



Green Reformation: Ecology, Religion, Education and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement. An International Consultation, 12-15 May 2019, Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland

"When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." (Gen. 9:16)

"We are embarking on a journey for change. We are thankful for our accomplishments thus far. Still, God's call for us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves and to take great care of creation encourages us to do more." (Roadmap for Congregations, Communities, and Churches, for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice, Geneva: WCC, 2019, p.4)

A Living Document for Further Reflection and Engagement

What this consultation was about

The World Council of Churches' department on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), as part of its programmatic mandate, regularly organizes conferences with the aim of providing space for exchange on cutting-edge issues relevant for the ecumenical movement, and more specifically ecumenical formation. The international consultation on "Green Reformation: Ecology, Religion, Education and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement" represents the third major gathering in this series of activities over the past five years (2014: Migration and Theological Education, 2016: Religious Radicalization and Theological Education).

This consultation was planned and implemented in partnership with the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), and with the support of the departments on Ecumenical Continuing Formation, Care for Creation, Economy of Life and Climate Justice, and Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. It is embedded in the wider context of debate and the commitment of the World Council of Churches to foster theological, advocacy-oriented and lifestyle-changing reflection and action at the level of churches, international organizations, networks and individuals. Care for creation has become one of the core fields of ecumenical commitment, which responds to the urgency of the current ecological crisis and at the same time constitutes a transversal field relevant to all: religious communities, including churches of different traditions, and all people of good will. Significant work has been accomplished in partnership with ecumenical partners and civil society actors, for instance by providing resources for congregational work, by engaging people of other faiths and young people, and by raising the voices of the churches in the international discourse on sustainability and ecological justice.

The Green Reformation consultation aimed at offering contributions to this continuous , particularly from the perspective of theological education (*which forms, models and methods should be used in learning for ecological awareness?*), and through the lenses of indigenous traditions and contexts (*how can indigenous traditions inform the reflection on and care for creation?*).

Who took part in the consultation?

The consultation was enriched by the participation and contributions of theological educators, researchers, members of ecumenical networks in the field of advocacy and care for creation, and representatives of grassroots movements. They represented the fullest breadth of Christianity, originating from diverse regions of the world and representing 23 countries: Argentina, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Fiji, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, Togo, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The geographical representation, diversity of faith and church traditions, as well as the interdisciplinary character of the event underscored the global and intersectional character of the consultation. The participants of this consultation see themselves

as part of a larger movement to create and foster ecological awareness, feel called as theological educators in the widest sense, and are committed to inviting one another to deepen the dialogue on eco-relational theologies and their place in theological and other learning environments.

What we reflected upon

The consultation was designed as a continuous reflection process with four thematic emphases: a) ecology and the re-reading of sacred texts, b) eco-theology and indigenous traditions and contexts, c) theological education and methods of ecological engagement, and d) eco-theology/eco-relational theologies and the future of the ecumenical movement. The following salient points from the common reflection process are arranged according to the sequence of these thematic emphases.

Ecology and the re-reading of sacred texts

1. Identifying the need for re-reading the biblical texts related to creation and God's *oikos*, we started our reflection by defining vantage points for an eco-relational hermeneutics. One aspect stressed in this context was revisiting the notion of "the other" or "the neighbour" and extending it beyond human beings. Respecting the double command of love – the love for God relates to the Creator and sustainer of the world and the love for one's neighbour/the other – must entail including beings and created entities beyond humans.
2. Another hermeneutical aspect we highlighted was to extend the notion of "text" beyond the biblical passages which relate directly to creation, e.g. Genesis or the Psalms. Our re-reading should also include passages which are relevant for defining relations between humans and created entities, as well as humans as part of the web of life. There is a need to recognize the plurality of sacred literary genres within the Bible and other sacred texts, and the value of reading sacred literary genres in indigenous and other religious traditions. Another point that was raised was, "to what extent do other entities in nature constitute a genre of the sacred which requires attention?"
3. We also stressed the necessity to formulate a new paradigm with hermeneutical principles that address and recognise justice, dignity, rights, interconnectedness and integrity of creations.
4. Coming together from various traditions and languages and mirroring the plurality and richness of the Christian faith worldwide, as well as other religions, we became aware that another dimension is important for our discussion: cultivating awareness for an inclusive language that incorporates all that belongs to God's creation. This is not restricted to the words we use; it also entails an awareness of the concepts they refer to in various languages, which may be diluted in the process of translation.

