

David G. Hallman

**SPIRITUAL  
VALUES  
FOR EARTH  
COMMUNITY**

*Updated Edition*



**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

SPIRITUAL VALUES FOR EARTH COMMUNITY

Updated Edition



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*Opinions expressed in WCC Publications are those of the authors.*

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# Foreword

Guillermo Kerber

In its most profound form, the contemporary ecological and climate crisis challenges Christians everywhere to envision and embrace a new and radically different lifestyle. This little volume, now available in this updated edition, sparks the deep reflection on values that can inform strong Christian commitment and enable us to change our lives—and perhaps the fate of the planet.

We are quite aware of the environmental, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the earth crisis. But sometimes the spiritual dimension is overlooked. David Hallman's book addresses it in a creative, positive, encouraging manner.

Of course Christian churches, church leaders and the World Council of Churches in particular have been stressing that the climate change crisis, as part of the ecological crisis, is also an ethical and spiritual crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, even in these last ten years, the challenges to an earth community have become more evident. Reports of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change<sup>2</sup> have presented the scientific consensus on the matter, despite some sceptics who continue to have a lot of media influence. The IPCC and other independent reports show the variety of alarming consequences that the present level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have exacted.

As David Hallman tells us in the Preface, it was at the Kyoto Climate Change summit in 1997 (the third Conference of Parties – COP – of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) that the idea for this book was originated. The COPs have occasioned in recent years an extraordinary development. Just a few hundred participated at the first COPs, while tens of thousands participated in the last three in Copenhagen (COP 15 in 2009), Cancun (COP 16 in 2010) and Durban (COP 17 in 2011). The international media have given wide coverage to the negotiations themselves and to the civil-society participation. Mobilization by ordinary citizens all over the world in the last few years has been impressive with, for example, the 350 or the tckctck campaigns.<sup>3</sup> Churches and the ecumenical movement at large have been involved in this process, with their own contribution, the Time for Climate Justice campaign.<sup>4</sup> WCC delegations to COPs, which started at COP 1 in Berlin in 1995, have been joined by other ecumenical delegations, rising to hundreds of persons coming from all the regions of the world.

It may well be that this increasing energy at the grassroots level will drive both practical and policy change. With that in mind, we want to recommend David Hallman's work on the key values that can inform an alternative earth community for the future. It is not only an insightful presentation of the roots and shape of our present problem but also a rich discussion of the pertinent Christian values and a workbook for people—individually and in groups—to analyze their own contexts and choices for creating a sustainable future. To facilitate the process further, we have also listed some of the more recent resources in the area, included recent statements from the WCC about the challenges of climate change, and detailed WCC participation in the UN climate change meetings.

For my part, while responding to the question that David formulates, "Are there spiritual values other than those discussed in this book that you think are important to emphasize?" from my Latin American experience, I would also like to suggest three: solidarity, compassion and joy. Vulnerable communities, indigenous peoples, women, and peoples of African descent in the region teach us how solidarity can overcome individualism and greed, how compassion with the earth is at the same time compassion with humanity, and how—despite centuries of oppression and threats to their life and dignity—joy is possible. There are always good reasons to celebrate.

Once again we thank David for his longstanding contribution to the WCC on environment and climate change matters, and we wish readers a fruitful encounter with his vital text.

*Guillermo Kerber presently coordinates the work of the World Council of Churches on Care for Creation and Climate Justice.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Most recently, WCC's journals have presented discussions on creation, ecology, climate and water from a theological perspective. *The Ecumenical Review* dedicated its July 2010 issue to "Churches caring for creation and climate justice." *The International Review of Mission* in its November 2010 issue bore the theme "Mission and Creation" and gathered articles from the "Mission, Spirituality and Creation" process of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and the WCC's Programme on Climate Change.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. [www.350.org](http://www.350.org) and [tckctck.org](http://tckctck.org).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [www.climatejusticeonline.org](http://www.climatejusticeonline.org).

# Preface

An invitation and a misunderstanding laid the basis for this book.

