

True disciples, nature and leiturgia

Preservation of the earth

Phemelo Marumo¹ & Sarel van der Merwe²

Abstract

God created humanity in his image (*imago Dei*) so that they become God's disciples. The core duties of being a disciple are to be responsible for, utilise and care for the earth as part of *leiturgia*³, which according to Deddens is, "service to the benefit of the people and an act of worship" (1993:15). Indeed, we must heed the call of creation in our worship services. From a Reformed perspective, the Fall, however, resulted in a disregard for worshipping God, living with him and taking care of the earth. Instead, the earth has been subject to exploitation ever since. This exploitation is in sharp contrast to Matthew 28:20 where Jesus instructed his disciples to go and teach the nations to observe all his commands, one of which was to "care for and subdue" the earth.

This exploitation is seen in our time in the phenomenon called, global warming, which is gradually ravaging the environment. A lot has been proclaimed by religious bodies over time, governments as well as organisations, advocating the preservation of the environment, but to no avail. In this article, we argue that, for religious communities, *leiturgia* and discipleship should be considered as an alternative to merely holding conferences and seminars on the environment. The care for nature is at the centre of multifarious debates, but nothing ever comes of it because, so we argue, the value of true discipleship has been pushed aside as though it never existed.

This article addresses the above by first highlighting the historical background of the notions of *leiturgia* and discipleship as a core of the mission to preserve the earth, then secondly, we present action taken at present to attend to the earth's destruction. The article then demonstrates concretely, as an alternative, how *leiturgia* and discipleship could serve to care for the earth and how as an essential part of true discipleship, glorifying God is in accordance with the *missio Dei*.

Key words: disciples; *leiturgia*; creation; *missio Dei*; earth.

¹ Phemelo Olifile Marumo is a lecturer of Missiology and Philosophy, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences: Department of Theology and Philosophy at the North-West University - Mafikeng Campus.: phemelo.marumo@nwu.ac.za

² Sarel van der Merwe is an extraordinary professor in Missiology; Faculty of Human and Social Sciences: Department of Theology and Philosophy at the North-West University - Mafikeng Campus. sarel.vandermerwe@nwu.ac.za

³ Means 'a' (Deddens 1993:15)

1. Background

The creation narrative in Genesis 1:26-28 describes how humanity was created, culminating in “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness; let them reign...” Humanity was created in the likeness to God and this demonstrates that humanity is made in God’s image (*imago Dei*). The fact that humanity was created in this manner and by God himself, the owner of creation, bestows on humanity the status of kingship. Giving humanity “dominion” over all creatures that dwell on the earth entrusted humanity with the duty of priesthood and royalty to oversee the earth as God’s steward or representative.

The term “image of God” has had various interpretations. Regardless of the conclusions reached, it is clear that God and human beings have a bond different from any other that God has with the rest of creation. Humanity is entrusted with a unique task. Westermann (1987:10) puts it as follows: “By virtue of being created, (humanity) bears a responsibility; human dignity and responsibility are inseparable.” Westermann (1987:10) adds that although “humanity exercises sovereignty over the rest of creation”, human beings are reminded that “there is no suggestion of exploitation.” Just like a king is obliged to rule responsibly to the benefit of his subjects, so humans are to care responsibly for creation. The caring is characterised by responsibilities embedded in stewardship specific to the environment that God may have a representative for his creation who will reflect God’s image, instilled in humanity during creation (Genesis 1).

Despite the above, God’s plan for his creation was hampered by sin, the plan was not abandoned; even after the Fall, God continues to care for his creation, in his glory. Rhoads (2009:338) confirms this as follows:

“God’s purpose after the Fall was to restore all creation to his intended plan. This action is not an escape from Earth, but a movement toward embodiment of creation and was divine in nature. Jesus became flesh to bring ‘new creation’ (Gal 6:15). Furthermore, Paul in Rom. 8:18-25 testifies to this vocation when he claims that “the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains ready to be set free from its bondage to decay, as it waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God who will care for each other and for Earth.” Therefore, humanity is called now to be those children of God who exercise stewardship in relation to all creation. The recreation and caring for the earth clearly illustrates *missio Dei*.

2. Introduction

All of creation is destined to be reconciled to the Creator, not only humanity but also the entire cosmic order. This is so that all things may be reconciled to God in Christ (Colossians 1:15–20) and that “God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28b), “from him and through him” (Romans 11:36). The dynamic “engine” driving this

eschatological reconciliation is the Spirit. The Spirit of creation and redemption is also the coming Spirit, who enables the renewal and restoration of all things to the image of God in Christ. The eschatological work of the Spirit transforms and transfigures all creation as the dwelling place of the Spirit of the living God. As part of *missio Dei*, God will redeem all that belongs to him - creation in its entirety.