Ecology and indigenous traditions and contexts

5. We listened to presentations on indigenous wisdom and critical reflections on the Christian lifestyle with respect to caring for creation, the spirit of consumerism, and structural greed.
6. Panellists and participants argued in their contributions particularly on the aspects of interconnectedness, relationality and the centrality of land as important, also theologically relevant pointers in understanding ecology from an indigenous perspective.
7. Eco-relational theology urges us to examine the question of salvation and eschatology anew. Is salvation restricted to humans? Can kenosis and resurrection, as well as *theologoumena* such as the new heaven and the new earth be fully understood if we restrict them to humans only? If we speak about the task of safeguarding creation and assuring its integrity, is it only a task for human beings, and only for Christians? Does not the relation of all created entities safeguard the existence of human beings in the first place?

8. In view of this, we also addressed the ambivalence of the human inclination toward violence, which affects creation and other species, and we reflected upon the necessity of reclaiming reverence for life in relation to creation.

Theological education and methods of ecological engagement

9. We discussed the need for theological institutions and theological educators to become more conscious about their educational frameworks in which eco-theology is embedded.
10. We discovered that curriculum development in the area of eco-theology/eco-relational theology and care for creation requires a multi-disciplinary effort and collaboration between all disciplines.
11. We reflected on the necessity of engaging more thoroughly in a methodological discussion (how can eco-theological/eco-relational theological learning be organized? Which methods are appropriate?).

Eco-theology/Eco-relational theologies and the future of the ecumenical movement

12. We discussed the role churches and religious communities can play in modelling ecological awareness and in contributing insights from spirituality and values informed by sacred texts, holistic and integral world views.
13. We reflected on the mandate of churches and religious communities to promote best practices for caring for creation, the well-being of all creation, and advocacy for the implementation of eco-preservation measures in the public sphere.
14. We highlighted eco-theology/eco-relational theologies as a cross-cutting theme for the future of the ecumenical movement which will remain on the ecumenical agenda as the fellowship of churches prepares for the next WCC assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2021 and beyond.

What we learned

Against the background of our discussions and reflections, we were able to identify core areas of learning. Some are fresh, others are reminders of what we should be aware of but tend to forget, and still others are those we need to explore further.

15. We realised the richness of, and the challenges inherent in, the concept of “ecology” as a transversal theological and interdisciplinary enquiry, which we do not always recognize in their full breadth and depth. Sometimes, we are tempted to restrict ourselves too swiftly to theological tradition and enquiry.
16. We reminded one another about the forgotten Christian values and indigenous traditions that allowed human beings to be in harmony with their local natural environment prior to the era of industrialization.
17. We shared ideas on the necessity of renewing methodologies for teaching and learning eco-theology/eco-relational theologies as an urgent response to the ecological crisis caused by current human lifestyles.
18. We agreed to continue the collective exploration of new educational paradigms in ecumenical eco-theology/eco-relational theologies, through dialogue and interfaith collaboration.
19. We decided to deepen and discern the understanding of the theological concept of *oikos*, so as to avoid a narrow metaphorical and ideological interpretation of its national/geographic meaning, and thus to restrict it to ‘those who dwell there’. *Oikos* also needs to be expanded to mean an inviting home for all animate and inanimate creation.
20. We recognize *oikos* as a collective household, which includes constant mobility and living with ambivalence, dissension and modes of transitional existence. This is expressed in the tension

between various meanings of “home-house” such as “carried home” in nomadic societies, and the Oceanian concept of “carrying a home”.