In 1997, I was invited by Prawate Khid Arn of the Christian Conference of Asia to give one of the theme addresses at an Inter-Religious Consultation on Climate Change being held in Kyoto, Japan, in December of that year in conjunction with the UN Climate Change Summit. Somehow, the theme he asked me to speak on got transformed in my mind into “Spiritual Values for Sustainable Living in the 21st Century”. By the time I realized that I had focused on something other than what he had asked for, it was too late to change. After having presented the paper, I was encouraged by a number of people, including colleagues at the World Council of Churches, to consider expanding it into a book.

Whatever may have led me to misconstrue Prawate’s original request, I found my perceived theme very enticing. I have worked on ecological issues for the United Church of Canada for almost 25 years and have been the coordinator of the World Council of Churches’ Programme on Climate Change since 1995. While deeply engaged in education and advocacy work on ecological concerns, I have always been intrigued by the theological and ethical dimensions of these issues. I have sought in my earlier books to integrate those various dimensions,<sup>1</sup> but an explicit focus on spirituality was something new for me.

I have long been convinced that we who are active in advocacy work need to attend more specifically to the spiritual sources of our commitment, not only to ground the work firmly in our faith but also to benefit from the spiritual nourishment necessary for sustaining our energies over the long haul. I have also been aware of a broader constituency of people of faith who may not be actively engaged in issues of social or ecological justice but for whom spirituality concerns are central. Might it be possible to write something that would be helpful to them in making the connections?

Hence, *Spiritual Values for Earth Community*.

This is of course an enormous theme. But it seems to me that the issues facing our world are of such urgency that we

must ask and struggle to find answers to the big questions. This book is intended as a small contribution to that. I hope it will be useful for individual reading and for group study.

In addition to thanking Prawate Khid Arn for the original invitation which led me to focus on the theme, I am indebted to various people for contributing to the writing through conversation, referring me to helpful material or providing feedback on drafts: Mark Burch, Nafisa Goga D'Souza, Bonnie Greene, Jean Olthius, Lillian Perigoe, Larry Rasmussen, Ernie Regehr, Martin Robra, Sandra Severs. Marlin Van Elderen of the WCC Publications office has been most helpful as I nursed the idea from concept to completion. My life partner Bill Conklin supported me in innumerable ways as I spent many hours of our collective time glued to my laptop computer.

Though I have tried to ensure the accuracy of all information included, errors may have crept in and I accept full responsibility if that is the case. While drawing on the work and insights of many colleagues in the ecumenical community, I am ultimately responsible for the analyses that form the basis of the book. Blame me, not them if you find the arguments unconvincing.

Whether or not you agree with what I have written, I hope you will find it stimulating. The contribution of everyone is needed in the building of just and sustainable communities.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> These include *Caring for Creation: A Canadian, Christian Response to the Environmental Crisis*, Winfield, Woodlake Books, 1989; *A Place in Creation: Ecological Visions in Science, Religion and Economics*, Toronto, United Church of Canada Publishing House, 1992; *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva, WCC, and Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1994.



# 1. Spiritual Values and Earth Community

Earth and its creatures are threatened.

The signs are everywhere: climate change, ozone-layer depletion, toxic and nuclear wastes, urban pollution, ground-water contamination, loss of agricultural land, diminishing fish stocks, unsustainable forestry practices. The list goes on. Add to that social and economic injustice, with the growing disparity between rich and poor, and one has a depressing picture of the health of human and natural communities.

These threats to the earth community come from many different sources - international trade agreements and economic policies, activities of transnational corporations, national industrial and agricultural practices, transportation systems dominated by the automobile, political and military conflicts, individual consumer decisions.

Such systems, institutions and behaviour are not immutable facts of nature. They have been created and are maintained by human decisions. As societies, we have chosen to organize ourselves in ways which are now producing destructive consequences for many people and many of the world's ecological systems. As individuals, we make countless daily decisions which add up to a life-style whose impacts on ourselves, our families, our neighbours, people around the world, future generations and the natural world are damaging.

Why do we as individuals and societies act in ways which have such disastrous consequences?

The argument of this book is that we make decisions as individuals and societies based on certain values. I contend that the dominant values influencing contemporary societies are:

- *human greed*, which is reflected in our patterns of materialistic consumption;
- the will for *domination*, which is manifested in the power of economic globalization; and
- *fear*, which gets expressed as violence.

