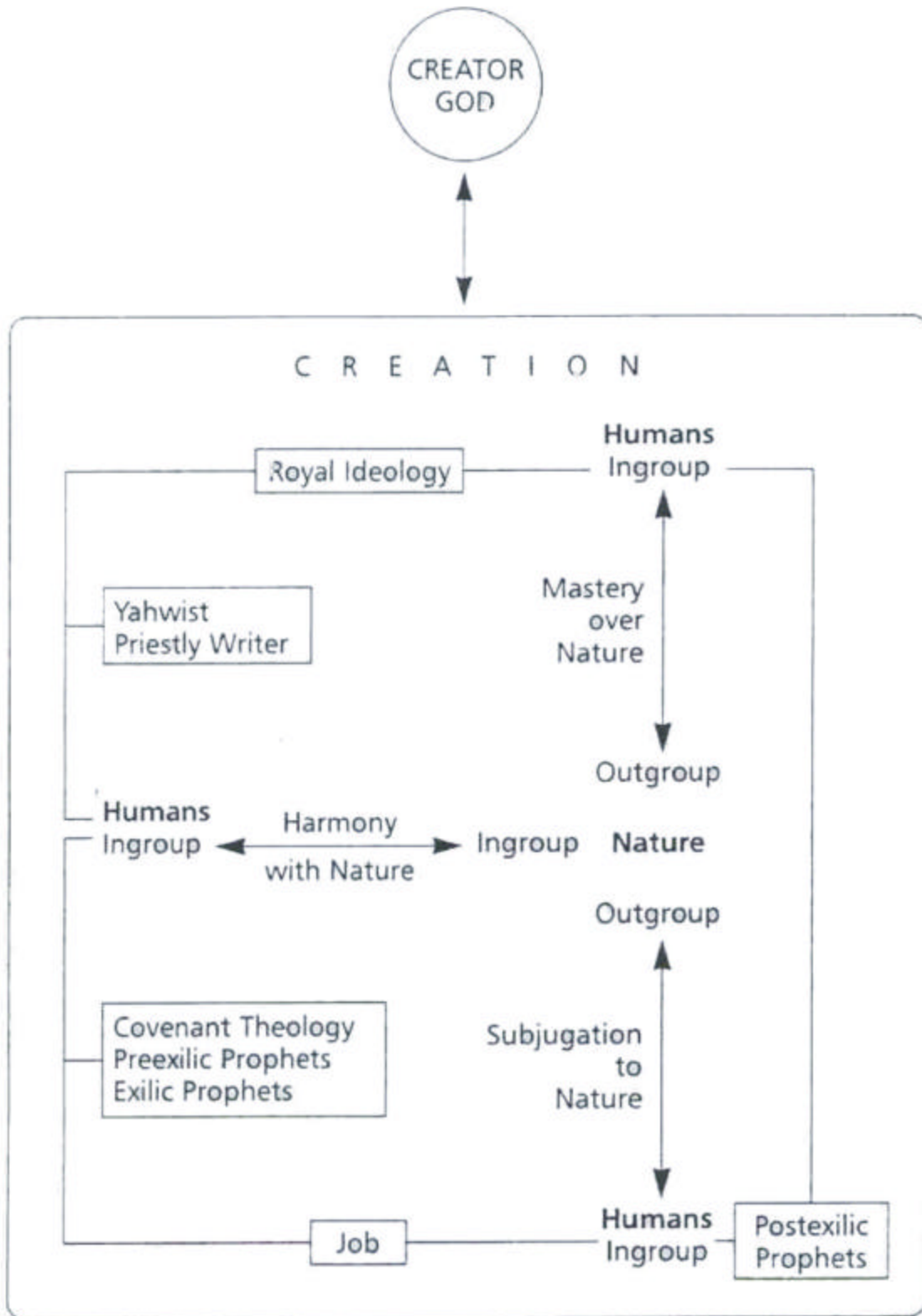


Figure 17. The Biblical Writers' Worldview and Values Toward Nature

The diagram clearly illustrates the triangular relationship between God, humans and the natural world. Israel's worldview heralded Yahweh as the sole creator of the entire creation and Yahweh dwelled in the heavenly sphere. According to this worldview, Yahweh had to entrust his creation unto stewards, namely the kings. The king was considered to be God's representative on earth because of his royal status. Secondly, the king stands in relation to the earth because God in turn is related to creation.

Royal ideology entailed both the mastery- over- nature and the harmony- with- nature relationship. When the king defeated the enemy and destroyed their land (outgroup) it was regarded by the Israelites as the manifestation of God's justice and righteousness. The king's rule over his subjects had to be consistent with the principles of justice and righteousness, because this would ensure that the order of creation would prevail, thus securing the blessing of creation for his people (ingroup). Both the Yahwist and Priestly writers reflect the harmony- with- nature classification. These writers considered humans to be a special creation of God because God endowed them with cultural knowledge and that humans were created in the image of God. Although humans were creations of God they had distinct characteristics, which made them different from other creatures. These writers also proclaimed that humans must live according to the order of creation and to remember that their fate is automatically bound to the fate of creation. This in turn would ensure a harmony- with- nature solution by obeying the order of creation.

The prophets and covenant theology reflect a harmony- with- nature solution, however, humans do sin and violate the order of creation. These transgressions have negative ramifications with regard to nature because they bring disorder to

creation when God's covenant is disobeyed. The redemption of humans thus entails a new creation.

The harmony-with-nature is not always an appropriate solution as envisaged by Job. According to Job, creation (outgroup) is hostile and overpowering and he therefore opts for the second order of preference, namely a subjugation- to- nature orientation. Some of the post- exilic prophets reflect a similar orientation to that of Job when the people of Judah (ingroup) are oppressed by other nations (outgroup). But unlike Job, these prophets envisaged a new creation of God whereby the enemies and their land (outgroup) would be destroyed while by the same token their land (ingroup) would be restored to them.

The worldview of Israel determined the value orientation it would adopt as solution to a specific situation (the ingroup/ outgroup) in a certain era. According to the sketch, though preferences to solutions may vary, the general consensus was to endorse the idea of *the harmony- with- nature orientation*.

In the final analysis Israel's worldview on nature was one of value and appreciating the natural world. They preferred a harmonious existence with nature and should this be threatened in any way they would not hesitate to defend it to ensure justice and righteousness. The act of stewardship was of paramount importance because it envisaged the caring and protection of creation by its trustees. This also included the observance of the covenant.

2.3 AN APPRECIATION OF GREEN READINGS OF THE BIBLE.

From the preceding analysis it is quite clear that Israel's general relationship with nature is one of harmony. In the subsequent investigation, where the focus is on a few selected texts from the Bible, this harmonious relationship will be illustrated and highlighted further. The insights of writers from the Earth Bible Series will be utilized.

Not all texts of the Bible are eco-friendly (Augustyn 1996), which confirms the anthropocentric dimension of the Bible. But there is an unmistakable "green" dimension of the Bible, which will hopefully come to the fore in the focus on the texts to follow. Obviously not all "green" texts are represented here (for a more comprehensive overview, see Habel 2000; Habel & Wurst 2000; Habel & Wurst 2001), but a sample of texts from the Old and New Testament will be analyzed to illustrate the praxis of eco-just readings and simultaneously to highlight the green dimension of the Bible. The scope of this study is too small to cover all.

The rationale for the selection is to represent at least a text or two (books) from the traditional division of the Old Testament, namely the Pentateuch (Gen.1), Prophets (Amos, Jeremiah 12) and Writings (Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Job). One would not expect the 'spiritual' New Testament to appreciate 'material' nature, but this is indeed the case with well-known texts like the Our Father (Matthew 6: 9-13) and Revelation 21. There is more "green" in the New Testament, but this will suffice for the purpose of this study.

The interesting observation of this "green" appreciation of texts in the Bible is its genesis and its ending. The "green" canopy has its beginnings in the book of

Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament and fittingly has its ending in Revelation, the last book of the New Testament.

2.3.1 Old Testament

2.3.1.1 Pentateuch

Genesis 1: The revelation of the Earth (*Erets*)

Introduction

The present form of the text, Gen 1, is a narrative with a sequence of events and various characters. When reading the Genesis text from an Earth perspective one has to “shed the baggage of our Western concepts of creation” (Habel 2000: 34), because by reading the text literally one is confronted with the origin of the world culminating in the creation of human beings. But when the text is read from an eco-justice perspective, the focus is on another dimension, namely the origin, appearance and the activating of Earth. This is neatly termed a “Geophany” (Habel 2000:35), which means the manifestation or revelation of the Earth.

The major role players of the narrative are God (*Elohim*) and Earth (*erets*). The eco-justice principle of intrinsic worth and other principles will be illustrated where necessary. In order to elicit a better understanding of creation from an eco-justice reading, I will utilize Habel’s captions with regard to the revelation of the earth.

***Erets* hidden**

Genesis 1, from an eco-justice perspective, regards the earth as hidden. The earth's envelopment in both darkness and the waters signifies the hidden nature of *erets* in its primordial setting. *Erets* is there, but obliterated by a temporary shroud. The other two characters present with *erets* within the darkness are *Elohim* and the waters. *Elohim's* presence is termed as a breath or spirit (*ruach*) hovering above the waters in the darkness. Everything awaits a transformation process.

***Erets* uninhabited**

Habel (2000:38) describes the primordial setting of *erets* as *tohu wabohou*, meaning the earth was in a state of barrenness. There was no vegetation, habitation or life present and *erets* was awaiting the process that would ensure its productivity. There is no consensus amongst scholars about the concept *tohu wabohou*, as some scholars read into it conflict mythology. Habel (2000: 38) says the following: "God did not create it *tohu* , God formed it to be inhabited (cf. Is 45:18)."

According to Habel the text reveals the purpose God envisaged with the creation of *erets*, namely to procure its future habitation, a domain devoid of any apparent conflict.

***Erets* staging**

Erets is concealed by darkness and to reveal its presence, light is a prerequisite. On the first day, God creates light to expose his hidden creation in its primordial

setting. The transformation process in its initial stages has commenced. Although an apparent dualism between light and darkness is recognised, this interpretation should be discarded, because light and darkness in this context defines a functional order of creation, which distinguishes day from night. There is no evil connotation attached to darkness!

The second prerequisite for *erets* to be revealed necessitates that the waters covering and concealing *erets* have to be restructured to form a new reality. The restructuring process occurs in two phases, the first phase takes place on day two and the second phase on day three. On day two *Elohim* creates the sky and Habel (2000: 41) refers to it as “a dome or canopy (*raqia*).” The setting for the manifestation of *erets* has reached completion. The light and the sky serve as the stage for Earth’s revelation.



***Erets* revealed**

On the third day *erets* is revealed and God’s appreciation of his creation is aptly described by himself as good (Gen 1:9-10). The emergence of *erets* from its primordial setting of darkness and waters allows God to bond with it. This bonding process elicits the intrinsic worth of the Earth.

***Erets* activated**

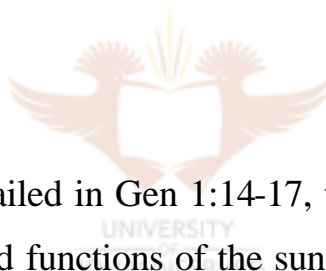
“The Earth story depicts *erets* as both the source of life and the home of all living things” (Habel 2001: 43). Through divine intervention, *erets* is activated as the prime source of plant and animal life. The waters are activated to bring forth

aquatic life while birds fly in the sky above *erets* (Gen 1:20). *Erets*' intrinsic value is underlined.

On the sixth day *erets* is once again activated and both wild and domestic animals, including crawling creatures are seen as creations of earth.

The interaction between God and *erets* is illustrated by the latter's response to the former's commands through "voice". The response of Earth to *Elohim*'s commands to bring forth life attest to the interaction between the two central figures of the creation drama. Earth is also the source of life and this feature endorses the value aspect attached to it.

***Erets* illuminated.**



The crux of this aspect is detailed in Gen 1:14-17, the fourth day. In these verses God describes the purpose and functions of the sun, moon and the stars. The sole purpose of these heavenly bodies is to fulfill a designated role in the created order, which is to provide day and night distinctions.

***Erets* complete**

On the sixth day God completed the creation of the earth with all its inhabitants. The once concealed *erets* is now revealed as a fully-fledged and complete creation of God. Finally, after God's awesome activity, he observes a Sabbath on the seventh day.

Erets subdued

This aspect could be regarded as the “anti-climax” of creation because with the introduction of the human species the status quo is affected. There is a power shift in the narrative as the humans are divinely blessed to be fruitful, multiply and to *subdue* the earth (Gen 1:26 ff).

The process of creating humans differs from the other forms of life, thereby indicating that humans are special creations of God. This image is further compounded with the introduction of the words “in our image” (Gen 1: 26), which further elevates the status of humans. The differentiation in creation implies that humans have dominance and power over the earth and its inhabitants thus devaluing the latter’s status by expecting it to be subservient to the former’s rule. The word *kabash* (subdue) has a negative meaning (Habel & Wurst 2000:46).

Conclusion

Earth is a subject, a character of the plot, who in conjunction with God participates in the creation process. It is highly valued by God, it has its own voice and its relationship with humans is strained, right from the beginning.

2.3.1.2 Prophets

Amos - A fighter for eco-justice?

Introduction

The book of Amos is not considered to be suitable literature for an eco-theological reading when compared to either Job or Genesis. However, its text does reveal evidence of class distinction and resistance to the oppression of the poor, typical of prophecy. A deeper reading of the book of Amos also reveals a knowledgeable account of both the rural and urban life of ancient Israel with both environments in conflict with each other.

The prophet Amos is considered the key figure in the prophetic discourse with a great deal of experience and knowledge, which he gained while traversing across the Canaanite highlands. He is depicted as a traveller who also took a keen interest, in his observations of the natural world. Within the limitations of his worldview “Amos takes a global view of things” (Jobling & Loewen 2000:76). Amos obviously also knows about history and historical events and the traditional interpretation of his people’s history.

Amos – The doom prophet

The prophet Amos is considered to be a prophet of doom, a strategy contemporary environmentalists analogically apply to emphasize the end result of humankind’s indiscriminate abusive behaviour towards the natural world and its resources. ‘Doom’ implies the principle of the resistance of the earth, a typical characteristic of Amos and the other prophets. Amos can be demarcated redactionally into three stages namely Amos A, Amos B and Amos C (Habel 2000:75). Amos A (pre-exilic) does not only castigate the royalty of Northern Israel, his message of impending doom covers the whole upper class. Amos B (exilic) continues his

prophecy of doom on the ruling class of the southern kingdom, Judah. Amos C is post-exilic where the prophet anticipates a reversal of the doom prophecy.

Each of the prophetic stages is also ecologically (and analogically) useful. Amos A (8th century BCE) proclaims the approaching judgement over Israel (threatening ecological crisis), Amos B (exilic) proclaims retrospectively the completed judgement over Israel (that which has been ecologically destroyed) and Amos C (post-exilic) proclaims hope of recovery (also for the earth).

Earth versus economics in Amos

Jobling and Loewen (2000:77-80) illuminate the bond between social justice and eco-justice. The first does not necessarily imply the latter, because socialists (like capitalists) are often blind to environmental issues. Yet Amos still acknowledges (perhaps unconsciously) the ecojust principle of resistance where the earth takes vengeance on the exploiting, rich power-mongers. Jobling and Loewen (2000:79) explain it as follows:

“Compare Amos 2:17 with 2:13: in ‘trampling the head of the poor into the dust of the earth’ (2:7), the rich treat the poor simply as part of the earth they till. Dominating the poor becomes part and parcel of dominating the Earth. But a more complex metaphor in Amos 2:13 reverses this: ‘I will press you down ... just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves... The rich are now ‘pressed down’ ...by the agricultural produce they have sought to monopolize.’ An illuminating example of poetic justice.”

Ecologies in Amos

Jobling and Loewen (2000: 81) identify three specific ecological perspectives in Amos. The first perspective is an *ecology of danger* whereby they illustrate Amos' ability to use the natural environment to strike fear into his listeners. The images present in the texts conjure up a picture of natural destruction and death, for example, marauding animals such as lions and bears, and natural disasters such as earthquakes.

The second perspective is the *Edenic ecology of plenty* (9:13-15). This image presents the natural world as infinite and an inexhaustible resource, which can mislead, the earth has a limited sustainability. Finally, the doxologies (4: 13; 5: 8-9; 9: 5-6) present an *ecology of contemplation*. These images present the cosmos in its totality and in the process reveal its mysticism and wisdom inviting reflection (even panentheism). The above perspectives are indicative of God's omnipotence in creation and God's relationship with humans and the earth.