21. An important dimension of our consultation was the contribution from colleagues belonging to indigenous peoples of their traditions and contexts. We experienced their presence as critical stimulus for the development of eco-relational theologies. We were reminded, for instance, that in many traditions humans are considered late-coming neighbours who were embedded into the relationship with others and the web of life in creation.
22. We learned that multi-dimensionality and interconnectedness are not abstract insights, but evolve from the understanding that all of life is eco-relational, and therefore all of life is ecological. This understanding runs at the same time against the colonial agenda of compartmentalisation, and could be a possible hermeneutical tool for the church worldwide, in partnership with other religious communities, to reconstruct doctrines and theological views such as the Trinity, salvation and sin, which have been used as tools to discriminate and exclude the holistic eco-spiritualities of the indigenous peoples.
23. We discovered that there remains a critical tension between indigenous spiritualities and Christian traditions, since in many regions these traditions were and continue to be explicitly stigmatized and excluded as non-Christian and declared as heathen. There is not only a need to rediscover these resources and traditions by indigenous peoples themselves, but also to study critically the misinterpretations they may have been the object of, and to reconcile the contextualization of the Christian faith with the traditions in which it was received.
24. We also lamented the wounds of the complicity of churches in ecological destruction, highlighted the importance of giving climate change “faces”, and of paving the way for repentance and prophetic action to restore the integrity of God’s creation.
25. We expressed the need to humble ourselves by reassessing the role of the church in hermeneutics, accountability, and the fragmentation of discourses with respect to their prophetic voice in the field of ecology.
26. We underscored the urgency of embracing diverse hermeneutics and approaches to solve the challenges at the local and global levels.
27. We recognized the necessity of connecting local experiences with the global perspective on justice, where issues of ecology, economy, gender and other social contexts and their global dimensions intersect (e.g. climate justice and the experience of climate-induced refugees).
28. We realized that climate change is also a personal matter, which we are called to address by identifying stories of “hope against hope” in order to sustain commitment for the care of creation.
29. We decided to discuss, share and further explore critical questions such as, “What does green reformation mean in the field of ecology?” Furthermore, what does it mean to be a human (Human-humus) in search of the origin/genesis and intrinsic relation of humans with the earth?

What we recommend to churches and theological schools

Eco-theology is a theme for collaborative reflection and action of churches and theological institutions.

We invite the churches to join the process of eco-relational theological engagement and recommend:

30. Deepening eco-relational theology and promoting a “green” hermeneutics of the Bible (green Bible). Churches and theological schools should give more importance to this field of study, both theologically and liturgically.

31. This consultation made us aware of the special need to honour and pay more attention to the wisdom of indigenous peoples, and to make their voices heard. It is of paramount importance that churches and schools engage with the richness of traditions and relate to them. Such sharing could constitute a crucial dimension of the pilgrimage of justice and peace.
32. Strengthening of networking and convergence of the eco-justice movements with the involvement and leadership of churches and theological institutions, will help profiling churches' public witness in the field of eco-theology.
33. Our deliberations at this consultation once again highlighted how vital it is that churches unite around the challenges of the ecological crisis and lift up their prophetic voices on care for creation and eco-justice.
34. We shared the conviction that churches can be impactful models for living together in harmony with creation, as a strong and radiant sign of living the teachings of Christ on the fullness of life, in solidarity with people of other faiths and all people of good will.

We invite theological schools and other educational institutions to join the process of eco-relational theological engagement and recommend:

35. Including workshops, classes and exposure visits in their curricula which offer the possibility of practical involvement with the care for creation through experiential and service learning (planting, farming, environmental activities, green campuses), and developing the spiritual dimension of such activities.
36. Engaging in theological and educational reformation for the accountability of the churches and institutions engaged in vocational training, in response to climate change and ecological destruction. We also recommend using and implementing the WCC's "Roadmap for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice" as a resource for eco-theological/eco-relational theological education, with the intention of bridging the gap between theoretical and practical learning.
37. Fostering collaboration between educational and political decision makers to promote educational frameworks, the accreditation of ecological study programmes, and a more sustainable and just society.
38. Strengthening interdisciplinary dialogue on the issues involved, in light of the findings of this consultation.
39. We were impressed to learn of the many initiatives that exist, and we underscore the need for sharing more intentionally and deeply what has been achieved so far. Churches and schools should exchange across the regions what they have studied and the resources they have produced.

There is still much to reflect upon, many actions to undertake, and more prayers to formulate:

Praying to you refreshes us and gives us wings: our hearts overflow with warmth; a majesty filled with wisdom permeates nature and all of life! (Metropolitan Tryphon, An Akathist in Praise of God's Creation, 1934)