These values are propelling us towards ever greater damage to the natural world and all that depends upon it, ourselves included.

But we do not have to stay on this destructive trajectory. Other values could form the basis of just and sustainable living patterns in the 21st century. I believe that there are potent spiritual values, expressed through - though not limited to - Christianity and other faiths, which could transform the way we live and organize our societies. The principal spiritual values I will highlight are gratitude, humility, sufficiency, justice, peace, love, faith and hope.

It is far from a simple task to substitute one set of values for another. Human behaviour and decision-making derive from many complex factors. In this introductory chapter, I want first to review some of the understandings over the ages of what determines human behaviour. Second, I will reflect on the place of values and specifically spiritual values in influencing behaviour. Third, I will look at concepts which have evolved over the past several decades in the effort to articulate what kind of societies are grounded in justice among peoples and respect for the broader creation. The evolution of those conceptual frameworks has led us to speak of “earth community”.

### **Influences on human behaviour and decision-making**

Much about what influences individual and collective behaviour is unclear. Social science research seems to indicate that we humans make choices and act out of complex motivations which include the basic survival instincts, but go well beyond these.

In order to understand better how values may influence individual and collective behaviour, we should perhaps go back several steps.<sup>1</sup> There is a long history of intellectual reflection about what determines actual human behaviour, but this question has been most explicitly addressed with the emergence of the disciplines of psychology and sociology. William James in 1887 published a series of articles which explored the role of instinct as the primary motivating factor in human behaviour. While some ancient and mediaeval writings focused on instinct, the major grounding for James’s analysis came from the biological study of animals by 19th-

century scientists such as Charles Darwin, combined with the emerging understandings of the human nervous system and basic organic reactions.

During the early part of the 20th century, however, instinct gradually lost favour among scientists because of its limitations in explaining more complex individual human behaviour and the collective behaviour of groups and societies. A range of other explanations were proposed including Freud's psychoanalytic theories, the behaviourist school of B.F. Skinner, and A.H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs moving through a spectrum from basic to more complex (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization, cognitive and aesthetic). More recent studies of personality development have led many social scientists to conclude that the motivation for our behaviour is a complex interaction of factors, some of which are related to heredity and others to the environment in which we have grown and now function. The ultimate logic of these sciences would seem to imply that behaviour could be fully explained if we knew all the causal factors in one's personality development and if we knew all the circumstances in a situation of choice.

Supplementing these analyses of individual behaviour has been the contribution of sociology to our understanding of the individual within the context of the group and the organization and the behaviour of people as part of communities, institutions, societies and cultures. Sociologists speak, for example, of "norms" or "mores" as shared standards for behaviour in a society. Norms can evolve as a result of new developments or threats, and norms in one context can be in conflict with norms in another context. Insights from sociology can be helpful as we look in later sections of this book at how spiritual values can become more influential in determining the way we live our collective lives.

Other historical approaches to understanding and influencing human collective behaviour can be subsumed under classical political philosophy, more recent efforts to develop meaningful political theory and the realm of ideology. Ideologies in particular are action-oriented, often seeking mas-

sive changes in the existing situation in response to analyses of the problems with current conditions. Political theorists have identified various functions of ideologies, among them simplifying the view of the world, demanding action either for or against change and justifying the course of action taken. Liberalism, communism and fascism are perhaps the ideologies that come most quickly to mind, but much of this analytical framework of how ideologies function can be applied to the current dominance of the agenda of economic globalization with its emphasis on an unrestricted market and free trade.

Running parallel to and inter-related with analyses of the motivations of human behaviour is the history of philosophical and theological reflection on what human behaviour *should* be. Plato believed that a realm of pure ideas existed, of which life as we experience it is an incomplete imitation. Thus for Plato a moral life meant one in which a person tries to pattern his or her behaviour after such universal moral ideals as temperance, courage, prudence and justice. Aristotle reversed Plato's paradigm and suggested that ideas are a reflection of things. He began with life and tried to articulate the ultimate end or purpose of all things. For Aristotle the moral life was one that sought to bring about the full potential of one's true nature. Aristotle's philosophy laid the ground for more detailed examinations from an ethical perspective of actual human life and the social, economic and political institutions that humans create.