Conclusion

Although Amos cannot be regarded as a classical biblical text for an eco-theological reading, it has "green" dimensions. Its three redactional stages resonate with environmental issues. Amos' ecologies of danger, plenty and contemplation evoke new visions of environmental awareness, be it fear of nature or joy in abundance. As a prophet Amos resists the oppression of the poor and lower classes. This opens the possibility of resisting the oppression as well as the domineering attempts of humans to conquer nature.

Jeremiah: 12 – How long must the land mourn?

Introduction

Jeremiah 12 does little to distinguish between the words of the prophet and the words of God with the exception of Jeremiah 12:14. In fact, Jeremiah 12 may be divided into two sections. The first part, 12:1-4, refers to Jeremiah's laments while the second part, 12:5-17, refers to the divine's response. 12:4 emphasizes Jeremiah's concern for the land and by the same token, in 12:7-13; 12: 14-17, God reciprocates by responding to and identifying with the prophet's concern over the land question. Therefore, according to Fretheim (2000: 98) the voices of both "tend to bleed" into each other. An interesting aspect of the lamentation section of this text is the mutual focus on the land, which joins them "in one grand liturgy of mourning" (Fretheim 2000: 98).

Creation: Jeremiah's perspective

According to Jeremiah 33:2 God created the earth and his entire creation is governed by a fixed natural order. The language used in Jeremiah indicates a creation which is not divinely determined, though God's presence in creation is acknowledged. The writer further demonstrates present day realities for example, the extinction of animal life (Jer.12 : 4), humans' hideous destruction of the natural world (Jer.12:1) and humans turning the land arid (Jer.14:2-6). Jeremiah personifies the land by allowing it to "mourn" human actions (Jer.12:11). The "mourning" of the land affirms a relationship with God which excludes human involvement. This independent relationship is further enhanced when God addresses the land itself (Jer.16-19).

A feature of Jeremiah is the use of “victim language” (Fretheim 2000: 103) whereby God pronounces judgement on the people in defence of the land and its animals (Jer. 3: 2-5; 5: 24-25, 14: 2-12). By employing this act of victimization, the writer illustrates the principle of purpose in Jeremiah 12. For Jeremiah God created the world in which all creation, human and non-human, is interrelated and inter-dependent on each other.

Jeremiah – An early conservationist

It is abundantly clear that Jeremiah is a forerunner in terms of nature conservation and the prophet’s obvious concern is his appeal to God to intercede (Jer.12:1) and to punish the wicked (Jer. 12: 3). Jeremiah’s deep concern for the earth is further illustrated when he challenges God’s indiscretion in allowing the perpetrators of injustice on the earth to flourish. Jeremiah also accuses God of complicity in the degradation of the land because he not only considers God to have abandoned the land (Jer. 12: 7), but he accuses God of being hesitant and reluctant to intervene. (Jer. 12: 4). Jeremiah’s dilemma is masked by his lamentation and his situation is aptly synchronized with that of the earth who is also in mourning (Jer. 12:11) because of the faults of the wicked. The mourning of the land is evidence of the principle of voice in the text.

Jeremiah also depicts the principle of custodianship. The personal pronoun “my” (Jer. 12:10) indicates divine ownership of the land, but “God’s way of possessing does not entail ‘control’ ” (Fretheim 2000; 106). It implies that God delegates the management and responsibility of the land to stewards on earth.

God does however not only “abandon” the land or his inheritance but God mourns the loss of his inheritance (Jer. 12:7-8). The divine suffering is necessary to ensure a better future for the earth and its inhabitants who will submit to the will of God. God and the earth are co-subjects in mourning. God is disgruntled and disillusioned with the Israelites and employs His wrath by metaphorically fashioning wild animals (Jer. 12: 9) to devour the wicked. Jeremiah 5: 6 and 8:17 name the following animals, which God uses to devour the enemies, for example the wolf, leopard and snakes (Jer. 5: 6, 18: 7).

In Jeremiah 12: 8 the writer uses a metaphor of Israel as a lion turning on God, but God retaliates by reversing the attack and ordering the lions to devour Israel (Jer. 2: 15, 4: 7; 5: 6, 5:17). It appears that both God and the land were the victims of Israel’s disparaging onslaught. It is however, not the case, because not only did God defend his inheritance, but by implication the earth also resisted the attack.

Conclusion

The lamentation of God, Jeremiah and the earth bears testimony to the trio’s disenchantment with the maltreatment of the land by humans. The principle of (resistant) “voice” is conspicuous. In the salvation oracles of Jeremiah God promises an inclusive new creation of fauna, flora, people and the earth itself (Jer. 3: 17; 12:14-17; cf. 29: 7; 31:5; 12; 14; 27; 32; 42 – 44; 33: 10-13; 50:19).

2.3.1.3 Wisdom writings

Creation: An enigma for Job

Introduction

In what follows Habel's "Earth First: Inverse Cosmology" (2001) will be analyzed in order to portray a green appreciation of Job. For an earth reading the book of Job could be divided into two sections, which can be termed the Jobian cosmology and the Yahwistic cosmology respectively. The former represents a protagonistic stance towards the natural world (earth) while the latter represents an antagonistic stance towards the natural world (earth). The plot of both scenarios reflects the tension existing between the two chief characters of the text with each character employing his own strategies to enhance his specific objective.

Job images the character who champions the cause of the earth and its inhabitants because of his apparent knowledge of the natural world of his time. God in turn is characterized by Job as a tyrant whose main aim is not only to be punitive but, to humiliate Job for daring to confront Him. Job 1-2, and the end of Job form the frame narrative of the whole Job story. The two cosmological domains are not only interrelated but they are in confrontation with each other.

The writer apparently uses Job in a dual role to present an image of earth with its inhabitants while on the other hand he uses Job to depict his own feelings of despair because of the ecological crises of his time. Job 1:8 could reveal Job's insight into nature (conservation) and the words "there is no one like him on earth" could be the exaggerated form illustrating that very few people were aware of such insights.

The Jobian cosmology

Job refers to the earth as Mother Earth and although there is a sense of ambiguity about the use of Mother, Job is specific in his usage because he clearly states that he will return “there”, indicating the earth. By using the metaphor Mother, the writer illustrates the kinship between humans and the earth, as humans are from the earth and they will return to it when they die. By referring to earth as Mother “Job introduces the Earth as a subject, a silent character in the story” (Habel 2000:66).

There is an initial sense of harmony between the two domains, but this “truce” is drastically affected as the narrative presents a sudden twist of fate because of the intervention of heaven on earth. “Job is framed “ (Habel 2000: 66) could be indicative of his helplessness to resist his and earth’s destruction. The writer’s imaginative style reveals that Job is at the mercy of a ruthless God who is relentless in his pursuit of His quarry. The cause of Job’s attitude towards God could be his inability to understand Gods purpose with creation, therefore Job considers God to be in cahoots with the antagonists of the natural world. Job feels that God has let down creation because of God’s “refusal” and hesitancy to intervene to stop the destruction of life.

Because of God’s apparent attitude, Job develops a reversal of his own perception of the traditional belief or worldview of God of his day. Habel (2000:69) describes this as follows:

“Job imagines an inverse cosmology. To escape God’s ‘onslaught’, Job envisages the option of death. In the first verse of the poem (Job 3:1) Job regrets his own birth and his attitude becomes even more desperate when he prefers death to his birth. Finally, Job contemplates Sheol (Job 2.7-8) as his final escape from a

vindictive God. By opting for Sheol the writer introduces a dualism in reverse, because of Job's preference of the earth to heaven."

Job may not only champion the earth's cause, but he also becomes the voice of the earth. Job 7 focuses on the human situation, but in chapter 12 Job expresses the voice of the other inhabitants of the earth namely, cattle, birds, fishes and the earth itself to challenge God's reluctance to intervene in the crises facing his own and all life. Job accuses God of being an accomplice in the devaluation of creation.

The Yahwistic cosmology

God's reaction to Job's tirades is one of wisdom. The writer uses his apparent "engineering" knowledge to mathematically describe God's precise "architectural construction" of the earth, thus further mystifying God's wisdom to Job. "God reveals gleefully to Job that he is the steward of the earth (*Oikos*) (Habel 2000: 75), the habitat of all the inhabitants. God's care for the earth is revealed in Job 38:26 where God ensures the rain falls in the wilderness, the place where no human lives.

The writer's apparent "scientific" knowledge is further expressed in terms of the law of gravity. In Job 38:8 –11, he exposes God's wisdom to confine the sea within its prescribed perimeters: "In-built boundaries and controlling processes are part of the ecology of Sea and, by implication, of Earth itself" (Habel 2000:75).

The writer explores a third dimension of God's creation by revealing an order or pattern that governs creation, for example how darkness and light operates. Everything has its operating principle in the ecological design of the earth and "the order and functioning of creation is not arbitrary or subject to direct divine

intervention” (Habel 2000: 75). Habel (2000:75) sums up the natural order as follows: “Everything has its assigned *makom* (place), its designated locus, whether it be dawn (Job 38:12) or even wisdom herself (Job 28: 12, 20).”

Finally, to reveal Job’s ignorance and inability to comprehend God’s wisdom, the writer uses irony to undercut Job’s stance on earth. Job prefers the netherworld (Sheol), but God challenges him to explain his experiences of the underworld, “the meeting house of all the living” (Job 30,23). According to the voice in the whirlwind the reaction of death is an integral part of the cosmic order, “even if its precise function remains part of the greater mystery of things, the door which Job has yet to penetrate” (Habel 2000: 76).

Conclusion

The traumatic afflictions Job endured affected his traditional worldview of God, heaven and earth. His value orientation towards God altered because he conceived God as an oppressor without any regard for nature. Regardless of Job’s acrimonious relationship with God, God displays His greatness by declaring that Job “has spoken the truth” (Job 42: 7).

The moral of the Job discourse is that reprisals serve no purpose, instead man should appreciate and enjoy the integrity, beauty and wisdom of the earth. The earth’s voice, value and its interconnected principles should always, be cherished and preserved by God’s entrusted custodians. The fathom of God’s wisdom is incomprehensible; therefore the purpose of his creation should not be devalued.

Song of Songs

An ancient song of celebration of love and (“green”) life

Introduction

One may see evidence in the imagery used in the Song of Songs, of something akin to the modern concepts of feminism and nature conservation. The differences between ‘urban’ and rural life, which incorporates the wild life of both the fauna and flora, suggests a knowledgeable individual.

As suggested, the writer could have had liberal inclinations and this aspect is detected by the inference of gender equality, opposing both class distinction and the patriarchal system that dominated and discriminated against women. The social environment of the writer’s period, “fourth or third century BC” (Viviers 2000:143), was conservative and the use of erotic subject matter to promote love and the appreciation of the natural world of “her” time could be considered challenging, outrageous and even daring. The culmination of this love is experienced in the ambiance of the natural world surrounded by its wild life. The aggressive style of the writer is regarded as subversive as, “it subverts patriarchy and the moral and religious mores of its time” (Viviers 2000:142).

The eco-justice principles of voice, interconnectedness and intrinsic value or worth of the earth are all illustrated by the writer of the Song of Songs. The writer also illustrates ancient Israel’s worldview of nature, namely that of harmony (cf. prelude to this chapter). In contrast to the “cool” feeling espoused by Israel towards wild nature (cf. again Schochet) the Song of Songs depicts the contrary. By using

different figures of speech, such as metaphors and personification, the writer reveals the kinship existing between man and nature.

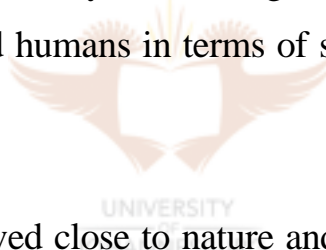
Nature, the haven of love and life

Scholars describe the natural environment of the lovers as a “rural retreat” and it indicates nature as a secluded arena where the lovers enjoy their sexual trysts (cf. Spring Song; Song 2:8-17). The lovers escape from the congestive ‘city’. In this type of environment the individual is forced to lead a stereotypical life governed by traditional restrictions.

The natural world, however, allows the lovers to give vent to their feelings and to enjoy uninhibited freedom. This is the desire the male lover wishes his female companion and lures her to swap her cultural lifestyle for a “lucrative” natural one. Nature is not only a pristine domain, “but a living companion- lively earth infusing all other life with its pulsating energy” (Viviers 2000:147). The animals found in the Song are often personified. The gazelle is regarded as the male lover (Song 2:8) illustrating the virility and vibrance of youth. Other animals, such as the little foxes, are compared to human lovers. They intrude on and interfere with the privacy of the lovers, while they are in passionate embrace. The writer of the Song also describes the plant life and the role it plays in the love scenes. The lovers enjoy their intimacy in a garden covered by vineyards and apricot trees (Song 1: 7-8; 2:16; 4:12-51 and so on). It is in this garden that their union as one is also realized, “My beloved is mine and I am his” (Song 2:16; cf. also 6:3; 7:10). Lilies are also named in the Song and it is amongst them that the lover browses.

In the second invitation of the “Spring Song” (Song 2:14) animals are further personified as the lover refers to his companion as a rock pigeon. The beauty, gentleness and the sweetness of the bird are characteristics that typify the personality of his lover. In the second invitation the writer also sketches the surroundings of their love haven as an inaccessible rock cliff. The implication here is that in the natural world man and animal share the same earth, they are inhabitants of the same habitat, a community that is akin to each other.

The woman is also compared to a garden, the symbol that brings forth life. This “garden” is perfect in comparison to the Eden of Genesis. The Eden of the Song is a domain where the inhabitants live in harmony with each other and all natural life and it is a world devoid of enmity. The Song also reveals the interrelatedness between the natural world and humans in terms of sharing natural resources. They are indeed interconnected.



Israelites were people who lived close to nature and through the use of metaphors Israelite writers indicate how both human and animal behaviour influenced each other. The animal kingdom is used to highlight certain human qualities displayed in them, for example the beauty and gentleness of the dove and the youthful vibrance of the gazelle. By identifying with nature in this manner, humankind’s oneness with the natural world is revealed and thus add value to and appreciation of it.

Plants are also used to underline this unity, for example as they are used to describe the woman, “the lilies amongst which the gazelle browses” (Song 2:16). Viviers (2000:150) emphasizes the essential “oneness” of humans and nature as follows: “Humans and nature belong together. In the wonders of nature we rediscover ourselves”.

The Song also reveals a sense of mutual incorporation through the sexual deed of the lovers and the human response to natural patterns, for example the seasons. The approaching of spring invigorates and kindles emotions: “the blooming flowers, vines and fig trees (Song 2:12-13) appeal to the lovers to do likewise” (Viviers 2000:15).

Nature’s worth is finally expressed in its mystical dimension whereby animals are “divinized” (cf. Song 2:7; 3:5; Viviers 2000:153). Both lovers refer to each other as a kind of “god”. Although God is not mentioned in the poem, his omnipotence is sensed in creation as “panentheism”

Conclusion

Israel may have adopted a “cool” relationship to nature, but in the Song of Songs the harmonious existence between all Earth’s inhabitants, humanity included, is magnificently expressed. The Song of Songs also reveals the interconnected nature of life, hence punctuating the intrinsic worth of the Earth and implying our responsibility to be its responsible stewards.

Ecclesiastes 3: 16-22 : Creation’s purpose

Introduction

Initially biblical scholars found it difficult to interpret Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 from an ecological perspective. This perception soon changed when the Earth Bible Team identified the six eco-justice principles to read a text namely, intrinsic worth, voice, purpose, interconnectedness, custodianship and resistance. For the purpose of this

analysis only the eco-justice principle of purpose will be considered although other principles such as intrinsic worth and interconnectedness will also come into play. The principle of purpose serves to “illustrate how opposing cycles or ‘patterns’” (Van Heerden 2000:155) interact with each other in the broader context of life. When these opposing cycles interfere or clash with each other they tend to diminish the very purpose of their function, hence, the outcome could be termed ludicrous or “absurdity” (Van Heerden 2000:154).

For a clearer understanding of the said text the terms “patterns” and “absurdity” of Van Heerden will be used, some African proverbs will also be utilized to give credence to the absurdities of life.