3. Image of God (*imago Dei*)

It is evident from the above premise that being made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) bestowed upon humanity the dignity of being called the sons and daughters of God, in God's glory. This glorification could only be a reality if humanity served God diligently and honourably and obeyed what I would call, the Edenic instruction - "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17) – but humanity failed to obey this command and show God his due glory. It did not, however, thwart God's plan for his creation - sin created the impetus for the *missio Dei*; it did not remove it. Academic discussions further demonstrate that reflecting God's glory in his creation remained uppermost, even after the Fall, and is the reason why the new creation will be eschatologically restored and glorification of God will be evident to all.

Wyatt (2014:24) asserts that "the making of the man explicitly out of dust is another royal metaphor," as discerned by Brueggemann (1972:2) who states, "it is terminology used to speak of the elevation of man to royal office, where man became unique. Behind the creation formula lies a royal formula of 'enthronement,'" Brueggemann (1972) further adds that 'Dust' is used to describe his pre-royal status, which apparently means he is a 'nothing', without identity or importance. The antithesis of 'dust' in this text is 'kingship' (*nagîd*) - a position of power and importance. His pre-royal status which has been described as 'dust' is clearly explained in Gen. 2:7."

Sin, however, tainted it all. This premise makes it important to address discipleship, since humanity was now corrupted by sin and this needed to be corrected. Discipleship corrects the neglect of stewardship, through sin, by humanity.

4. Biblical Discipleship

A disciple is called to fulfil the task Jesus set out for his disciples during the revision and correction in the forty vital days after the resurrection (Van der Walt 2007:304), hence the disciples' response: "Now we really understand." (John 12:16; Mark 6:52). Humanity conducted its stewardship in close relationship with God fulfilling the Edenic instruction. Genesis 3:8 describes how God visited Adam in the Garden at sunset in his desire to have fellowship, intimacy and closeness.

During these visits God ensured that Adam carry out the mandate. From his visits in the garden “in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8) up to the first disobedience and to the end of this age and beyond, God is constantly seeking, even yearning for a meaningful relationship with people.

This relationship compelled true discipleship and hence the following statement by Stromsmoe (2010:22) on the cultural mandate, namely, “Because God told Adam to care for the garden, and that command has never been revoked, so we have received this duty as an ethical imperative. Put bluntly, we should care for creation because God has told us to.” In the context of this analysis, it is the discipleship of caring that binds this obligation.

When God put Adam in the Garden of Eden, he was given the simple mandate “to serve and to keep.” The basis of this mandate is for human beings to perform these tasks concurrently and they should be the terms of reference for humanity being placed in the Garden of Eden. Humanity cannot heed the one and disregard the other, both are paramount to preserving the environment. It is also the reason that God bestowed on humanity the status of priesthood as well as kingship. Human beings are servants of creation and that is how they exercise their kingship. Kingship is about serving and “to keep” meaning to protect and care for in a watchful manner.

Wright (2010:51) describes watchfulness as a sign of carefulness, i.e. one cannot be watchful and be clumsy or neglectful of the task; watchfulness implies utmost devoted attention at all times. It further bears the implication of keeping whatever is entrusted in a manner that will maintain the condition in which it was granted by the owner. Humanity is thus obliged to work hard at caring for creation and protecting its best interest at all times. This mandate was given to man and still remains. God also bestowed kingship or royalty on humanity.

The concept of royalty is clearly explained by Van Seters (1989:341) as “the creation of humanity has a royal flair or a royal ideology.” He further argues that “concerning Gen 1: 26-28 and Psalm 8 it has been clear for some time that the presentation of the creation of humanity in these texts is dominated by royal ideology.” In his argumentation, Van Seters (1989:341) cites the Babylonian tradition that all of the deities collectively lend aid in the creation of the king and not just a single deity. He refers to the plural “let us” to demonstrate how other deities had a part to play in the creation of humanity (Van Seters, 1989:341).

In conjunction with Van Seters (1989), Wright (2010:50-51) maintains that “being made in God’s image or likeness, humanity was made the king of creation. Being made in the image of God does not constitute dominion.”

Wright (2010:50-51) explains as follows: “Being made in God’s image means God’s image was imprinted on humanity and humanity could represent God. This representation entrusted to human beings not to any other species. God passed

into human hands a delegated form of God's own kingly authority over the whole of creation. This was similarly the practice in ancient times for emperors to erect images of themselves in the far-flung corners of their realms, which would proclaim their sovereignty over the territory and its people. The image of God represented the authority of the king. Similarly, God installs the human species as his image within creation and authorises humans to exercise authority. However, it is the authority that ultimately belongs to God, the creator and owner of the earth."