The inherent conflict between these contrasting understandings of the relationship between values and human behaviour still remains. I saw a young environmentalist recently wearing a T-shirt with the saying: "We may not be able to think ourselves into new ways of living but we can live ourselves into new ways of thinking." He was siding with Aristotle.

Over the centuries, many philosophers and theologians have deliberated on the nature of moral ideals and how they relate to our actual behaviour as humans. In the 1700s, Immanuel Kant maintained that it is only through "pure rea-

son” that we can discern moral knowledge to apply in our lives. By contrast, David Hume argued that neither reason nor the knowledge we acquire by use of our reason can directly determine our behaviour. Rather, the principal motivating force for what we do is “passion”, by which Hume meant emotions, attitudes, desires, wishes and needs.

A significant dimension in moral philosophy relevant to our discussion is the question of freedom of will. Regardless of the source by which we come to discern what is morally right, do we have unfettered freedom of will to choose one option over another? Theologies that assert that we have such freedom draw on a belief in the existence of God, who endows human beings with a spiritual dimension or soul, whose influence is not bound by physical, psychological or social factors. The soul can impel us to make choices based on higher and longer-term motivations. A non-religious variation of this bases its support for freedom of will on an analysis of the “moral self,” the capacity of humans to make conscious choices based on principles of what is right even though such choices may seem to contradict what would be expected of such a person given their heredity and environment.

In modern and now post-modern times, we are witnessing a broadening of approaches to understanding the major influences on human behaviour. Male-dominated academic methodologies have been forcefully challenged by feminist thinkers, who have brought a sharp critique concerning how privilege that is structured into society on the basis of gender and class opens up opportunities for some and severely circumscribes opportunities for others. At a macro-economic level, ethicists and theologians from countries of the South have analyzed how privilege for some and oppression for the majority have become institutionalized within international economic relations.

Two other recent insights are worth noting. An understanding of the major influences on human behaviour and decision-making cannot emerge from a rational process alone, but must be open to appreciating insights derived from

intuitive, emotional and spiritual sources. Again, it is feminist thinkers who have been most helpful in raising the profile of these other faculties. Second, we learn more about ourselves through an interactive process of engagement and reflection. Practical experience is indispensable for increasing our understanding. Intellectual analysis is impoverished without it.

This brief review of analyses of the sources of behaviour in psychology, sociology, political economy, philosophy and theology is not intended to come to a definitive conclusion. No one can fully explain why we act as we do as individuals and why we organize our societies as we do collectively. But it is apparent that the best minds over the millennia have struggled with this question, because it is an important one.

I have begun with this examination of theories of human behaviour because I expect that some readers may be inclined to dismiss the focus of this book on spiritual values as naive or idealistic, based on the assumption that identifying the relevant spiritual values will lead automatically to their implementation in practice at individual and collective levels. This assumption I do not make. I recognize the complexity of human behaviour, and I see spiritual values as fitting into a wider spectrum of influences on behaviour.

Given the diversity of explanations that have been offered regarding what determines human behaviour, I conclude that there is a variety of relevant factors, ranging from the micro dimension of neuro-physical response to specific stimuli of pain, through a wide matrix of hereditary and environmental aspects, to the macro dimension of choosing to abide by an abstract principle of what we discern to be morally correct. I see spiritual values as related to most of this continuum with the exception of the more reductionistic explanations. Throughout the book, I will try to illustrate how becoming aware of the operative current value systems can help us to see where and how they have an effect on human behaviour and, conversely, how we can use other more constructive values to help change individual and collective behaviour.

### **The nature of spiritual values**

My hope for the future rests to a significant degree in my belief that there are spiritual values embedded in Christianity and other faiths that can help us live justly and sustainably if we can understand, rejoice in and live our individual and collective lives according to those values.

Though we talk rather glibly about values, it is more difficult to define exactly what they are. For example, how are values different from attitudes or beliefs?