Purpose, intrinsic worth and interconnectedness : Eccl. 3:16-22

In Ecclesiastes 3:16 the scenario is one of injustice and wickedness, followed by verse 17 where the appropriate justice is expected and the reasons why this necessitates punishment are expounded. The perception of both these verses is that both the righteous and the wrong deeds of people would be punished accordingly. In verse 18 the expected justice is delayed and the reader is confronted by the fact of death and the comparison of humans to animals. Death is regarded as the equalizer, for in death every living soul is regarded as equal regardless of status. The two interacting patterns, which are highlighted here in terms of death, are wickedness and punishment (righteousness and reward) and that of birth and death (coming from earth and returning to it).

A problem arises when the interacting patterns interfere with each other, for example everybody has to die, but when an individual dies before justice has been

meted out, then the resultant outcome is considered unfair and absurd. This interference of death is also neatly demonstrated by the African proverb: “The leopard that prowls does not respect a sacrificial goat destined for the lubaale.” The goat had been prepared for a traditional occasion by its owner but when the leopard kills the goat it interferes with the purpose for which the goat has been cared for.

In verse 18 where the anticipated justice is expected of both the wrong and the righteous deeds of people, God stuns His audience by not only comparing humans to animals, but also equating the former and the latter. This comparison reveals the eco-justice principles of intrinsic worth and interconnectedness. “Humans cannot rely on their sense of righteousness to distinguish them from animals” (Van Heerden 2000:159). This characteristic does not elevate humans above animals because in terms of the eco-justice principle of intrinsic worth, humankind is defined as being part of the earth’s complex ecological system.

In verse 20 the oneness of both humans and animals is explicitly expressed because it clearly sketches the origins of both. Both animal and human originate from Earth and will eventually through death, return to it. Furthermore, both animal and human also share a common breath, inhaling the same air. If the respiratory function of either collapses they will succumb to death. “All living beings are interconnected through their bond with Earth” (Van Heerden 2000:160). An African proverb echoes this as follows: “Earth we are. Unexpectedly the time comes and we die” (Van Heerden 2000:160).

Conclusion

Although life may be regarded as absurd because of its disruption or interference

by interacting patterns, this absurdity should not negate life's purpose on this earth. Ecclesiastes urges its reader to “enjoy his work because that is his lot” (e.g. 9:7) and to accept life and make the best of it. Mankind is considered as steward of God's creation, therefore the protection and caring of God's creation is part of man's lot, his work.

2.3.2 New Testament

2.3.2.1 The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13): praying also for the earth

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer played a pivotal role in fashioning Christian theology and its ethos. The divine nature of the Prayer instills an awesome sense of faith and belief in its adherents. Due to the profound effect which the prayer has on people it can be employed within the context of the eco-justice framework to prompt responsibility also for creation. The version of the Lord's Prayer that is interpreted from an eco-justice perspective is that of the Gospel of Matthew (6:9-13).

The division of the Lord's Prayer

According to Balabanski the Prayer can be divided into two carefully structured sections (2000:154) namely, the first section and the second section. The opening line or invocation plus the closing line of the first section are linked by an inclusio and within this framework there are three petitions in the third person imperative called the “Thou” petitions.

In the second section, each petition is characterized by the plural form of the noun “we”, “us” and “ours”. These imperatives are therefore called the “we” petitions.

The First Section : collapsing the dualism between heaven and earth

The opening of the prayer evokes a cosmology of God’s absence from the earth and that God’s presence is only confined to the heavenly realm. This image creates a spatial dualism of God’s apparent preference of that domain. The dualism also implies the devaluation of the earth by contrasting its worth to that of heaven. The hallowing of God’s name implies subduing the earth through God’s will and reign, as determined in heaven.

A striking feature to nullify the spatial dualism is the earth’s own stance or cosmology in praying for the disintegration or collapse of the distinction between heaven and earth. The question arises, how will the distinction pertaining to the hallowing of God’s name, His reign and will be implemented? According to Balabanski (2000: 156): “The third person aorist’s imperatives in the prayer are intriguing, as they exhort God to effect these actions” to nullify the gap between heaven and earth.

A further question is if God alone will effect this action of collapse? Will the earth be involved? From an eco-justice perspective God and creation will be working together in the act of dismantling the distinction between heaven and earth. The earth and its communities are not passive characters, but they are co-creators with God in realizing the eventual purpose of the prayer to recognise God’s name, will and reign throughout creation. This is neatly implied by the opening of the prayer with “Our Father” and closing with “earth”.

The Second Section: praying for the earth also!

The petitions of the first section focus on the collapse of the heavenly and earthly realities while the second section focuses on the everyday realities. Everyday realities refer to the daily issues that characterize life such as debt incurrence, the need for daily bread, evil in all its forms, natural and unnatural calamities or disasters. These petitions denote the practical and mundane needs of life. Regardless of their mundane status, they are worthy to hallow God's name. (Balabanski 2000: 157).

The basic realities and the practical needs, determine the lifestyle of people worldwide. These needs in turn impact on the earth and its various communities. A contemporary example is Zimbabwe, a country that unequivocally demonstrates and defines what the mundane and practical needs of people are and the dire consequences when the natural resources are abused and mismanaged.



The debt petition serves a dual function because debt should not only evoke an individual indebtedness to God, but it should encompass one's indebtedness to one's fellow beings. From this premise the Prayer highlights that mutual indebtedness should be reciprocal, demonstrating our interconnectedness with each other. The interconnectedness is not exclusive to humans only, but it entails the entire creation.

The prayer commences with the words "Our Father" but ends with the "evil". This could suggest a cosmic dualism with the forces of good and evil in opposition to each other. The prayer addresses the scenario by especially stating that it is God alone who can deliver us from evil. The prayer also identifies evil. In central

America the destruction of the Amazon rain forest by international conglomerates ensures a ripple effect on the environment. To illustrate, the logging process destroys and disrupts the natural habitat and eco-systems necessary to sustain plant and animal life. From an eco-justice perspective Balabanski states (2000: 160): “it seems to me important that our contemporary cosmology is able to conceptualise evil, particularly given the reality of corporate evil”, thus highlighting the reality where the interest of one group gets credence over the interest of others.

Conclusion

The Lord’s Prayer projects the earth community as a living organism and not a passive recipient of divine action. Creation in its entirety can evoke and appeal to God and other members to desist evil and to pray for the welfare of all creation. The aim of the prayer is to project a balanced perception of God’s mutual interest in both the heavenly and earthly domains without neglecting either of his creation.



2.3.2.2 Revelation 21:1-22.5: Heaven comes to Earth

Introduction

The apocalyptic nature of the text complicates an eco-justice reading. Apocalyptic texts usually annihilate the earth or the earthly. Reid sums it up as follows: “apocalyptic material is often simply assumed to carry an annihilationist message- or at least one that fails to recognise the goodness of created matters” (2000:232-3). Revelation 21:1-22.5 is the revelation of John, of the new Jerusalem wherein the holy city is described in detail. The image, which John acquires, is of a new

creation, a new heaven and a new earth as the order of the old creation has passed away. According to the vision even the sea no longer exists.

The perceived message in Rev 21:1-7; 21:10

The voice messages that John received interpret the vision of the new Jerusalem. The messages come to John in the form of promises. The first promise explains the passing away of both the old order and death itself. The second promise reveals the new reality, Jerusalem that represents God's new creation.

The vision of a new heaven and new earth

The vision has a dual revelation. Firstly it evokes a sensual experience and secondly, the image of a mountain is noted. In the first instance the vision reveals a genuine creation because what is seen is believed and accepted as reliable. The senses of both the bodily and the earth are affirmed. The vision of the new reality which is apparently envisaged from the top of a mountain can be compared to the one evinced by Moses looking down onto the promised land (Deut 34:1-4). The metaphorical use of the mountain image evokes a sense of descent instead of ascent whereby the visionary looks down onto the panoramic expanse of the land and appreciates its fertility and goodness.

The sea is also envisaged to cease existing. The "end" of the sea is also the result of its abuse by human beings, for example, the misuse of the sea by the Roman Empire, for transporting their loot.

According to Revelation 21:1 the unimaginable has happened as the visionary depicts an image, which reveals that the old earth, heaven and sea have died. In reality none of these creations have died, instead they have been transformed into a new reality. The earth, like the martyred saints, is raised in glory by God.

Another prominent feature of Revelation is the visualization by the writer of a new city, Jerusalem, descending from heaven (Rev 21:2). This new city is personified and compared to a bride coming to meet a husband. This allusion to marriage by implication infers a sexual union, hence affirming “the inherent goodness of creation” (Reid 2000:239).

The descent of the city does not imply a dualism, instead “the new Jerusalem signifies the mutual permeability of heaven and earth” (Reid 2000:241). In this vision heaven ceases to be an isolated realm or domain beyond us, because in the new Jerusalem or the new creation, heaven and earth are unified, they have become one.

Conclusion

The purpose of this apocalyptic text is to highlight the earth as renewed or a new creation rather than a replacement or substitute of the former order. Although “redemption is interpreted cosmologically” (Reid 2000:240) it implies that there can be no redemption for humans without the earth itself being redeemed. Interestingly, heaven descends down to earth, acknowledging the earth’s worth! The redemption also expresses the interrelationship between humans and the environment, even though their surroundings are urban.

Revelation is not vociferous about the earth's non-human community, nevertheless, the silence of the text could indicate, "that nature is free, it has not been assimilated into the urban, human habitat" (Reid 2000:245). However, it implies that it has its place outside the walls of the new Jerusalem.

2.3.3 Summary: Christian perspectives on eco-theology

Chapter two provides an impression of the green dimensions encountered in Christianity. The following summary serves as a résumé that highlights specific salient points.

- Early Israel's worldview towards the natural world

Schochet acknowledges Israel's attitude towards the natural world in a balanced manner. He explains both the positive and the negative aspects of Israel's relationship with nature in terms of compassion and kinship or as derogatory and oppressive. Although the overall impression suggests that Israel appreciated nature, the fact remains that Israel's actual relationship with the natural world can be termed as "cool" and non-committal.

- Israel's worldview based on Simkins Comparative Model of Human Relations

Israel's worldview determined the value orientation it would adopt as a solution to a specific situation based on the ingroup/ outgroup scenario. The value orientation available to Israel was threefold namely:

- 1 A mastery-over-nature solution,
- 2 Harmony-with-nature solution,
- 3 Subjugation-to-nature.

The general consensus was that Israel preferred the harmony-with-nature solution and this attitude reflects its worldview of valuing and appreciating nature. Israel's preference to live in harmony with nature also suggests that it would not hesitate to defend the status quo should it be threatened by the outgroup.

- Bible

The “green” dimension found in Scripture is not exclusive to the Old Testament only as its tenets are detected in the New Testament as well. The “green” perspective is inclusive of the Bible and manifests itself in terms of the Earth Bible Series' six eco-justice principles.



The Principle of Intrinsic Worth

God communicates His satisfaction with creation and bonds with it. Rev 21: 1-22.5: The image of the heaven descending down upon the earth acknowledges the latter's worth. Song of Songs: Creation is granted a mystical status to a certain extent to illustrate its importance.

The Principle of Voice

Both God and the earth are co-subjects in mourning the wicked deeds of humans.

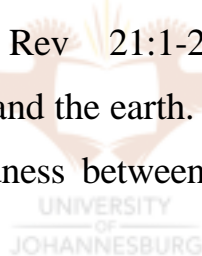
The Lord's Prayer: Creation and its communities can evoke God's mercy to desist evil.

The Principle of Custodianship

As stewards of God's creation, mankind should ensure the protection of his inheritance. God delegates the management and responsibility of caring for the land to His stewards.

The Principle of Interconnectedness

Life's interacting patterns tend to affect and influence each other for example wickedness and punishment. Rev 21:1-22.5: Redemption captures the interrelatedness between humans and the earth. Song of Songs: Through the use of personification the interconnectedness between the natural world and humans is revealed.



The Principle of Purpose

The purpose of mankind is to find enjoyment and pleasure in his lot or work, that is inter alia caring for God's creation.

The Principle of Resistance

The prophets applied the doom strategy to resist the oppression of the poor and by implication the oppression or abuse of the earth.

To conclude: when reading the Bible from an eco-justice perspective it is abundantly clear that Scripture resonates with “green” sentiments as espoused by the Earth Bible Series’ six eco-justice principles. Against this background it would therefore be an appropriate endeavour to investigate the Qur’an and Muslim traditions on similar lines to ascertain whether Islam embraces the same eco-justice principles. If this fact is discerned then the obvious contemplation would be to pursue and to facilitate mutual dialogue between the Christian and Muslim faiths to formulate an acceptable eco-theology. This endeavour can hopefully encourage and promote religious tolerance and mutual respect between the two respective faiths.



CHAPTER THREE

ECO-THEOLOGY: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 A different approach

It is important to note that a “green” appreciation of texts as envisaged by articles such as those in the Earth Bible Series cannot be expected or assumed from an Islamic perspective, since the Qur’an does not have specific and detailed narratives or discourses on ecology such as those encountered in the Bible (for eg Psalm 104, Job, et cetera). Instead, the Qur’an perceives creation in scattered and isolated verses reflecting Allah as the sole and major mastermind behind the creation. However, like the Qur’an, the Bible also lacks a single complete, cohesive and chronicled account of the entire creation.

In contrast with the Bible where human authors contributed to the compilation and completion of Scripture, Islam is pertinent and resolute in its stance that Allah is the sole author of the Qur’an (2:23; 10:38; 11:13-14; 17:88; 29:51). In Islam, the Qur’an is regarded as the absolute word of Allah. However, the Qur’an (80:15-16) does vividly depict the involvement of intermediaries in the writing of certain *suras* or chapters. These verses clearly state: “Written by hands of Scribes- Honourable and Pious and Just.”

According to the Qur’an the creation itself is regarded a sign of Allah’s power and mercy which He in turn has bestowed on mankind (13:1-7). The Qur’an paints

broad canvas strokes on Islam's stance on ecology as opposed to depicting a detailed exposition. However, when reading the Qur'an from an eco-theological perspective, one discovers significant overlapping and correspondence to the eco-justice principles in the Christian faith, as highlighted by Habel (2000:42-53).

3.1.2 Islamic thought

From the outset it has to be emphasized that Islam is a religion rooted very deeply in a set of fundamental traditions, customs and values. The oneness of Allah (God) and Allah being the sole creator undergirds the Muslim's worldview of creation. This premise is not only religiously stringent, but also rigid and inflexible because no Muslim will dare digress or divert from this traditional perspective or view. Consequently, liberalistic approaches to creation as encountered in other faiths, (e.g. feministic theology in Christianity) is not only rejected but also condemned by orthodox Muslims. To cite an example, the critical, analytical and liberalistic approaches employed by such groups as the Earth Bible scholars and eco-feminists is totally outlawed, taboo and considered blasphemous by Muslim scholars.

Therefore, to appreciate creation in terms of Islam one has to firstly, adhere to the principle of the oneness of Allah and understand the early Islamic worldview of creation within this view. The Islamic perception of creation is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the *hadith* literature and nothing else. The cornerstone of creation in Islam is the crucial Quranic verses, 6:73 and 2:117, because Allah need only say "Be, and it is". According to O'Shaughnessy (1975:204) the decree (*amr*) by Allah to create anything whenever He wishes to do so bears a resemblance to Yahweh's oral creative powers in the Old Testament. In Psalm 33:6,9 and Genesis 1:3 respectively, creation responds to God's oration as follows:

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.” In Genesis: “And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The word “Be” in the Qur’an may also have an eschatological dimension because in *surah* 2:117 the introductory verb “*Yaqulu*” states: “He says.” Thus whenever Allah decrees a matter He “says.” This verse may by implication infer a future world or creation.

In addition to the oneness of Allah, creation is embedded in a divine value system. Ibrahim (1989:19) emphasises, for Islam “values are a priori, given,” hence values are divinely given and eternal. Mankind did not create values. This belief does impact directly on Islam’s worldview on creation. It is obvious that a Muslim scholar’s approach to creation is defined by belief in a predetermined value system as espoused by the Qur’an, *shariah* and *hadith* literature.

3.2 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW ON CREATION



Islam is a monotheistic religion and prescribes to the oneness of Allah (God), implying that there is no other God to worship but Allah. Allah is also seen as the sole creator of the entire creation, He controls and maintains it through His eternal commands. The Qur’an states: “It is He who created the heavens and the earth in truth (i.e. proportions), and on a day He will say: ‘be’, and it evolves into ‘being.’ His words turn into truth (i.e. reality)” (6:73). This particular verse infers that creation is continual and not stagnant. The contextual interpretation of this verse demonstrates the continual creative powers of almighty Allah. It also implies: “Creatures are subject to time, but the Creator is not. His word is the key that opens the door of existence.” (A Yusuf Ali [1946] 1993: 896, footnote 308). Once again an eschatological sense is alluded at.