For me, values refer to basic, foundational influences that affect how we think about and act towards ourselves and the world around us. Values can be positive or negative in influencing us towards life-enhancing or destructive choices. There is both a conscious and an unconscious dimension to our values. For instance, we can articulate what we believe to be our value system but our behaviour may show that we actually subscribe to a different set.

Values are more deep-seated and general than the attitudes we hold on particular subjects. Beliefs are conscious understandings to which we are committed and may well incorporate some of our values.

There is a close relationship between spiritual values and religious beliefs. When I talk about spiritual values, I am focusing on those creative, life-enhancing influences that are linked to our souls and our relationship to the spiritual dimension of existence. Spiritual values relate not only to our rational mind, but also to our heart, our emotions, our intuitions, our perceptions, our behaviour. Religious beliefs on the other hand are the way in which we describe the elements of our faith systems, usually through the use of sacred texts and traditions and commentaries on those sources. Though most religious beliefs are not verifiable in the scientific sense, they nonetheless do function primarily at a rational level in terms of our attempts to understand, articulate and communicate our faith. For me, spiritual values are more fundamental than religious beliefs, but that is not to assign them greater priority. Neither one is more important than the other; rather, they nurture each other.

In discerning the spiritual values from Christianity and other faiths which could undergird a more sustainable approach to social life in the 21st century, we find a significant resonance of ideas among the faiths in terms of the sacredness of the earth, the place of the human species as an integral member of the broader life-system, and the need to respect life including that which has gone before and that which will come after. There are certainly distinctions among the faiths in their understandings related to the natural world and our place within it, but the important commonalities provide a solid basis for interfaith collaboration in efforts to help reorient our societies towards greater social and ecological justice.

There are many people in our societies who look at religions with considerable cynicism. They point to the wars around the world where religion is a significant factor; the oppressiveness of various religions towards women, aboriginal peoples and minorities; and the undermining of concern about the well-being of the natural world as a function of teachings and practices of religions. A discussion about how spiritual values related to various faiths can support living for earth community needs to take seriously these contemporary critiques of religion.

Christians engaged in ecological issues are well aware of the accusation that certain elements of the Christian faith and tradition can be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to dissuade people from concern about and engagement in caring for the earth. There are many ways in which the Genesis reference to God's giving humans dominion over creation has been drawn upon to justify an exploitation of the earth's resources, with little concern for the ecological consequences. A focus on the importance of the next life has been used to minimize the need for concern about this life, and the emphasis on the superiority of humans as the only species with a soul has provided licence for disregarding the welfare of animals. The complexities of the Christian faith tradition in relation to earth community are certainly relevant to this discussion, but it is helpful to recognize that other faiths are



not immune from certain paradoxes between their teachings and care for the earth. Take, for example, Buddhism, a faith that many would consider among the more ecologically benign.

Though different from Christianity in many ways, Buddhism shares some similar dynamics when it comes to concern about the well-being of creation. Both the teachings and practice of Buddhism encompass elements that would appear to place barriers to active engagement in caring for the earth and spiritual values that can help us grow in appreciation of our inter-relatedness with the rest of life.

For Western Christians, Zen Buddhism originating in Japan is probably the best known stream of Buddhism and here we immediately encounter complexities in relating Buddhist spiritual values to caring for the earth.

Zen Buddhism is focused on the practice of meditation whose aim is a journey of self-discovery. As Ruben Habito describes it,

this tradition, which focuses on meditative practice, itself encourages the inward turn that enables the individual to disengage him- or herself from distracting and secondary “worldly” preoccupations and to focus on “the one thing necessary” - the awakening of one’s true self, understood to be the basis of true inner peace and fulfilment.<sup>2</sup>

The pursuit of spiritual nourishment through Zen meditation, with its discipline on “listening within”, can lead to a perceived separation of that which is interior from that which is exterior. There is an intentional spiritual withdrawing from the world outside in order to discover the self inside. This apparent split of the inner world and outer world - with the clear priority being concentrated on the inner - could diminish concern about the state of the earth on the part of Zen practitioners. There would be less spiritual rationale for being active in addressing pressing environmental concerns.

But just as deeper examination of Christian scripture and tradition has yielded new spiritual insights with profound ecological implications, so too more sensitive exploration in

Zen Buddhism leads to understandings that not only challenge those propensities to dismiss concern for the world but indeed illumine Buddhist spiritual values critical to saving the earth from human despoilment.

An examination of the practice of Zen Buddhism shows that there can be considerable application to ecological concerns. The three “fruits” of Zen practice are the deepening of one’s mindfulness, the experience of awakening to one’s true self, and the realization and personalization of this true self in one’s ordinary life. The first fruit results in an integration of the various elements of one’s life, so that the practitioner becomes acutely aware of the current moment and of being fully present in it. In the second fruit, where one recognizes one’s true self, there comes a realization that there is no separation between one and the world, between subject and object. Thus the whole universe becomes one’s concern. One comes to be able to see things from the perspective of other beings and thus to experience the inter-relatedness of all things. The third fruit then leads one to apply these understandings to daily life. One is able to feel the suffering of the earth, which can then become a source of energy for transformation of how we live individually and collectively.

As important as interfaith efforts will be in the challenge of the global ecological crisis, we should not let the exploration of spiritual values in other faiths distract us from the primary task of delving into our own faith history, tradition and spirituality. Our aim is to address those negative values that have undermined sustainability, and to lift up those positive spiritual values that are critical for the long-term survival and flourishing of life on earth.

There are two risks in interfaith dialogue on the ecological crisis. One is that we will find it easier to focus on the gifts of another tradition than to come to terms with the problems and potentials in our own. Without the hard work of examining our own faith, especially for those of us within the Western Christian tradition, we will develop neither a comprehensive enough critique of the current situation nor a set

of sufficiently alternative values for the future to make the kind of fundamental difference that is required.

The second risk is the temptation to appropriate spiritual ideas from other traditions at a superficial level. It would be an error to not take seriously enough the context out of which they have evolved and the many challenges that those communities face in the global context. For instance, it would be a disservice to First Nations (Indigenous or Aboriginal) Peoples to romanticize their spirituality about the earth without acknowledging the injustice, oppression and poverty to which many of them have been and continue to be subjected by the societies that have come to inhabit their land over the past centuries.

### **The concept of “earth community”**

Half of the title of this book is “spiritual values”. But to what end are we exploring spiritual values? For “earth community”. For some, the term “earth community” will be new and it may seem almost as awkward as “just and sustainable living”. Both of these phrases, which appear in the title and subtitle, are somewhat clumsy verbal attempts to capture a profound insight: the abundant life promised by Jesus and the shalom on earth towards which we are to work requires justice and respect towards the broader natural world. How can we articulate that integrated concept of social justice and ecological integrity? The ecumenical community has been trying for quite some time.<sup>3</sup>

More than a decade before the term “sustainable development” became popularized through the Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development),<sup>4</sup> the concept of sustainability was being discussed at a WCC consultation of scientists, theologians and economists in Bucharest in 1974. We should not lose sight of the fact that the ecumenical community can claim some credit for conceptualizing sustainability.

The consultation in Bucharest was convened in response to the report *The Limits to Growth*,<sup>5</sup> in which an international group of scientists, economists and business and political

leaders who formed the so-called Club of Rome sounded an alarm about how natural resource depletion, pollution and population growth were placing an intolerable strain on the earth's resources. What emerged out of the Bucharest discussion on the role of science and technology in the development of human societies was the articulation of a "concept called 'sustainability' - the idea that the world's future requires a vision of development that can be sustained in the long run, both environmentally and economically".<sup>6</sup> Charles Birch, an eminent biologist, was one of the speakers at the WCC assembly in Nairobi in 1975 and brought the Bucharest findings to the attention of the WCC. His eloquent promotion of the concept of sustainability was key in the WCC adopting a programme on "just, participatory and sustainable society" (JPSS).