The Qur'an further states that the entire creation, every entity of it, praises Allah for its creative status: "All that is in the heavens and earth praises Allah, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Mighty, the Wise" (62:1). Creation does not only submit to the will of Allah or praises Him, but prostrates before Him: "Do you not see all things bow down to Allah, all things in heaven and earth. The sun, the moon and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the moving creatures and a great number of mankind" (22:18). All created things, both animate and inanimate, depend on Allah for their existence and this dependence can be construed as their *sajda* or bowing down in worship. Their very existence proclaims their dependence on almighty Allah.

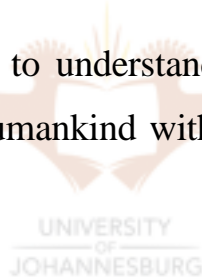
According to Islam, to prevent the destruction of the natural world one must follow the teachings of the Qur'an, *hadith* and the *shariah*. The following verse exemplifies this notion: "Do not mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear" (7:56). Masri (1992:22) concurs by stating, that if humankind can only submit themselves to the will of Allah and respect the laws of nature then in all probability most of the problems we encounter as individuals and as a universal family, including the ecological problem, can be overcome. The prophet Mohammed (S) regards creation as sacred and equates it with holiness, "The whole of this earth is a Mosque, that is a place of worship" (Negus 1992:38).

3.2.1 Science and Islam

The Islamic approach to science is encapsulated by the following statement: "Science then, which is a method that uses the intelligence, must be guided by the Qur'an, otherwise it risks being lost in a wilderness of opinion, theory and error" (Negus 1992:41). Negus compares Western science to Islamic science citing the

former's "futile" attempts to probe the origins of creation, which according to Islam, are the secrets of Allah. "With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He..." (6:59). According to Negus (1992:42) Western scientists invent theories from their experiments and observations in order to explain the origins of creation. Furthermore their findings exclude Allah whereas, the premise for the Muslim scientist, is that everything in creation has its origin in Allah. The latter's cosmology of creation is obvious because the Qur'an provides him with irrefutable evidence that Allah has created and manages the universe: "Your Guardian-Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth... (All) governed by the laws under His commands. Is it not His, to create and to govern?" (7:54; 10:3).

In order to enable human beings to understand His creation, God, according to Negus (1992:40), has provided humankind with the following guiding principles, namely:



- 1 Revelation through the Qur'an, which is the absolute truth,
- 2 The gift of human intelligence and,
- 3 The gift of human instincts.

"Intelligence should be guided by Revelation, and instinct should be guided by intelligence. As a result both intelligence and instinct can be guided by Allah" (Negus 1992:40-41).

As has already been implied, the major difference between the Muslim and Western scientific perceptions is that there is a tendency among Western scientists to invent theories based on their observations and experiments that completely

ignore and isolate God (Allah). God accordingly does not form part of the scientific endeavour. It is understandable that theories such as Darwin's theory of evolution and the Big Bang theory is alien to Muslim thought because their explanations practically exclude Allah and they do not have any basis in the Qur'an (Negus 1992: 42).

It is also wrong for modern Muslim scientists to use the Qur'an to prove such theories because it is unacceptable and wrong according to Negus (1992:42) to give credence and to justify scientific evidence or facts that are contrary to the Qur'an's teachings. In contrast, Muslim scientists must always explain creation in terms of their supernatural origin as this approach emphasizes and illustrates the sacredness of creation. Therefore, to show disrespect towards, or abuse creation, by implication, suggests a lack of respect and disobedience to Allah. Negus (1992:46) states: "the science that arose in Islam was therefore neither independent of the needs of the community nor disobedient to the will of Allah".



Khalid (1992:5) accepts that the Qur'an does not disagree with such scientific theories pertaining to the laws of nature that illustrate uniformity, consistency and functioning according to rules. However, Islam rejects the idea that the laws were devised by nature itself because, according to Islam, the laws of nature are prescribed and enforced by Allah. He created the entire universe, therefore, He knows the laws governing it (50:6-8).

The *shariah* (Negus 1992:45) distinguishes between five types of motives or actions that can apply to science and to life in general. They include, *halâl* (approved), *mandûb* (recommended), *mubah* (indifferent), *makrûh* (reprehensible) and *harâm* (forbidden). To illustrate, some of the technologies man applies to the

natural world are destructive and have dire consequences for life itself, for example deforestation, the destroying of eco-systems causing the extinction of flora and fauna, et cetera. These kinds of negative actions imposed on the environment by man on the environment belong to the categories *makrûh* and *harâm* (Negus1992: 45).

3.2 CREATION IN ISLAM

3.3.1 Creation in general

The Islamic religion like its Jewish and Christian counterparts, has its origins in the Middle East and therefore the obvious question arises, does Islam understand creation in terms of Judaism and Christianity? According to Timm (1994:83) “The answer turns out to be both yes and no.”

Timm (1994: 83-84) agrees that the references to Allah creating the world in the Qur’an are clearly related to the creation accounts found in the Bible, however, the differences are also conspicuous. When compared to Genesis the Qur’an does not include a single narrative on creation, instead it contains repetitive references to elements of several creation stories. Like the Bible, the Qur’an states that Allah created the world in six days (7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4), but the assertion that God rested on the seventh day is explicitly rejected by Islam because it demeans the glory and power of God to suggest that God required a rest period on completion of His creative work. Sherif (1995:28) substantiates this view by stating: “Allah’s motive in creating the entire universe causes Him no fatigue or weariness (2: 255 and 46: 33).”

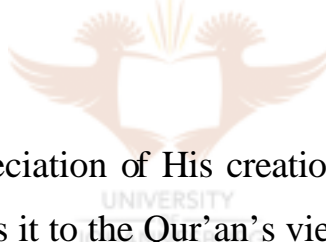
According to Timm (1994:83-84) the Qur'an concurs with the Bible that the earth was created in six days, but Sherif (1995:27) expounds on this concept even further, when he states the creation of the universe took place within a period of six thousand years. According to Sherif, "God's day equals one thousand years" (1995:27). Sherif substantiates his argument by referring to the Quranic verse: "a day in the sight of the Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning" (22: 47 and 32:4/5).

The Qur'an does not have a detailed account of the first human creation but it does concur with the Bible in naming the first human, Adam. The Qur'an like Genesis 2, describes Adam as being created from dust (3:59; 35:11; 40:67) or according to Timm (1998:84), "as suggested by the biblical image of God as a potter, out of clay" (6:2; 15:26; 38:71; 55:14; cf. Mishkat al- Masâbîh, 33).

Like the Bible, the Qur'an reveals that Adam assigned names to what Allah has created. In contrast to the Bible, the Qur'an describes Adam as merely expressing what God had revealed to him and thereby demonstrating God's power and knowledge and not Adam's (21:31-33). In the Qur'an Allah refers to Adam's "wife" while addressing him (Adam) (*surah* 4:1). In the Bible God does not use the term wife while addressing Adam. The term "wife" is however found in Gen. 2:25 and 3:20. Another difference is that the Qur'an does not expressly state that all humans are created in God's image (42:11). Ismail Hobson contradicts this view. According to Hobson (1998:37), "to be created as humans is, in accordance with a saying of the prophet Mohammed (S), to be created in the image of Allah". This implies that human beings are superior creations of Allah because they have powers, rights and duties above all other creatures including the angels.

Sherif (1995:26) further elaborates on the Islamic cosmology by stating: “Allah created seven heavens and has placed them one above the other over our earth”. These heavens are also placed in a perfect and faultless order above the earth so that each could orbit its approved course (2:29; 23:17; 67:3; 78:12). Sherif goes further and states that Allah is never unmindful of His creation (23:17). Therefore, Allah has also created an equal number of earths as well and quotes the Quranic verse: “ Allah is He who created seven heavens and the earth a similar number” (65:12).

According to Sherif, Allah’s greatest attribute is manifested as having the power to create anything from absolutely nothing, “the producer of being from non-being” (1995:26). This statement once again implies that God is the sole creator of His entire creation.



Sherif highlights God’s appreciation of His creation as reflected in Genesis 1:31, “it was very good”, and relates it to the Qur’an’s view (in the third person) in verse 23:12-14, “blessed be Allah, the best of creators”. He (Sherif) sees Allah as venting His emotions of satisfaction and appreciation on the completion of His creation.

Sherif makes the following interesting observation about creation in the Qur’an. Firstly, he states (1995:27-28) that the Qur’an “does not reveal the nature of the divine plan or the rationale and teleology of creation”. The Qur’an does state that the creation of mankind and *jinn* (spirits) was motivated by Allah alone to worship Him (51:56), but men and *jinn* are only a minor part of creation. Secondly, he states that the motive of Allah in creating the entire universe does not appear in the Qur’an, but that it is reported in *hadith* literature (Sherif 1995:28; cf. however 3.3.3).

According to one tradition attributed to the Prophet Mohammed (S), Allah says: “I was a hidden treasure. Then did I feel the love of being known, and I created the Creation in order that I should be known”. According to another tradition, Allah addresses the prophet as follows: “Were it not for thee, I would have not created the heavens” (Sherif 1995:28).

The words of the first tradition; “I was a hidden treasure” serve as an interesting example of a similar view, when this is compared cross culturally with the Earth Bible Series. The principle of the intrinsic worth of all creation is highlighted in both traditions.

Finally, Sherif (1995:28) states that creation is not a once off act “but may be renewed wherever Allah so wills (29:19-20; 50:15)”. Allah made this statement in the face of the non-believers who denied the resurrection possibility, therefore the Qur’an forecasts a “second or new” creation after the first (21:104; 13:5; 17: 52, 99).

3.3.2 The God of creation in early Islam

“The distinctiveness of the Qur’an’s description of creation becomes especially clear when its theological emphases are considered” (Timm 1994:84). To illustrate, references to creation in the Qur’an serve primarily to focus on Allah and His various attributes. The entire creation is therefore obligated and obliged to worship and praise Him as sole creator and give voice to the fundamental principle “ there is no God but Allah.”

The Qur’an emphasizes Allah’s sovereignty and power over all creation and the

phrase “ Allah has power over all things” is repeated several times in the Qur’an (2:106 and 109; 3:29; 5:19; 8:41; 9:39; 22:6; 29:20; 46:33; 64:1). The following texts reiterate that both heaven and earth are domains belonging to Allah: 2:107; 3:189; 9:116; 23: 84-89; 35:13; 57:2.

Although Allah is almighty, the Qur’an depicts Allah as being merciful and beneficent and this characteristic is reflected in the words: “God’s creation is a gift of God’s grace” (28:73; 35:3; 53:32). To some critics or commentators on Islam this attitude of Allah may elicit a sense of Allah being “stern and intimidating” (Timm 1994:85). However, to suggest this according to Timm (1994:85) “is to misrepresent the customary Islamic view of God”. Timm cites the *hadith* literature to defend his assertion and quotes the prophet Mohammed (S) as saying: “When God completed the creation He wrote the following which is with Him above His throne, ‘My mercy has taken precedence over my anger’” (al-Bukhari, vol.4, book 54, ch 1, 279 and Mishkat, 502).



According to Timm (1994:86), the creation accounts in the Qur’an clearly demonstrate Islam’s eschatological dimension as follows. Firstly, the Qur’an describes Allah as a Judge: “He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days.... That he may try you, which of you is best in conduct.” (11:7; 18:48). Secondly, Allah is not only recognized as the sole originator of life but He is also regarded as creation’s final destination: “and to God is the final goal [of all]” (24:42; 64:3). Thirdly, many of the Qur’an’s references to creation reveal Allah’s ability to raise the dead for the final judgment (17:51 and 98:99; 19: 66-67; 22:6; 50:15).

Consequently, within the context of viceregency, mankind as stewards or trustees,

are held responsible for the preservation and protection of God's most valued asset, creation. Should humanity fail in its duty, the implication is that God, as Judge, will proclaim on Resurrection Day His inevitable judgment on those who have transgressed His teachings on creation. The Earth Bible Series of mutual custodianship is neatly illustrated here in Islamic thought as well.

3.3.3 The purpose of creation according to Islam

The Qur'an states that Allah created the world neither "in jest" nor "for naught," thus indicating that God had a purpose for His creation (3:191; 21:16; 23:115; 38:27; 44:38-39). That creation should serve as a sign (*aya*) of Allah's goodness and power is thus of paramount importance. This in turn implies that the entire creation should serve and submit itself unconditionally to the will of Allah because of His mercy and benevolence.

Another purpose of creation, according to Islam, is that the world was created for the use of humans suggesting that creation had to meet human needs. To a lesser degree, the Qur'an states that creation should serve all creatures and not only humans (25:47-49; 55:10; 80:24).

According to Timm (1994:87) "the view of the world being created for human purposes, however, predominates in the early (Meccan) Islamic tradition".

3.3.4 The theological implications of Creation in early Islamic traditions

The early Islamic traditional perception of creation implies that creation's primary

function is religious or devotional, that is Allah's creation is good and therefore it necessitated and obligated both the animate and inanimate worlds to worship and praise Him (3:191; 7:54; 23:14; 32:7; 40:64; 67:3). This devotional motive is interlinked with passages affirming humankind's role as viceregents of God's creation. Humans are therefore expected to respond to Allah's beneficence and sovereignty by worshipping, praising and showing gratitude to Him. In *surah 22*, the question is asked after affirming that everything belongs to Allah: "Seest thou not that God has made subject to you... all that is on the earth? (22:65). *Khalîfa* (viceregent) is referred to in 6:165, "Yes, Allah it is, who made you (His) viceregent of the earth." The viceregent concept clearly echoes the eco-justice principle of mutual custodianship (Habel 2000:50-51). This specific concept of viceregents can however, also be translated as "successive generations."

The Qur'an and the *hadith* do attach value and appreciation to non-human life, however, they subordinate it to human life. For example, passages in the *hadith* literature allows for the killing of animals that are not desirable to humans such as rats, crows, certain kinds of dogs and snakes (cf. al-Bukhari vol. 4, book 54, ch. 14-16, 334-36 and 339-40; and Mishkat, 763, 876, 879 and 881-82).

Although non-human life is subjected to humans within the early Islamic tradition, the devotional motive also applies to them for they are perceived as having to praise and worship Allah. The verses 57:1; 59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1 postulate that: "whatever is in the heavens and the earth, let it declare the praises and the glory of God: for He is the Exalted in might, the wise." This is reminiscent of the last psalm of the Bible, Psalm 150.

3.3.5 The Ecological implications (consequences) of early Islamic thought

Timm (1994:89) aptly describes the ambiguous views of the Qur'an and the *hadith* literature on the creation as the “ecological fallout”. On the negative side some material may support an anthropocentric perception of the environment in which it is exploited for human needs and purposes. For example, the early Islamic traditions viewed the heavens and the earth as creation to serve humankind. According to this perspective, the inanimate and the non-human creation, though marginally appreciated, serves primarily as a functional or utilitarian object in service of humans. It has no intrinsic value but rather has an instrumental or materialistic value.

The verse, “Seest thou not that God has made subject to you (men) all that is on the earth” (22:65), indicates a perception of androcentrism and patriarchalism. This in turn could imply that by elevating humans to the role of viceregents (*khulafâ* Allah), Allah Himself is allocating a divine mandate to humans to rule over creation, hence, dominating the earth or even subduing it. The early Islamic school of thought does not bode well for the environment.

On the positive side, the Islamic emphasis on divine sovereignty outweighs and perhaps nullifies the detrimental perception of the concept of human viceregency. The act of entrusting creation to humans, as stewards of creation, may be perceived, not as an indication of absolute rule over creation but it could rather be regarded as a test to determine humankind's ability to be obedient, loyal and appreciative of Allah's creation. Allah may further be perceived as balancing this elevation of humankind by equating it in value with the animal kingdom. Although

man is regarded as Allah's viceregent on earth, He relegates mankind's status to that of a two-legged animal. 24:45 refers: "Allah has created every animal from water, of them there are some that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four."

A regard for the environment could be ascertained from the belief that creation is a sign of God's grace and sovereignty and the perception that the non-human creation is ordained to praise Allah along with humans. This view also implies that equal worth or "intrinsic value" (Timm 1994:89), is attached to the entire creation, every entity is deemed to have its own value because not only humans but also the entire creation praises Allah. The Earth Bible Series two eco-justice principles of "voice" and purpose is aptly reflected here as well.

Finally, the eschatological dimension of traditional Islam, regards Allah as a Judge and this concept reinforces the responsibility of humankind to creation in order to attain the afterlife (*Janna*).