The JPSS framework demonstrated the awareness of the need to link socio-economic justice and ecological sustainability. This has been a recurring theme within the ecumenical community and has been a gift to the broader global community. While many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government departments, and international organizations have had either development concerns *or* environmental issues as their focus, the churches have tried to hold the two dimensions together. During the late 1970s, the WCC Department of Church and Society worked to promote the JPSS framework including at the 1979 conference on "Faith, Science and the Future"<sup>7</sup> in Boston at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The just, participatory and sustainable society framework was expanded in 1983 at the Vancouver assembly of the WCC with the inauguration of the conciliar process on "justice, peace and integrity of creation" (JPIC). Some people feel that the JPIC focus lost some of the specificity of the JPSS framework since there no longer was explicit reference to "participatory" with its conceptual links to people's empowerment movements nor was "sustainable" any more in the title. The participatory theme could have been helpful now that an emphasis on communities has emerged as an

important focus for the WCC. «Sustainable» may have clearer practical implications than “integrity of creation” which was a rather last-minute addition at the Vancouver assembly to a proposal which was originally referring only to justice and peace. On the other hand, others argue that JPIC makes an explicit reference to peace, which reminds us how destructive a force war and militarism is to both people and environment, and it adds a more specifically ecological and theological perspective with the concept of integrity of creation.

The important point is to recognize the conceptual inadequacy of any framework to describe sufficiently the breadth of our social and ecological concern. Such frameworks are constantly evolving in response both to how we understand our experiences and to new dynamics from the local to the global level.

Though the churches have done quite a good job in stressing the linkages among these various global problems, this is not to suggest that we have not had our share of debate within the ecumenical community about the relationship of socio-economic justice and ecological sustainability. The 1990 WCC world convocation on “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” in Seoul and the lead-up to it stand out as a point in our history where this discussion was particularly vigorous. There were criticisms, mainly from persons involved in economic justice work, that the rising priority on environmental concerns was a Northern and largely middle-class diversion of the churches’ attention from the more critical concerns of hunger, poverty and racial injustice.

The Seoul JPIC convocation did nonetheless take a significant step forward in the articulation of ten theological affirmations which, together with the analyses on which they are based, provide a clearer elaboration than we had had regarding, on the one hand, the inter-relatedness of economic inequity, militarism, ecological destruction and racial injustice and, on the other hand, the theological, ethical and spiritual basis for affirming and sustaining life in its fullness.<sup>8</sup> A further contribution of Seoul was to integrate these theologi-

cal affirmations with more specific «covenants» in which the participating churches agreed to work together on programmes in justice, peace, integrity of creation and racial equity.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 was a high point in ecumenical involvement in issues of sustainability and in interaction with the broader global community.<sup>9</sup> The ecumenical gathering in Rio was significant for a number of reasons. The WCC, along with representatives from other faith groups, helped to provide a substantial profile of religious communities at UNCED witnessing to our belief that the issues being addressed by the Rio Earth Summit had ethical, spiritual and theological dimensions which could not be ignored. Secondly, our time together as an ecumenical group laid the groundwork for network-building which resulted in further collaborative efforts later (e.g., a 1993 forestry consultation co-sponsored by Canadian and Philippine churches; WCC climate change work moving to a global level; initial conception of a theological resource which resulted in the WCC book *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*<sup>10</sup>). Thirdly, the event diffused more broadly than ever before within the ecumenical community a recognition of the inter-relatedness of environment and development. We can point to a variety of evidence including increased programmes on environment and development within churches and new courses on ecotheology in seminaries in the North and the South.

On the other hand, the ecumenical gathering in Rio did not make a pivotal contribution to any new conceptualization of sustainability. More explicit work on this theme was done in 1993, when the WCC-related Visser 't Hooft organization sponsored a consultation entitled "Sustainable Growth: A Contradiction in Terms?"<sup>11</sup> A central focus of that consultation and the resulting booklet was the destructive and inequitable impact of the global economic system which emphasizes economic growth at all costs. The participants suggested that the term and concept of "sustainable develop-

ment” was at risk of being eviscerated of its transformative potency by being expanded to include sustainable economic growth. In fact, this is precisely what we have seen in the documents that governments adopted at the Rio Earth Summit and most of the subsequent UN conferences.<sup>12</sup>

Much has happened to the concept of sustainability over the past twenty years and serious concerns can be raised about how its integrity is being compromised by current tendencies to misconstrue the term “sustainable development” to legitimize clearly unsustainable practices. “Sustainable community” is a term that we are now coming to use within ecumenical discussions related to the WCC’s work on issues of economic justice and ecological integrity. While continuing to carry the long-term perspective of sustainability, it focuses on community in which the nurturing of just and equitable relationships both within the human family and also between humans and the rest of the ecological community can occur - in other words, justice within the whole of God’s creation. Community can be understood at various levels, from the local context in which people spend their daily lives to the global human fellowship to the even more profound inter-relationship of all life on earth. Community is a useful focus also because it carries implications of relationships, responsibility and fulfilment.