3.4 ISLAM AND ECOLOGY

3.4.1 Intrinsic worth and custodianship of creation

It becomes necessary at this point to narrow down the focus on Islamic ideas on creation in general to ecological specifics.

The Quranic verse "Seest thou not that God has made subject to you (men) all that is of the earth" (22:65) could serve as the counterpart of Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image and let them rule over the fish of the sea..... over all

the earth....” Both these verses imply androcentric and patriarchal connotations and guided audiences worldwide to understand humans’ role in creation in this way. Due to the international outcry over the environmental crisis, Muslim scholars came to the fore to highlight the plight of the earth from an Islamic perspective. Like their Christian counterparts, for example the Earth Bible scholars, they “reinterpreted” texts from an ecological perspective but within the ambits of the Qur’an, *shariah* and *hadith*.

The importance of Allah’s creation was now articulated. The role of humans as *khulafâ* or guardians is recognized as the sacred duty Allah has ascribed to the human race. There are many verses in the Qur’an that describe man’s responsibility for creation for example: “It is He who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised in ranks, some above others; that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you.” (6:165).

According to Haleem (1998:5), the Qur’an encourages human beings to investigate and to contemplate creation and even to find fault but it asserts that human efforts will always be an exercise in futility. The reason being that Allah’s creation is so complicated that the human mind will never be able to fathom nor comprehend it. The Qur’an states: “Humans cannot comprehend anything of His knowledge, unless He wills it” (2:255). According to Islam then, investigating creation should not imply conquering it, instead, the individual should observe and marvel at the natural laws of Allah that guide and manipulate the natural world.

According to the Qur’an, Allah has created a balanced (15:19) and interrelated creation. The slightest disturbance of this balance by humankind can have a rippling effect on the environment (e.g. the destruction of the ozone layer). The

“balance” concept incurred by the Qur’an does not only imply “ecological balance” but it also refers to “the balance of justice which weighs the deeds of human beings, the balance of right and wrong” (Haleem 1998:7). Therefore, according to Haleem there is a right way to live and a wrong way, and if people obey the laws and instructions of Allah, the balance will be maintained. He expounds the concept further by stating that it is only Allah that can restore the balance and when He does so, it will be at the expense of the wrongdoers (7:56).

The following quote significantly encapsulates the Islamic perspective on creation and interestingly, resonates with the philosophy of the Earth Bible scholars. Nasr (1998:120) states: “the soul which is nourished and sustained by the Qur’an does not regard the world of nature as its natural enemy to be conquered and subdued but as an integral part of man’s religious universe sharing in his earthly life and in a sense even in his ultimate destiny”. The quote poignantly and eloquently illustrates that the Islamic view of the natural world is firmly rooted in the Qur’an, which is regarded as the very word of Allah and “which is the central theophany of Islam” (Nasr 1998:119).

In the Qur’an, theophany and creation both shroud, unveil and reveal Allah in terms of His signs (*âyat*). Nasr (1998:120) further claims: “Allah Himself is the ultimate environment which surrounds and encompasses man”. The encompassing feature of Allah is declared as follows; “But to Allah belong all things in the heavens and on the earth: and He it is who encompasseth (*muhît*) all things” (2:115). The verb “encompasseth or *muhît*” is not equal to pantheism, instead it should be understood within the context of God’s creative powers. The term “encompasseth” can also be used in a negative sense (2:19). In this particular verse a graphic simile is used to illustrate how Allah encompasses even the unbelievers.

According to Nasr (1998: 121) the noun *muhît* also means environment. Consequently, the natural and the environmental crisis the world is experiencing can be attributed to the fact that man has refused to view Allah as the true “Environment” which surrounds and nourishes life (Nasr 1998:121). The destruction of creation is the result of modern man observing the natural world “as an ontologically independent order of reality, divorced from the Divine Environment without whose liberating grace it becomes stifled and dies” (Nasr 1998:121). To regard Allah as all encompassing (*muhît*) signifies the sacred quality of creation and therefore humanity should respect and appreciate the creative artistry of Allah. The intrinsic value of creation is expressed, (cf. Earth Bible Series) hence as *khalifa[t]* of Allah, (servant of Allah), man must obey the commandments of Allah and he must also ensure cosmic harmony.

Finally, humankind has a well-developed brain, which allows one to discern between right and wrong or between virtue and evil. Because of this capacity, we have the freedom of choice based on our intellect and knowledge inferring thus our added responsibility of caring for and protecting God’s creation. Masri (1992:1) reminds humanity that it is our responsibility to care for and protect God’s entire creation including the resources that sustain life itself. The responsibility assigned to humans is inclusive because it entails caring for both the animate and inanimate worlds of creation. Masri (1992:2) reiterates the Islamic view that the entire creation, including humans, is obliged to observe the natural laws. The observance of God’s laws would in turn ensure that harmony exists between man and the natural world.

Although the Qur’an describes humanity as the pinnacle of creation, it also tells us in the same verse that people degrade themselves to the lowest levels

(Qur'an 95:4-5). This verse indicates the corrupt nature of mankind.

It is evident from the above that the Islamic ecological awareness reverberates with the principles of stewardship and intrinsic worth or value, explicated by the Earth Bible Series. Both faiths speak from the “same mouth.”

3.4.2 Monism instead of dualism

Islam opposes the influence and impact of Western dualistic thought on creation. (cf. Habel 2000:30; 40-42). Khalid (1994:2) states that Islam does not make a distinction between the spiritual and the physical welfare of humanity. When one deals with humanity and ecology one should always be conscious of the fact that the earth is also inhabited by various other species or organisms that require equal and just treatment.

The essence of creation within the context of Islam, is that humanity should subscribe itself to the oneness of Allah, because He created the universe plus everything therein. He also orders and governs creation by implementing His laws, the laws of nature. The subjection of creation to His will and laws eliminates the dualistic distinction between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Allah does not only subdue creation, He also expects it to prostrate itself unto Him in order to express its appreciation of His greatness. The oneness aspect of Allah evokes a sense of equality and worthiness for both the animate and inanimate worlds and thereby eliminating the dualistic thought.

3.4.3 Why degradation in Muslim countries?

The obvious question then must be, if Islam is so resolute in its approach to creation, why then do Muslim countries experience environmental degeneration or abuse? The reason according to Timm (1994:91) is “abject poverty.” The lack of social and economic resources dictate the attitudes of people towards the natural world. Basic needs for food, water and education determine life’s agenda and ecological sustainability is marginalized. In such circumstances people’s thoughts and aspirations are confined by and limited to, their daily needs. Another reason contributing to the neglect of the environment is “the impact of modern, Western science and technology” (Timm 1994: 91) on Muslim countries. The Western influence and its successes have profoundly influenced the Muslim world and because of this influence the Muslim nations are gradually being alienated from their religious beliefs and roots. The lure of Western technology and riches is so powerful and defining that the Islamic worldview of caring for creation may soon be a notion of the past.

3.5.1 ISLAM AND NATURAL RESOURCES

In this section the ecological focus will be narrowed down further and natural resources will be highlighted.

The ecological problems that we are encountering today could be ascribed to humans who are using scarce resources wastefully and who do not allow the earth to regenerate itself sufficiently. The depletion of resources ultimately leads to our own detriment and therefore to curb this practice Masri (1992:6) advises: “The

laws of nature are based on its own rhythm; we must learn to operate in accordance with that rhythm.”

The early Muslims considered all the elements of nature to be common property of all creatures. According to Islamic law the elements of nature such as land, air, water, fire, forests et cetera, are regarded as common property of all and not only for human usage alone, but for the purpose of all creatures. With reference to the use of natural resources Masri (1996:6) states: “Our right to use the natural resources is only in the sense of usufruct”. This translates into having the right to utilize another person’s property on the understanding that you will not damage, destroy or waste whatever is placed in your trust. Therefore, as custodians of God’s creation, it is humanity’s inevitable responsibility to ensure that eco-justice prevails at all costs.



The Qur’an interestingly contrasts human behaviour, in terms of the utilization of resources, with that of animals. The Qur’an states: “Seest thou that unto Allah pays adoration all things that are in the heavens and on earth.... However, there are many humans who do not, and deserve chastisement” (22:18). According to this verse animals have understood the laws of nature and have obeyed them better than humans by using natural resources in a sustainable manner. In addition, the following verse could have prophesied or predicted the destruction of the natural world by humans which Moslems may have chosen to ignore: “corruption has appeared over land and water on account of what man’s hands have wrought” (30:41). According to Masri (1992:8-14) this prediction of 1,400 years ago by God has been fulfilled in our time through such things as the pollution of the water and air and deforestation.

3.5.1 Land

Traditional Islamic law divides land into the following categories, developed land (*'imir*), underdeveloped land (*mawât*), protective zones (*harîm*) and reserves (*himan*) (Dutton 1998: 59).

The developed land may be broadly subdivided into settlements and agricultural lands while underdeveloped land may be divided into rough grazing land and virgin wilderness. The first three of the above categories reflect the main types of human activities, which are trade, agriculture and pastoralism. The last category reflects the absence of human activity.

Land that is underdeveloped may be regarded as the general property of the community (communal land), but instances where the land is developed could be regarded as the private property of an individual. The sharing of the land resource is explained as follows: “There is, therefore, no concept in Islam of everybody having a general right to the countryside, nor on the other hand, can all the land be sequestered by particular individuals” (Dutton 1998:59). Every development, for example settlement, agricultural field, well or canal has its associated protective zone called *harîm*. This area or zone must remain free to all the people associated with the development, for example, the area around a village, which the villagers use to acquire their firewood, or the area required for grazing their livestock.

Land, which is underdeveloped, may be set aside permanently by the community for reserves or *himan* areas for special purposes such as grazing land. According to Khalid (1992:56) *himan* areas could be used to preserve plant species, animal reserves and the rehabilitation of degraded land.

Islam also advocates the reclaiming of desert land. If arid land is cultivated and it becomes productive the benefit for humans, animals and plants could be immense. For example, nomads with their livestock could flourish by enjoying a new resource, which provides them with the necessary sustenance and possible new areas for settlements. The rejuvenation of arid land has always been an important Islamic value. The prophet Mohammed (S) states; “Whoever brings dead land to life, for him there is a reward in it, and whatever creature eats from it, but it shall be reckoned as charity for him.” (Llewellyn 1998: 89 quotes his reference as Mishkat al-Masabih).

Ihya is an Islamic law jargon for bringing to life uncultivated or abandoned land that allows the individual to stake a claim on such land with the proviso that he would bring it “to life.” The individual could claim the land by fencing it in thereby ensuring the development of it through cultivation, erecting of buildings, digging a well or irrigating it. If the land has not been revived after a period of three years, the individual or cultivator stands to lose his right of ownership thereby allowing other parties to claim it. The acquisition of land through *Ihya* is permissible according to Islamic law as long as it does not harm or impede the general welfare of a community and the environment. For example, the owner cannot lay claim on natural resources such as watercourses, pastures, woodlands or wildlife habitats. According to Llewellyn (1992:93) Bukhari states: the principle of reviving arid land is decreed by the prophet Mohammed (S) as follows: “Whoever revives dead land, it shall be his.”

3.5.2 Water

Water is one of the major themes of the Qur’an, in fact “the word water (*mâ*)

occurs sixty times” in the Qur’an” (Haleem 1998:103). The importance of water in the Qur’an is expressed as follows: “We made from water every living thing” (21:30). According to the *hadith* literature water in its natural state in *mawat* or underdeveloped land is considered as common property. Water resources are divided into three main categories according to Islamic law and they are rivers, wells and springs.

Large natural free flowing rivers should serve any individual needs including his cattle or agricultural land by diverting the water via channels to his farm. In the case of rivulets, the community upstream has the right to the water flow, but according to the ruling of the prophet Mohammed (S), once dam water reaches ankle depth, it should be released to serve the people downstream.

In the case of wells, those that have been dug for public use allow everybody the right to a fair share of the water for his particular needs. However, in the case of desert dwellers that have dug their own wells, the well belongs to the group temporarily. When the group leaves the terrain the well belongs to whoever occupies the encampment next.

In the case of the springs, the same rationale applies pertaining to rivers and wells. Water also plays an important role in the religious life of Muslims because before a Muslim prays he has to perform an absolution (*wudû*) with water. The prophet Mohammed (S) stresses the importance of water as follows: “Cleanliness is part of faith”. The Qur’an 5:7, underscores this facet: “O you who believe, when you rise to pray, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbow, wipe your heads and your feet to the ankle...”

3.5.3 Animals

Islam takes a strong stance against animal abuse and opposes any form of cruelty towards them, for example using animals in sporting activities such as bull fighting and dog fights. The removal of young calves from a herd to be slaughtered as veal is also opposed including the killing of animals for commercial purposes such as killing elephants for their ivory and foxes and crocodiles for their skins. The use of animals for medical research and scientific experiments is also disapproved. Some people do not only degrade animals but they also treat them as though they have no feelings. In this regard Masri (1992:18) quotes Shu'ab-al-Imam who states: "All creatures are like a family (*ayal* or *âl*) of God: and He loves the most those who are the most beneficent to his family."

The Qur'an reinforces this compassion concept and states that animals like humans are communities and are loved by God in much the same way as humans. "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities (*umam*) like you" (6:38).

This idea of compassion is sensitively elicited by the prophet Mohammed (S) who according to Masri (1994:18) noticed a grief stricken mother bird hovering above her empty nest. On investigating, He discovered that His companions had removed the fledglings from their nest and immediately instructed them to return the nestlings to their mother's nest (In Deut 22:6 the mother is spared but the eggs or young may be taken). God's love for the animal kingdom is further illustrated in the Islamic literature of Bukhari and Muslim. The prophet Mohammed (S) told his companions that a certain Prophet in the olden days was stung by an ant and he ordered his followers to burn the entire nesting colony. God became so infuriated

and reprimanded him as follows: “Because one ant stung you, you burnt an entire community that glorified Me.” God’s caring love and concern for animals is further indicated through communication between God himself and the animal world. The following verse reveals God’s instruction to bees: “And your Lord revealed to the bees; Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in human habitations” (16:68). The Qur’an (24:41) declares: “Each creature knows its prayer and psalm and so does God know what they are doing. And yet, you understand not how they declare His glory”.

The attitude God reveals to the animal kingdom echoes the eco-justice principles of intrinsic value and voice. The intrinsic value attached to animals is appropriately complemented by the *hadith*, “A good deed done to a beast is as good as doing good to a human being, while an act of cruelty to a beast is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being.” Masri (1994:18) quotes his reference as Mishkat al-Masabîh. The above *hadith* implies that the treatment of animals should be on par with that offered to humans, thus equating the animal’s worth to that of humans. In this context, the status of human beings is not elevated instead, it is equated to that of an animal.

Animals are divided into two groups namely, domestic and wild animals. Domestic animals refer to animals that can be slaughtered for human consumption and secondly those animals used for functional purposes for example, oxen to plough the fields.

Islam allows the hunting of wild animals such as, deer, gazelles, et cetera, with the proviso that they are properly and humanely killed. Predators may only be killed if

they pose a threat to human life or if they are rogue animals killing a farmer's livestock.

It is also interesting to note that the Qur'an does not prohibit the hunting of animals. It stipulates: "O ye who believe... Ye may hunt." (5:3). It also approves the use of animals during hunting and it states: "They ask thee what is lawful to them... And what ye have taught your trained animals (to catch) in a manner directed to you by God" (5:5). The applicable law in this instance, is that the owner of the trained animal, for example hounds, hawks or cheetahs should say *Takbir* (pronounce Allah's name) before he releases his animal on its quarry. This form of hunting is regarded as *halâl* (permissible). The animal that was hunted and killed should only be used for consumption purposes.

3.5.4 Plants



Masri (1992:12) claims that legislation was proclaimed fourteen hundred years ago to protect and preserve fauna and flora. According to these laws protected areas called *harim* were set aside solely for conservation purposes and the development and erection of buildings or cultivation thereof was prohibited. The ecological legislation was based on the Qur'an and the sayings of the prophet Mohammed (S). The value attached to plant life is cited by Him as follows; "Whoever plants a tree and looks after it with care, until it matures and becomes productive, will he be rewarded in the Hereafter" (Masri 1992:12).

When the prophet Mohammed (S) became the ruler of Mecca and Medina, He declared that the native trees and animals found in and around these cities were to be protected by the following decrees: "I declare Medina to be sacrosanct

throughout the area between its two mountain paths, so that... leaves may not be eaten off them except for fodder.” (Masri 1992:12 quotes his reference as *Mishkat al- Masabih*). As for the wildlife He decreed, “The game in Mecca is not to be molested nor its fresh herbage cut.” According to Llewellyn (1994:89) the Prophet forbade the cutting of any trees found in the desert which provided valuable shade and sustenance to both humans and animals.

These laws were enforced by decree and anybody transgressing them had their tools confiscated. The tools became the property of the person who witnessed and reported the transgressor. When the Prophet died His successor, (*Hazrat*) Abu Bakar (r), maintained the status quo by instructing his troops to observe the value of trees when entering into battle. He is quoted as saying “Do not cut down trees and do not kill animals except for food.” (Masri 1994:13 quotes his reference as Tabari, *Exegesis of the Qur’an*).

3.5.5 Minerals

Mineral deposits are classified as either “open” (*zahir*) or “closed” (*batin*) deposits. Open or surface deposits are considered common property and may be acquired on a first come first serve basis. This type of mining which includes salt, pitch, et cetera, cannot be assigned by the government to a particular party or individual.

“Closed” deposits encompass the extraction of minerals from the earth for example mines. According to Dutton (1992:66) the issue of ownership in this regard differs amongst Muslim scholars because the deposits are produced naturally. However, if an individual develops land and discovers any metal on it, he automatically acquires rightful ownership of the land. If gold or silver is mined, the owner is

obliged to contribute 2.5 percent of his gross annual income to *zakat* or charity. The payment of the *zakat* should be done on an annual basis.

Islam is a proponent of the economic utilization of natural resources because by adopting the correct conservation strategies sustainability is ensured. The verse 7:31 attests to this approach: “Eat and drink, but waste not by indulging in excess; surely God does not approve of the intemperate”. According to Khalid (1992:106), Islam encourages mankind to accept: “the art of living in the *fitra* state, that is, the natural state, in balance and harmony with nature.” This approach to the natural world incidentally echoes the cross cultural sentiments of ancient Israel’s attitude towards nature. Living in balance and harmony with nature further implies the interconnected nature of creation whereby various eco-systems, each with their own bio-diversity, are mutually dependent upon each other. Khalid (1992:106) aptly sums up and unknowingly echoes the essence of the Earth Bible’s principle of interconnectedness as follows: “Everything is connected with each other and each with whole.” He astutely reminds the human species that they are also connected to Allah’s creation. The Quranic verse accentuates this concept: “God most gracious...He has set up the balance of justice. In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance...Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny.” (55: 7-9, 13).

3.5.6 Conclusion

Hobson (1998:97) aptly extrapolates the Islamic perspective of creation as follows: “In Islam the rules of religion are not separate from ordinary life, or from research, or from the application of scientific knowledge, but are intrinsic and in fact, determinative. It is for this reason that equilibrium is maintained. The branches of

knowledge are all branches of a single tree whose roots are grounded in the belief in one God. From this derives the sense of unity and balance.”

Islam, like Christianity, attaches significant value to creation and also strives to ensure that the bio-diversity of our natural world remains protected. To illustrate its concern for the earth and animal life the following examples elicit the Qur’an’s view. The Qur’an takes a definite stance against violence on animals and it attaches value to animal life by prohibiting the consumption of an animal’s flesh, which died by violent means. In cases where animals have been killed by strangulation, violent attacks or have been gored to death, are considered not edible for human consumption. The animal’s blood is also considered not to be *halâl*. “Forbidden to you for food are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine...” (Qur’an 5:4).

The value and importance of the earth is also coupled to the purification ritual (*wudû*), which Muslims has to undertake before worship. A Muslim has to perform an ablution with water before praying, but when water is not available then he is obligated to utilize the next source of cleansing, namely the earth (Qur’an 5:7). He has to dab his hands into the earth and use the dust or sand to rub onto his face and arms. This ritual proclaims his readiness to worship and pray unto Allah.

The prophet Mohammed (S) attaches value to plants as follows: “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field and men and beast and birds eat from it, all of it is charity on his part.” (Naseef 1998:13). The interconnected and functional nature of plant life is neatly expressed.

It can be concluded that the value attached to the natural world features prominently in both the Christian and Muslim faiths. It is imperative, therefore, for

both faiths to protect our God given heritage for our future generations.

3.6 SUMMARY OF ISLAM'S PERSPECTIVE ON ECOLOGY

In this chapter the fundamental and traditional perspectives adopted by Islam on creation have been highlighted, albeit in broad canvas strokes. It is important to note that Islam's traditional worldview on creation explicitly defines how contemporary Muslim scholars should approach any focus on eco-theology. The following salient points are highlighted:

3.6.1 Islam and creation.

- Islam is a monotheistic faith and it emphasizes the sacrosanct nature of the oneness of Allah and the holiness of the Qur'an. Although similarities pertaining to creation can be detected in both faiths, the approach to defining creation in terms of Islam will differ vastly to that of any other non- Islamic endeavour.
- Allah is not only regarded as the sole creator of the entire creation but He is also deemed to be the sole author of the Qur'an. The Qur'an, therefore, has no human authors and it, together with verified authentic resources such as the *hadith* and the *shariah*, describes the nature and the origin of creation.
- The adoption of Western or any other critical ideologies (e.g. feminism) in order to study and to understand creation is taboo in Islam because it deems to undermine the integrity of Allah as creator (A Yusuf Ali [1946] 1993: 2:23; 10:38; 11:13 and footnotes 2289).
- The Qur'an lacks a cohesive documented account on creation, instead it contains scattered and repetitive references to elements of creation.

However, there are references to creation that synchronize with those found in the Bible, for example, Allah created the world within six days and Adam is regarded as the first human creation.

- The early school of thought reflects androcentric and patriarchal tendencies because it supports the notion that creation was subjected to serving the needs of humans and especially males.
- The degradation of the natural world by mankind also revived an awareness amongst modern day Muslim scholars of the plight of the world and the need to ensure the protection of our natural heritage. The traditional utterances of the Qur'an, *shariah* and *hadith* gave new impetus to the responsibility of Muslims worldwide to act as viceregents of Allah's creation.



3.6.2 Islam and science.

- Islam questions the validity of Western science because it excludes both Allah and the Qur'an in its efforts. Islam portrays creation as a divine secret and only Allah can reveal its mysteries, not humankind. For the Muslim scientist then, his whole approach to understanding creation is not only divinely prescribed but predetermined.

3.7 CROSS CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

Although there is uniqueness in Islam there are also similarities with Christianity, when the two faiths are compared cross culturally.

The following eco-justice principles as envisaged by the Earth Bible Series, are definitively echoed (be it unknowingly) by their Muslim counterparts:

- The principle of mutual custodianship.

Qur'an 6:165: "Yes. Allah it is, who made you (His) viceregent on (literally: "of ") the earth." The text clearly indicates Allah designating the responsibility of protecting and preserving the earth to humans. The respective verses 11:7; 18:48 and 17:51 and 98-99; 19:66-67; 22:5; 50:15 reflect the eschatological facet of Islam whereby individuals will be held accountable on Judgement Day for their positive or negative contribution towards the welfare of the earth. This stance mirrors the importance Allah places on His creation.

- The Principle of Intrinsic Value /Worth.

The Qur'an not only stresses the idea that the entire creation belongs to Allah but it also stipulates His encompassing presence. "To Allah belong the East and the West.... There is the presence of God. For God is all-pervading." (2:115). To regard Allah as encompassing (*muhît*) signifies the sacred quality of creation, hence mankind should respect and appreciate the creative artistry of Allah. As viceregents of Allah humans must not only ensure cosmic harmony but they should always be obedient to His commandments.

The value that Islam attaches to animals and plants is elicited as follows. Firstly, the Mishkat al- Masabîh; states: "a good deed done to a beast is as

good as doing good to a human being, while an act of cruelty to a beast is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being.” The above *hadith* implies that the treatment provided to animals should be on a par to that provided to humans thereby equating the status of humans with that of animals. It also infers or implies God’s concern for the well-being and welfare of His creations.

Secondly, the value attached to plants is described by the prophet Mohammed (S) as follows: “whoever plants a tree and looks after it with care, until it matures and becomes productive, will be rewarded in the Hereafter” (Bukhari and Muslim). This text clearly indicates the role trees played during ancient Islam because trees were regarded as a valuable resource that provided people with various edibles and shade, a concept still relevant today.

- The Principle of Voice.

The Qur’an declares: “Each creature knows its prayer and psalm and so does God know what they are doing. And yet, you understand not how they declare His glory”(24:41). The text implies that only God understands the intricate process of how animals communicate with each other and unto Him. It further implies how animals reveal their needs during prayer and how they hallow His name.

- The Principle of Interconnectedness.

This principle stems from the oneness of Allah. Being the sole creator of

the entire universe His laws, the laws of nature, govern and regulate the interactions and interrelationships of patterns and phenomena of creation.

- The Principle of Resistance

This principle is illustrated, inter alia, by the angels on behalf of the earth and its components. The earth, in this instance, appears to be a subservient subject. The angels are showing a form of resistance in terms of their apprehensiveness and “dismay” in questioning Allah’s decision to place man as His viceregent on the earth. The angels apparently anticipate and contemplate mankind’s wicked nature and therefore, subtly voice their concern for the earth as follows: “about to create a viceregent (or successive generations) in the earth, they said: Wilt Thou place therein, one who will do harm therein, and will shed blood?” (2:30). In this scenario the angels become the voice of the earth ensuring its justice.

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- The Principle of Purpose

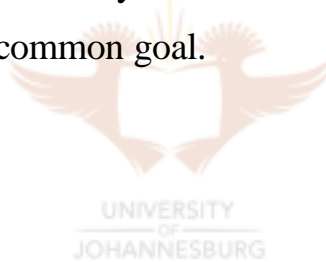
“This principle cannot be explained in terms of the Earth Bible project’s definition of ‘purpose.’” Although the purpose of creation is explained in the Qur’an, its main function is to endorse the following divine prerequisites:

- 1 Creation should serve as a sign of Allah’s goodness and power.
- 2 Creation should submit and serve Allah’s will and purpose.

To conclude: it is clear from the above resume that, even though important

differences do exist in the interpretation and the appreciation of creation by both the Muslim and Christian faiths, there is considerable evidence of similarities between them. This is significant as it indicates that both faiths share a common quest to appreciate God's mysterious creation.

With this shared and highly valued interest in nature and creation, both faiths can now establish a common agenda on nature conservation and perhaps, even religious tolerance. Their fundamental appreciation of the earth and earthlings is not that different at all. In fact there are undeniable parallels between them. Naseef (1998:13) echoes the "green" sentiments expressed by the Earth Bible Series so fittingly: "The world is green and beautiful and Allah has appointed you as stewards over it." This quote can only serve as a vanguard or nexus urging both faiths to join hands to serve a common goal.



CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS: DIALOGUE AND COMMON AGENDA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The centuries of dissension and intransigence displayed by both Christians and Muslims towards each other's religion can only be ascribed to ignorance, the lack of knowledge and understanding of the other's belief system. Waardenburg (1998:2) illustrates this perception as follows: "In fact, one should speak on both sides of a crisis of man's religious consciousness." Religion was initially studied to determine the truth, "nowadays it is studied as an object to be interpreted" (Waardenburg 1998:2).

The new paradigm shift to the objective interpretation of religion may not be easily and readily accepted by conservatives or fundamentalists from both religions. In the event of a threat neither would hesitate to vehemently defend their respective faiths. The annals of history are well documented with religious battles and are also tainted with the atrocities committed by extremists or fundamentalists in the name of religion.

Although at grassroots level both Christians and Muslims may still view each other with scepticism and contempt, the fact remains that since the second half of the 20th century significant changes have occurred in mutual perceptions between Muslims and Christians. Waardenburg (1998:1) refers to these changes as "significant changes in image formation". This in turn implies that a greater openness and co-

operative relationship has developed between the moderates and liberal thinkers of both faiths. For example, the Roman Catholic Church was the first Christian institution to initiate dialogue with Islam and later the major Protestant Churches followed (Waardenburg 1998:7).

Waardenburg (1998:10) discerns between two groups of Muslim thinkers namely, the radical fundamentalists and the moderate fundamentalists. The former rejects Christianity, because according to them Christianity has deviated from the teachings of Jesus. Secondly, Christianity has been diluted with pagan features and it is being dominated by an institutionalized hierarchical structure, the church. The moderate fundamentalists, however, believe in participating in both politics and engaging in dialogue with other religions. They also believe that Muslims and Christians have common roots from the past and that each has its own sacred book. Waardenburg (1998:2) illustrates Muslim-Christian relations by citing for example, Abdelmajid Charfi's approach to problem solving. Charfi chooses to concentrate on those problems which confront both faiths and then to compare respective responses to these problems.

4.2 INTERFAITH DIALOGUES

In order to determine the degree to which inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims has been promoted, the perceptions and initiatives instigated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, radical and moderate Islamic authors will be analysed briefly. It should be stressed that the efforts of moderate Islamic scholars to enhance interfaith dialogue does not necessarily represent the perceptions and sentiments of the broader Muslim world. The relevance of such authors may not represent the norm, but they nevertheless

give one an insight into current Muslim attitudes in this regard. Waardenburg (1998:9) declares that the existence and activities of these liberal minded Muslims should be recognized as significant because “ a century ago such people would have been difficult to imagine.”

Although the essence of this mini-dissertation focuses on a common Muslim and Christian perception of eco-theology, mutual theological and ecclesiastical reflections and their implications on promoting tolerance and respect between the two faiths will also be highlighted. The understanding of scriptural interpretation together with its differences is essential in paving an acceptable route that would enhance the possibility of dialogue between the two respective faiths.

4.2.1 Christian perceptions about Islam

4.2.1.1 The Roman Catholic initiative to dialogue with Islam

The magisterium or the teaching office of the Catholic Church played an important role in firstly, changing Catholic perceptions about Islam and secondly, it promoted and encouraged dialogue between the two religions. The Catholic-Islam relationship will briefly be analysed in terms of the pre-Vatican II, the Vatican II and post-Vatican II periods.

The Pre-Vatican II: The Council on Christian-Muslim relations

Troll (1998: 23-24) refers to this period as “the decade immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council (Oct. 1962- Dec. 1965). The following view reflects the typical mainstream Catholic thought during this period, namely that Christianity

was the only divine religion that was supernaturally revealed to the world. Islam was considered a mere “natural religion, having risen from below” (Troll 1998:69), devoid of any divinity. However, amidst the strong anti-Islam sentiments during this period liberal inclinations also began to emerge. The quote of the liberal Thomas Ohm, and translated by Troll (1998:22) could have served as the catalyst that transformed conservative Catholic thought: “Hence the spirit that the Christians need in their mission to Islam is not the spirit of enmity and antipathy but rather the spirit of friendship, brotherhood, sympathy, understanding- the Holy Spirit of Agape”.

The Vatican II: The Council on Christian-Muslim relations

This period (Oct. 1962-1965) heralded a sense of acknowledgment and recognizing Islam as a religion or faith. This fresh Catholic view is based on the following common or related theological reflections:

- 1 both faiths are monotheistic and they profess to worship and submit to the same God (based on the Abrahamic model of faith in the case of Muslims),
- 2 both faiths venerate Jesus though the Muslims refuse to acknowledge and accept Him as the Son of God,
- 3 both faiths accept the Virgin Mary as the mother of Christ,
- 4 both faiths accept the eschatological Judgement Day.

The Post Vatican II: The Council on Christian-Muslim relations

Troll (1998: 28) refers to this period as follows: “the years immediately after the

Council witnessed countless initiatives that began to transform the Catholic vision of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.” Of particular importance in this context, was the creation in 1964 of the Vatican Secretariat for non-Muslims but, in 1989 it was renamed and called the Pontifical Council for Dialogue between Religions (PCID) (Troll 1998:29).

During this period the magisterium proclaimed the following vital issues:

- 1 continual inter-religious dialogue in general with special emphasis on Islam,
- 2 the conviction that both religions submit to the same creator constitutes a link of fraternity on the part of both Christians and Muslims, “on which is based a comparable vision of the human person” (Troll 1998:29),
- 3 to respect Muslims not just as mere individuals but, also for the faith they profess,
- 4 to develop and realize a dignity that would help to promote and realize fraternity, equality and freedom especially, the fundamental right of individuals and communities to profess their faith without hinderance or discrimination,
- 5 to recognize the Muslim faith as a basic “meeting place” between Muslims and Christians. With reference to Titus 3:8 the common vocation of both Christian and Muslim is endorsed, for example co-existence in a plural society, which guarantees the freedom of worship and education

Finally, the Vatican guidelines further outline the principles and conditions that are essential for genuine dialogue between the two religions.