“Earth community” moves us an important step further. It evokes an understanding of the wholeness and inter-relatedness of all life. Larry Rasmussen in his book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* has made a major contribution in our ecumenical struggle to describe the vision towards which we feel called. Rasmussen illustrates how destructive are the basic conceptual frameworks of contemporary societies, which remain mired in assumptions that the human species is distinct from and superior to the rest of the natural world. Drawing on reflections of Czech President Vaclav Havel, Rasmussen observes:

The world of “modern anthropocentrism” is deeply, even fatally flawed. The notions and institutions that issue from its ethics and spirituality, and depend upon them, must be set aside. A

moral universe limited to the human universe will not, under present circumstances, even understand life, much less serve it. Earth community requires a biocentric or a geocentric knowledge, ethic and faith.<sup>13</sup>

Rasmussen issues a profound challenge. Grounding our commitment to transformation in a vision of earth community compels us to recognize that (1) the survival of the human community is dependent upon a thriving natural world; (2) the forces of destruction and injustice within the human community are similar to those threatening the broader natural world; and (3) the long-term solutions lie in an integration of our struggles to bring about justice within the human community and sustainability of the global environment. Spiritual values are a key element in any transformation towards just and sustainable living, towards an understanding of the joy and responsibility of being members of earth community.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The following discussion about various schools of thought regarding determinants of human behaviour draws on analyses from a range of books including Elmer Sprague and Paul Taylor, eds, *Knowledge and Value*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1967; Neil R. Carlson, *Psychology: The Science of Behavior*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1984; Frederick E. Mosedale, ed., *Philosophy and Science: The Wide Range of Interaction*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1979; Judson R. Landis, *Sociology - Concepts and Characteristics*, Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Publishing, 1971; Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, New York, Harmony Books, 1991; Dieter Hessel, ed., *Theology for Earth Community*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Ruben L.E. Habito, "Mountains and Rivers and the Great Earth: Zen and Ecology", in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds, *Buddhism and Ecology*, Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions, 1997, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the following material on ecumenical reflections regarding conceptual frameworks is drawn from an article I wrote for a WCC consultation on climate change and which was subsequently published in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 49, no. 2, April 1997, entitled "Ecumenical Responses to Climate Change: A Summary of the History and Dynamics of Ecumenical Involvement in the Issue of Climate Change".



- <sup>4</sup> World Commission on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 1987.
- <sup>5</sup> D. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome*, New York, Universe Books, 1974.
- <sup>6</sup> Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "Creation in Ecumenical Thought", in David G. Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology - Voices from South and North*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994.
- <sup>7</sup> See Paul Abrecht, ed., *Faith, Science and the Future*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1979.
- <sup>8</sup> World Council of Churches, *Now Is The Time: A Report from the Seoul World Convocation on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990.
- <sup>9</sup> World Council of Churches, *Searching for a New Heaven and a New Earth: An Ecumenical Response to UNCED*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1992.
- <sup>10</sup> David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994.
- <sup>11</sup> Visser 't Hooft Endowment Fund for Leadership Development, *Sustainable Growth—A Contradiction in Terms?*, Geneva, Visser 't Hooft Publications, 1993.
- <sup>12</sup> David G. Hallman, "Creation and Justice in the World of Politics: The Ecumenical Community and the United Nations Challenge Each Other", a paper examining ecumenical involvement in the recent UN world conferences in Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing, prepared for a consultation of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, April 1996 (available from the author).
- <sup>13</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Marynoll, NY, Orbis, 1996, pp. 17-18.