The guidelines are:

- 1 to regard Islam as a faith,
- 2 to respect each other's religion,
- 3 Catholics are urged to transform their distorted perception of Islam, both past and present,
- 4 in the spirit of the dialogue, Catholics should avoid imposing their perceptions and ideas on Muslims,
- 5 the recognition of Mohammed (S), as a prophet of God.

4.2.2 The Protestant initiative to dialogue with Islam

Even at the end of the 20th century, the vast majority of Christians, especially Protestants, remain ignorant about Islam and its religious practices (Basset 1998:91). However, Basset also concedes that during the past twenty-five years churches have begun to accept the existence of Islam. They have also acknowledged the challenge Islam presents for Christianity and Western society. Furthermore, Basset (1998:86) states that the major Protestant denominations for example, the Methodists, the Anglicans, the Lutherans, the Reformed churches and the Baptists have begun to re-align their traditional perspectives of Islam and they have endeavoured to enter into dialogue with their Muslim counterparts.

Basset (1998:91) further contends that the Protestant perception of Islam remains diverse and that he had identified, between the two extremes of rejection, four fundamental attitudes. The first is a pragmatic approach where different religious groups or communities can co-exist in harmony with each other. The second approach reflects the traditional theological thought whereby Christianity is

regarded as the absolute faith. The acceptable norm in this regard is to convert people to Christianity.

According to Basset (1998:92) the principle of faith conversion also applies to Islam where it is termed *da'wa*, a call to Islam. The third approach is centered on dialogue whereby individuals meet each other on an equal footing. A spirit of reciprocity should prevail that would in turn ensure listening to the other's faith and simultaneously talking about one's own convictions. The objective here is to seek avenues for believers to be faithful to their mission and open to their neighbour's faith. The fourth approach seeks to renounce all previous connotations and judgements of a negative or condescending nature of each others' religion. Hence, this approach advocates mutual respect and tolerance in an effort to bridge the gap of centuries of antagonism. The objective is also to heal the rift of ignorance and misunderstandings between both faiths and to strive for a peaceful co-existence culminating in a fraternity that would bear joint testimony in respect of the issues facing the world today.

Finally, it is hoped that Protestant perceptions and endeavours would not only change but also intensify in order to establish meaningful theological and ecclesiological dialogue with Islam while in the process maintaining its own identity.

4.2.3 Muslim perceptions about Christianity

According to Moussalli (1998:22) the Western world perceives Islamic fundamentalism and even Islam itself through the lenses of Islamic radicalism while, on the other hand, other religions are perceived through the lenses of their

moderate views. A brief typology of Islamic fundamentalism will ensue that will reflect both views and their relationship with other religions.

The concurrence of terminology, employed by both radicals and moderates, which involves the superstructure of Islam, could be considered as the root cause not only of confusion but the misunderstanding of the modus operandi of the respective groups. This in turn also affects the perception of Islam as a religion. Moussalli (1998:152) states that, “at a superstructure level all committed Muslims might seem therefore fundamentalists.” Islamic fundamentalism is therefore neither theoretically nor politically a unified movement even though certain common terminologies such as *tahwid* (the oneness of God) and *Jihad* are mutual points of departure. The contextual interpretation and application of such terminologies by radicals and moderates may differ in the light of present day political realities. Islamic fundamentalists can be divided into radical fundamentalists and moderate fundamentalists.



4.2.3.1 Radical Fundamentalists

This approach unfortunately markets Islam worldwide either as a negative force or as a protesting voice against all non-Islamic institutions. This perception of Islam in turn perpetuates animosity between the Western world and the religion of Islam. Islamic radicalism has developed against the historical background of Western imperialism, capitalism, colonialism and even the oppression of Zionism. Radicals believe that Western ideologies have influenced and occupied the Muslim world with the sole purpose of eradicating the Islamic creed. This view has also contributed towards the Western world’s negative perception of Islam. The following factors may also contribute to the hostile and intransigent stance radicals

have adopted towards other religions namely the interpretation of the teaching of the Qur'an, the *hadith* and the *shariah*. For example, *Shura*, is a religious concept implying consultation (Moussalli 1998:141) but it can also be used as a mechanism for elections (Moussalli 1998: 153). However, radicals construe the meaning of the word to infer “the Islamically derived religious will” (Moussalli 1998:153). According to radical interpretation this will sets up a contractual political order that disapproves of pluralism, religious or political opposition in an Islamic state since a multiplicity of opinions can result in political and theological turmoil. This will is therefore also claimed to be the divine's will and any deviation from Islamic doctrines is thus viewed as a revolt against Islam.

Radicals perceive Christianity as having its origins in paganism, therefore contemporary Christianity does not represent “true Christianity” because it is void of its divinity. Instead Christianity is referred to as a product of humankind that was developed during the course of time to serve specific political goals (Moussalli 1998:124). This school of thought maintains that all the messengers of God, from Noah to Jesus, taught *tahwid* before early Christianity was corrupted by paganistic features. The icon of modern day Islamic radicalism is Sayyid Qubt. His discourses and literature do not only promote radicalism but they depict the entire universe as being *jahiliyyah* or paganistic. He stresses that the world including Islam is dominated by Western ideologies. The essence of this philosophy is to project Islam as the only absolute divine religion. The ultimate objective of every true Muslim should therefore be: the domination of the world by Islam (Moussalli 1998:133). According to this premise, the world can only be an utopian abode for both Muslims and non-Muslims if it prescribes to and adheres to the *shariah*. This practice will ensure that God's law (and not the laws made by man), will govern the world.

Radicals are thus intolerant towards Christianity and other non-Muslim religions. They even interpret the Qur'an as sancturing the killing of infidels, which include Christians and Jews (Moussalli 1998:133). Radical theology also exhorts Muslims to topple non-Islamic governments and institutions, as a religious duty incumbent upon all Muslims until the Day of Judgment. This damning perception of non-Muslim religions is disturbingly and insensitively entrenched in radical philosophy as follows: “thus, Christianity, Judaism and textual Islam should not be observed or even respected but must be demolished” (Moussalli 1998:125).

Radical thought also interestingly and ironically echoes 16th century Protestantism where the Protestant theology of Martin Luther opposed the Catholic Church, Popism and the trinity concept. Luther also denied the validity of salvation through the Pope (Moussalli 1998:124).

Finally, this approach does not bode well for negotiating an acceptable shared eco-theology between Christians and Muslims because this type of ideology expects Christianity to submit itself to Islam “as the universal foundation for any positive interaction” (Moussalli 1998:122).

4.2.3.2 Moderate Fundamentalists

The quote of Al-Qaradawi, a moderate fundamentalist sums up in a very practical and discreet manner the philosophy of “liberal” minded Muslims as follows: “Mankind is destined to live together and therefore co-operate and co-exist” (Moussalli 1998:146). The Brotherhood is a moderate political party operating in the Arab world and, according to Moussalli, (1998:141) it has never sanctioned or used violence to achieve any political or religious objectives. Instead it accepts the

democratic principle of inclusiveness whereby everybody regardless of religion or creed is accommodated in an Islamic dispensation. It also encourages and supports dialogue with non-Muslims including the West. As already implied the interpretation of directives found in the Qur'an, the *hadith* and the *shariah*, determines the direction Islamic fundamentalism would eventually take.

Contrary to radicalism, moderate fundamentalists such as the Al-Banne believe that Western constitutional forms of government do not contradict Islam if they are based constitutionally within the framework of Islamic laws and objectivity (Moussalli 1998:141). Within the context of modernity, constitutional rule is now interpreted in terms of *Shurah* or consultation and therefore in spirit, it does not contradict the Qur'an. *Shura* is a religious concept and a mechanism for elections (Moussalli 1998:153). According to moderates it thus implies entering into dialogue with people other than Muslims. This approach expresses the democratic principle of inclusiveness. It should be noted that moderate fundamentalists will not collaborate with any atheist party. Because the Shariah is viewed as a social norm, moderates "free its application from past specific methods" (Moussalli 1998:141) and align its reputable practice with ensuring the maintenance of freedom and the monitoring of elected governments.

Democracy is a universal principle and countries worldwide are expected to conform to this norm of governance. Moderates therefore claim that the absence of pluralistic societies and democratic institutions are the real cause for violence against the state and religions. The inclusion of non-Muslims in the political or civil structures of a plural society is seen as the road for salvation to the community, religion and individuals. An inclusive society contributes to harmonious co-existence and enmity between Islam and other religions, even

between East and West, is obviated. In this regard, Moussalli (1998:156) claims: “Properly grounded, what is Western becomes indeed Islam.” Moderates are thus providing Islamic arguments for the inclusion of other religions as opposed to arguments for mutual exclusivity as advocated by radicals. Moderate fundamentalists apply the Quranic verses that call for tolerance and co-existence as the basis of its attitude towards other religions. This view is indicative of the democratic principles: equality in terms of citizenship, political, economic, religious and legal rights envisaged for a modern Islamic state. The modern trend advocates an Islamic interpretation of liberal democracy as opposed to the religiously exclusive democracy of radical fundamentalists or the authoritarian nationalism found in the Arab world.

In the final analysis, moderate fundamentalists believe that Islam, Christianity and Judaism have common monotheistic grounds upon which multi-cultural, religious co-operation and co-existence can be built. Moderates believe that people should not fight each other in God’s name but that instead they should be united by religion. They also lend equal status to all holy books and prophets and encourage Muslims to respect all Holy Scriptures and prophets without any distinction.

To conclude, the reciprocal nature that is evident between Christians and moderate Muslim fundamentalists provides the common ground necessary for inter-religious dialogue in general. In turn, this reciprocal element can also serve to galvanize the possibility of an interfaith eco-theological dialogue.

4.2.3 Common perceptions inducing eco-theological dialogue

It can be deduced from the preceding analysis that firstly, a distinct sense of

interfaith dialogue and co-operation does exist between Christians and moderate fundamentalists. Secondly, the emergence of positive images and perceptions pertaining to each other's religion can only serve as a barometer to foster and promote an eco-theological dialogue. The Roman Catholic Church via its magisterium's sincere and defining policies has paved the way for dialogue with Islam. It has advised its various structures to recognize Islam as a monotheistic religion and to acknowledge Mohamed (S) as a prophet of God. This groundbreaking decision can only serve to forge a closer working relationship with Islam.

However, it is unfortunate that the Protestant churches are not as bold as their Catholic counterparts to reform their thinking and perceptions of Islam. Despite this reluctance, liberal voices are mounting within the corridors of some sister churches to take cognisance of the relevance of Islam as a fully-fledged religion.

The radical Islamic fundamentalists' philosophy towards Christianity leaves much to be desired because this school of thought is orthodox and conservative in its approach to non-Islamic religions. The prerequisite for any form of inter-religious contact or dialogue is based on the supposition that Christianity should conform and subordinate itself to the norm and value system of Islam. This expectation by radicals can only translate into failure, as it would be difficult or even impossible to engage in any form of religious intercourse based on such assumptions because no Christian would succumb to such requests.

The moderate fundamentalists in turn, project the antithesis of their radical proponents. These liberal thinkers are aspiring to reform and to re-interpret traditional Islamic perspectives as well as realign and adapt them to conform to modernity but within the framework of acceptable Islamic guidelines or criteria.

Moderates accept implementing democratic principles based on an integrated social structure because the presence of plural societies and democratic institutions can contribute to the political stability of a country. This liberal view envisaged by moderates is encouraging as it secures the way forward for inter-religious co-operation.

Haleem regards his book, *Islam and the environment* as a contribution “that is meant to help Muslims to put care for the environment among their religious priorities” (1998:10). This plea illustrates the disregard and the non-involvement of Muslims in nature conservation issues, especially at grassroots level. By the same token this quote also appeals to Christians who like their Muslim counterparts, neglect conservation theology, in preference of salvation theology. With the emergence of Muslim environmental scholars the study of the natural world is now being exposed and presented to adherents of Islam within the context of their respective Holy Scriptures and traditions. Hence, a brief recapitulation of the “green” perceptions of both faiths is essential in order to expose the mutual overlapping strands, which undeniably link the two respective religions on the grounds of their common understanding on the environment. The following similarities illustrate how corresponding interpretations of the respective Scriptures oblige the human race to safeguard its prized-asset.

The concern for and the protection of the natural world is indelibly etched in the Holy Scriptures and teachings of both faiths. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every Christian and Muslim individual to avoid the degradation of the earth. The responsibility for caring for the earth should thus be seen as a joint inter-faith venture that is divinely sanctioned. Both faiths are monotheistic in nature and the premise, from a theological perspective, that God is the sole creator of the entire

universe, forms the nucleus and common ground for mutual interfaith dialogue. De Grunchy and Field state that creation should not be understood as an event of the past, “but as an ongoing process” (1999:204). This implies that God is actively involved in the life of the complex eco-systems of the earth and the wider cosmos, as creator, renewer and sustainer.

The Islamic concepts of *tawhid* (oneness or unity in God), *khalîfa* (steward or trustee) and *akhirah* (the Hereafter) are akin to both faiths. The role of mankind on earth is that of *khalîfa* or vicegerent. We are regarded as God’s stewards or agents on this earth and not as masters of it. The earth does not belong to mankind but to God. It has been entrusted to us by God and our function as human beings is to oversee this trust. The *khalîfa* is also deemed responsible for his positive or negative actions towards His creation. The *khalîfa* concept is indicative of the Christian principle, mutual custodianship.

Therefore, within the context of our vicegerents' status, both Christians and Muslims are obliged to manage creation with discretion and the due respect it deserves. The proper management of nature conservation can contribute to a harmonious co-existence between man and the natural world. If both faiths can only apply the essence of Islam, which is, submission to the will of God and peace, especially in the context of our stewardship status, the prospect for co-existence, mutual respect and tolerance for each other’s religion, is an achievable milestone.

Having elucidated the perspectives of both Christian and Muslims on ecology, it is now imperative at this juncture to draft a practical ecological agenda that will assist in combating the destruction of the environment at *grassroots level*.

The following suggested agenda is presented to encourage adherents of both faiths to ensure participation and to make concerted efforts to educate communities at grassroots level about the significance of nature conservation. The implementation of the suggested agenda and the acquisition of the ultimate goal can only be achieved if the process is pursued in conjunction with moderate Islamic groups rather than radical Islamic fundamentalists.

4.3.1 A PROPOSED PRACTICAL ECOLOGICAL AGENDA

4.3.1.1 An environmental conservation colloquium

This type of seminar is vital because it provides the necessary platform for formulating the common ground rules. In this forum people are afforded the opportunity to orientate and sensitize themselves with the theological perceptions of their fellow worshippers. As moderates from both faiths will be engaged in dialogue the focus will be on the crux of the matter rather than quibbling over theological differences. Such a forum, based on open-minded principles, would ensure that the theological ecological perspectives of the participants would thus be observed and respected.

The dialogue and debate in this forum would seek common ground, based on the similarities evident in both Scriptures, on the way forward. It would also seek to procure mutual trust and co-operation in order to stimulate long-term environmental programmes. If a culture of conservation is developed in such a forum the feasibility and sustainability of any future environmental programmes is a definite reality at grassroots level.

4.3.1.2 Heritage day

Heritage day can be observed as the symbol marking the genesis of mutual co-operation between Muslims and Christians in their struggle to preserve our natural world. From a theological perspective both faiths are conscious of their responsibilities as stewards of God's creation. Creation has been entrusted to us by God and therefore, we should not abuse it but, protect it for future generations.

A suggested programme in this context would be to educate people about the dangers of fauna and flora extinction. Here the examples of the cheetah, the black rhino, the kwagga and the dodo could be used appropriately to illustrate the idea of extinction. Both the cheetah and the black rhino are classified as endangered species and if these animals are not protected by international law, they would suffer the same fate as the kwagga and the dodo and become extinct. Should this tragedy occur then, we as custodians of creation, would have failed in our task to protect part of our heritage for our future generations.

4.3.1.3 The introduction of nature conservation into the curriculums of the Madressa and Sunday schools.

Although learners from the respective faiths are exposed to nature conservation programmes in public schools, the subject is basically absent from Madressa or Sunday school learning programmes. Although nature conservation is presented in public schools from a scientific perspective, it is also imperative to emphasize the religious dimension of it. The latter approach could be utilized to stress the role of humans as viceregents of God's creation, hence creating some form of balance in understanding nature from two different angles. The Bible and Qur'an evoke a

sense of profound reverence amongst the youth and by articulating the revelations of both Scriptures on conservation, a sense of responsibility towards conservation could be instilled within learners.

Although Western science offers various perspectives, studies on conservation are essential to elucidate the interrelationship between the Bible and the Qur'an. Learners should be able to recognize that although the Scriptural content may differ, the "green" dimensions of both faiths overlap with each other. The similarities existing in both Scriptures should be rigorously exploited to enhance the importance of preserving and protecting the natural world for future generations.

A suggestion would be to invite leaders of the respective faiths to address each other's seminars or workshops in order to discuss similarities and differences relevant to ecology. Furthermore, "green" excursions to our national parks such as the Kruger National Park, can jointly be undertaken in order to expose young people to the natural world of Southern Africa. By visiting and exploring such places, young people will be sensitized to the natural wonders and awesome beauty of creation and hopefully, the seed of appreciation and preservation will be sowed.

4.3.1.4 Arbor day

As already implied, it was compulsory during the old dispensation of the House Representatives that arbor day should be observed by all Coloured schools. Most schools are still diligently following this tradition, however, the only stumbling block would be the Christian flavour the programme endorses. This problem could be altered to accommodate the cultural aspirations of the other religions as well.

Although Muslim learners normally represent a minority group at Christian dominated schools, they are annually exposed to arbor day commemorations. The exposure and education on conservation should stand them in good stead in developing an equitable programme should the need arise in their own communities.

A suggested programme would be a joint endeavour in conjunction with the local municipality, to plant a tree or two annually in community parks. The members of both faiths would be responsible for the care of these trees. The local municipality of Boksburg also encourages the observance of arbor day and every year they celebrate the day by planting a tree in a different community. To promote this tradition it would be imperative for members of both faiths to serve on their local municipality's environmental committee, to make input and to transform the cultural face of arbor day programmes.

Squatter camps have mushroomed all over South Africa and the lack of proper facilities such as electricity and the need for fuel has resulted in the random destruction of trees. In conjunction with various stakeholders such as churches, schools and local municipalities, communities should be educated about the importance of preserving trees. People should be made aware of the grave consequences of the indiscriminate felling of trees would have on their lives. Trees should be regarded as nature's "air filter systems" whereby carbon dioxide is removed from the air by trees while in the process they produce life-saving oxygen. If trees are indiscriminately felled, different life forms and eco-systems are destroyed in the process. Trees also serve as roosting and resting places for indigenous and migrating birds and if these natural habitats are destroyed, the animal life is lost forever.

4.3.1.5 Mine dumps

Whenever the wind blows strongly, especially during the months of August and September, the dust from the mine dumps become a major problem for the residents of Reiger Park. Reiger Park is literally covered with a blanket of yellow dust. The interior and exterior of houses are covered in dust and residents inhale and chew on dust particles. During the recent world summit on the environment, Reiger Park was visited by committee members representing the summit, to gain first hand knowledge of the problem. Representatives from the community indicated to them that the dust was a health hazard for the community because it causes “asthma, especially amongst the elderly”.

This is an ideal opportunity for both faiths to collaborate in the fight against the ills of the mine dumps. Both faiths can now jointly formulate initiatives to combat the problem by becoming actively involved in established committees and forums in local government. It is in these forums where they could voice their opinions about the consequences of air pollution. In conjunction with the local municipality, companies within the Boksburg area and even outside of Boksburg, could be approached to sponsor the planting of grass and the watering facilities on the dumpsites. Alternatively, to rid Reiger Park of the menace and hazard, requests could be made to the owners of the East Rand Propriety Mines or E.R.P.M. to demolish the dumps based on well-documented evidence of being a serious health hazard in this area.

4.3.1.6 Animal support groups.

Animals are abused in various forms and this anomaly is common knowledge to

most of us living in the townships. Instead of reacting and opposing this practice, we simply choose to ignore it at the expense of the animals. A typical scenario in our communities is the unwanted litters of puppies born annually. As the animals grow older they become a menace to communities because of their scavenging for food.

The owners of these animals are normally poor and destitute and are unable to care for their animals. In order to survive these emaciated animals scavenge for food by ripping open plastic bags and toppling dustbins in people's property. In the process they scatter litter all over residential premises. A resident's worst nightmare is garbage collection day when plastic bags are ripped apart and debris scattered all over the streets.

To obviate this problem, support groups in conjunction with the local S.P.C.A (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), could intervene to alleviate the situation. These groups should identify families with bitches in the community and encourage them to have their animals spayed or to have them removed permanently by the S.P.C.A.

Another form of animal abuse is the increase in the number of strays as a result of the holiday seasons. The role of support groups is indispensable here because they could ensure provision for the animals either by incorporating private kennels or the S.P.C.A to care for the animals while the owners are away on holiday. It should be noted that when it comes to the handling of dogs, Muslims are apprehensive and reluctant to either handle or touch the animal because according to their tradition dogs are regarded as unclean.

4.3.1.7 Anti-litter campaign measures.

Urbanization, the influx of foreigners, unemployment and the surrounding squatter camps has contributed to the escalation of pollution in our townships. Due to the influx of people into Reiger Park and other areas, the need for shelter and accommodation has spiraled, so too has the problem of litter. The influx of people have provided the many unemployed home owners with the opportunity to display their entrepreneurial acumen by erecting extra corrugated shacks on their properties. These rented rooms provide the unemployed home owner with a monthly income which he so desperately needs.

The solution to the owner's financial woes unfortunately impacts negatively on the immediate environment. The problem arises when these small erfs, of about a hundred and fifty square meters in size, become overcrowded. Besides the resident family of about six people, in some instances it may even be more, an additional ten to twelve or even more, may occupy these ex-town council properties. The municipality provides only *one* dustbin per household and *two* poorly located dumping sites for the entire Reiger Park. The obvious question then, where is the extra litter discarded?

The litter is currently being dumped alongside certain roads and on every available vacant piece of land. Litter has become a major problem for Reiger Park. A possible programme could comprise twofold action. Firstly, in collaboration with the local municipality and respective stakeholders, signboards displaying the prohibition of dumping should be erected and transgressors should also receive spot fines. Secondly, residents of any immediate vacant areas should transform

these plots into viable parks by planting grass and trees. The maintenance of it should be a communal project.

4.3.1.8 Environmental day

Environmental day is celebrated annually by the primary schools of Reiger Park and it therefore provides the ideal opportunity for joint participation in environmental projects and activities. Members of both faiths, in conjunction with the respective stakeholders, such as schools, supermarkets and the Coca-Cola company (for instance) can organize suitable environmental projects for the day.

The local Hyper Rama encourages, promotes and sponsors such projects while Coca-Cola always obliges with the provision of their soft drinks.

A suggested programme would be to allocate a demarcated area to every local primary school to clean. The project could include the removal of debris from the dam, the parks and the streets. A time limit could also be set for the completion of the task. The rubble that is collected by the respective schools is placed in plastic bags at strategic points where it will either be collected by the municipality or a private company. At the end of the cleaning campaign, the pupils of the different schools are rewarded with a soft drink, fruit or sweets and a packet of chips.

4.3.1.9 Conclusion

Waardenburg (1998:1) refers to the mutual changes in perceptions between Christians and Muslims as “changes in image formation.” Although a great deal of apprehension and mistrust still exist between the followers of both faiths, the

encouraging aspect is that moderate elements from both sides are coming to the fore and entering into dialogue with each other. The proposed agenda is a strategy designed to encourage and enhance dialogue and mutual co-operation between the two faiths at grassroots level.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARISED CONCLUSION

5.1 RETROSPECT

The overall gist of this mini-dissertation is the sacred nature of God's or Allah's creation and the divine mandate rendered to both Christians and Muslims including other denominations, to deputise as custodians or viceregents in ensuring the sanctity of His prized asset, creation. Despite the hostile and diabolical attitudes displayed by conservative factions of both faiths, open-minded individuals from the respective faiths have come to the fore to pick up the cudgels in defense of the natural world. This spirit of "*ubuntu*" that now exists between the moderates of both groupings will hopefully manifest itself in the formation of an eco-theology leading to an eco-ethic.



In chapter one the specifics of the study was explained. The various factors that contributed to the formation of the discipline of eco-theology by the "Earth Bible" scholars were laid bare. The environmental crisis gave rise to a new and modern approach called eco-theology. It has developed an eco-justice hermeneutic that prides itself in highlighting the destruction of the natural world. Eco-theology implies a paradigm shift that challenges Christian theologians to re-evaluate their ecclesiastical tradition when interpreting biblical texts. Even though eco-theology is regarded as liberal and subversive at times, it provides indispensable guidelines through the medium of its six eco-justice principles, on how to analyse and interpret biblical texts in order to expropriate the "green" dimensions ensconced within texts.

The focus in chapter 1 was also on Islam as a problem for eco-theology and its inherent “green” sentiments. Islam, though unknowingly, also aligns its interpretation of creation along the same lines as the Earth Bible Series by testifying indirectly to some of the latter’s guidelines. However, the liberal and critical nature of the Earth Bible’s theology cannot be assigned to Islam because this type of approach is considered a heresy and blasphemous. Islam regards the Qur’an as the absolute word of God and stipulates that its contents cannot be challenged nor criticized by any living individual.

The hermeneutic of retrieval and suspicion of feminist theology, a formative component of the Earth Bible Series, highlights the patriarchal readings of the Bible in terms of male/female dualism. Feminists are endeavouring to retrieve the “voice” of women including any anti-patriarchal sentiments that might be concealed in texts. This hermeneutic is also applied to the earth in order to detect any “voices” of the female (earth) that is suppressed within the anthropocentric texts.

The hypothesis of this case study also focused on the ecological perceptions of the Christian and Muslim faiths with the aim of formulating a joint eco-theological agenda. The hypothesis of this study was formulated as follows: *the application and accentuation of “green“ sentiments ensconced within the respective Christian and Muslim faiths can facilitate the realization of shared ground between these two faiths. It can promote a constructive and purposeful effort by both faiths (also in combination) to contribute to nature conservation and indirectly to religious tolerance.*

Chapter two reflects the Christian perspectives on ecology. According to Schochet

(1995), ancient Israel revealed an ambiguous relationship to nature and he illustrates this attitude by highlighting the pros and cons of the issue. The Bible portrays the assumed caring feelings of deep kinship and compassion towards the animal kingdom. The affinity is further substantiated by the promulgation of “green” legislation in Deuteronomy 22: 6. However this caring perception is tarnished by the derogative practices displayed by Israel, for example, they regarded the animal as a mere “tool” for utilitarian purposes. Viviers (2001) underscores this negative attitude towards the animal kingdom by referring to it as a “cool and distant relationship.”

In contrast to Schochet, Simkins (1994) claims that ancient Israel’s worldview on the natural world was shaped by its own value system of the time. To illustrate his claims, he uses “a comparative model of human-environment relations in ancient Israel.” According to this model, Israel’s worldview expressed certain value orientations to the natural world such as a mastery-over-nature solution, a harmony-with-nature solution and a subjugation-to-nature solution. These solutions depict the value orientation ancient Israel would have adopted in terms of the in-group or out-group scenario. Simkins concludes with the harmony-with-nature solution.

To demonstrate the “green” aspects of Scripture, sample texts from the Old and New Testaments were selected to indicate the praxis of eco-justice readings of the Bible. Although not all texts of the Bible present an eco-friendly reading, the selection of texts from the Old and New Testaments resonate with “green” features namely, the Pentateuch (Genesis 1), the Prophets (Amos, Jeremiah 12) and the Wisdom Writings (Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Job). The following texts of the

New Testament reveal a surprisingly positive appreciation of the “material” world, namely the Our Father (Matt 6 : 9-14) and Revelation 21.

Chapter three reflects the Islamic perspective on ecology. The Qur’an like the Bible, lacks a complete discourse on creation. Creation motifs in the Qur’an are perceived in scattered and isolated verses. The Qur’an thus, paints broad canvas strokes as explanation of Islam’s position on creation. Of paramount importance is the assertion that, unlike the Bible, the Qur’an has no “human authors.” Allah is regarded as the sole author.

To understand and appreciate creation in terms of Islam, one must accept the following criteria, namely the oneness of Allah, and the teachings of the Qur’an, *hadith* and *shariah*. The entire creation is considered as Allah’s sole effort and that He alone manages it. Creation in turn does not only subordinate itself to Him but praises Him for its very existence.



Islam also outlaws the study of creation in terms of Western or any other critical ideologies as it supposedly demeans Allah as creator. Even the application of Western science to study creation is deemed unacceptable because it excludes Allah.

Although Islam divorces itself from certain Western and Christian views and practices, it nevertheless unknowingly echoes cross cultural similarities. Some of the eco-justice principles of the Earth Bible Series are echoed by Islam such as the notion of intrinsic worth or value, interconnectedness, voice, mutual custodianship and resistance.

As a consequence of the overlapping stances on creation shared by both faiths, the possibility of determining a common eco-theology and agenda becomes viable.

Chapter four deals with the perceptions and relationships between Christians and Muslims with a view to establishing a joint co-operative eco-theological agenda. According to Waardenburg (1998) there has been definite change in mutual perceptions between Christians and Muslims since the turn of the 20th century. However, in some instances on both sides there is reluctance to transform their thinking about the belief system of the other.

The Catholic Church set the example of enhancing and promoting interfaith co-operation by informing its various structures to respect and acknowledge Islam as a monotheistic religion. The Protestant churches are dragging their feet on the issue, but promising voices from moderates of some churches are being heard.

The Muslim stance towards Christianity is divided by radical and moderate fundamental schools of thought. The former is rigid, unwavering and sceptical of any political or theological contact with non-Islamic faiths. They perceive Islam to be the ultimate religion, therefore they expect that if any form of dialogue or social agenda is pursued with any non-Islamic faith, the forum should conform to the norm and value system of Islam.

On the contrary, moderate Islamic fundamentalists are enlightened, liberal and open-minded individuals who are unperturbed in exercising their democratic rights to freedom of expression and association. They are also bold enough to implement Western democratic principles of governance in an inclusive and pluralistic state but within the context of acceptable Islamic principles.

As both Christian and Moderate Islamic faiths reach out to embrace each other, the prospect of developing a sound working ethic is not only promising but inevitable. The positive signals of acknowledging and accepting each other as fellow-beings, can only serve to strengthen the bonds of tolerance, mutual co-operation and respect for each other's religious orientation. This holds good promise for a common agenda on eco-ethics.

Finally, to educate people from these two faiths at grassroots level about the significance of nature conservation, a proposed practical environmental agenda has been devised. A brief synopsis of the agenda (cf. chp 4) follows:

An environmental conservation colloquium

In this forum the ground rules for dialogue on conservation would be pursued including the planning of strategies that promote a viable working ethic.



Heritage day

The importance of preserving and protecting our natural world will be emphasized as the consequences of losing any more species through extinction cannot be contemplated.

The introduction of nature conservation into the curriculum of Madressa and Sunday schools

Despite the theological differences, learners can also be introduced to the striking similarities that exist between the two faiths. A balance can also be struck between

science and theology on the issue of creation.

Arbor day

The important function that trees fulfill in the survival of plant, animal and human life will be celebrated.

Mine dumps

The hazards mine dumps present to communities living in close proximity to them will be highlighted

Animal support groups

The crux of the matter will be to consider what measures will be introduced to curb the abuse of animals?



Anti-litter campaign

The aim will be to combat the litter problem and the impact it has on the immediate environment.

Environmental day

The promotion of a healthier living environment is envisaged.

By looking back at the findings of this study, the hypothesis stated in chapter one has been proved. The laying bare of the “green” sentiments in both Christianity and Islam, markedly corresponding sentiments, provide an ample foundation for the development of a sound eco-ethics. There is indeed more than enough common ground between these two faiths to take hands in nature conservation. This shared eco-responsibility will surely also enhance greater interreligious tolerance.

5.2 FUTURE STUDIES

Tantamount to this mini-dissertation is firstly, that it should serve as a stimulant to aspiring Christian and Muslim scholars to delve deeper into their faith’s texts to profile and unearth the “green” sentiments embedded in both the Bible and the Qur’an.

Secondly, the quintessence of this study is also encapsulated by the words of the lyric that was composed and sung by the world’s musical elite namely, “*Don’t kill the world, its all we have.*” Based on this exquisite and befitting call, the desire would also be that future studies develop, pursue and ensure a symbiosis between Christianity, Islam and the environment at grassroots level. Creative programmes to establish a shared eco-ethic between the two faiths will hopefully see the light and perhaps even stimulate an eco-symbiosis also with the other big faiths of the world.

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