This leads to the conclusion that the bestowal of priestly and kingly status implies being entrusted with authority and a mandate. The acquisition of this status makes man a disciple responsible for the duties inherent in true discipleship, as Jesus indicates in Matthew 28:20: "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

5. Nature

Aside from humanity, God's creation also encompasses the world and nature – creation is thus God-given. According to Rottenberg (2000:411):

"The God of the Bible is the Creator God, who is confessed as the God of the Covenant. This is a fundamental principle shared by Judaism and Christianity, a perspective that has profoundly influenced the history of the West and beyond. The 'Lord' of the universe, out of sheer sovereign grace, enters into a relationship with mortals (bearers of the *imago Dei*), seeks them out and calls them to obedience and service to a world that has lost its way."

The Biblical doctrine of creation involves a *Weltanschauung*⁴, "a way in which countless millions of people have viewed, experienced and approached reality" (Thomson, 2012:179).

The above is further clarified by Grudem (2010:263) who affirms "that God created both heavens and earth and everything in them." This is substantiated in the New Testament where, for example, Acts 24:24 speaks of God as the "Sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them." One of the first ways of identifying God is to say that He is the one who created all things. Barnabas and Paul explain to the pagan audience at Lystra that "they are the messengers of a living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them" (Acts 14:15). Similarly, when Paul is speaking to pagan Greek philosophers

⁴ "A *Weltanschauung* starts from what is, as being the meaning, in order to step up from the depths to the conception of a God; but Holy Scripture has to do with heaven and earth and with man solely in the context of 'I believe in God the Creator of Heaven and earth'. In this genitive it is made manifest that I believe not in creation, but in God, the Creator." (Barth, 1949:61).

in Athens, he identifies the true God as “the God who made the world and everything in it” and furthermore adds that this God “gives to all men life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25-25; Isaiah 45:18; Revelation 10:6).

Grudem (2010:267) further states the following in this regard:

“God is also involved in creation, for it is continually dependent on him for its existence and its functioning. The technical term used to speak of God’s involvement in creation is ‘immanent’ meaning ‘remaining in’ creation. The God of the Bible is no abstract deity removed from and uninterested in his creation. The Bible is the story of God’s involvement with his creation and particularly the people in it. This is affirmed by Job who states that even animals and plants depend on God; ‘In his hand is life of every living thing and the breath of humanity’ (Job 12:10). This affirmation can be seen in the New Testament, where Paul states that God ‘gives to all men life and breath and everything’ and that ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:25, 28). Indeed in Christ ‘all things hold together’ (Col. 1:17). God’s transcendence and immanence are both affirmed in a single verse, when Paul speaks of ‘one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all’ (Eph. 4:6).”

6. Humanity and nature

Despite the above, humanity has failed to obey and take up the task to look after the earth. Humanity has been blinded by self-enrichment, in lieu of pleasing God and paying homage to him alone. It has led to the following:

Selfishness and self-centredness have contributed to humanity treating creation as an object to be exploited, as though it has an autonomous right to do so. This practice is obvious from the value placed on time and money.

Echoing the assertion over humanity’s insistence on time and money, Bohlin (2014:7) states:

“Our often uncontrolled greed and haste have led to the deterioration of the environment. We evaluate projects almost exclusively in terms of their potential impact on humans. For instance, builders know that it is faster and more cost effective to bulldoze trees that are growing on the site of a proposed subdivision than it is to build the houses around them. Even if the uprooted trees are replaced with saplings once the houses are constructed, the loss of the mature trees leads to soil-erosion, eliminates a means of absorbing pollutants, producing oxygen, and providing shade, and produces a scar that heals slowly if at all.”

Similarly, the church has also failed to take environmental concerns seriously. This is clear from the following reference of Warmback (2012:23) and Conradie (2011:8) to statements made by the South African sociologist, Jacklyn Cock, in her

report titled *Towards the Greening of the Church in South Africa*. In the report she labels the response of the church in South Africa “as one of ‘deep silence’ and ‘blind spot’ when coming to matters of earth preservation.” Reviewing the efforts of the Roman Catholic, Anglican and other churches as well as analysing their policies and publications, she found that despite speaking out on issues of militarisation, political detainees, rent boycotts, negotiations, HIV/AIDS, objection, capital punishment, sexual abuse, torture and racism, “there is a silence on the environment conscientious.” On the whole, “neither were church organisations responsive to environmental concerns” (Cock, 1991). Cock points out that the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), closely associated with the *Kairos Document*, was silent on issues pertaining to the environment.

The above claim also emerges in Bohlin (2014:8) who maintains:

“The church is vocal on materialism of science as it resonates in the issues of abortion, human dignity, evolution and genetic engineering which are the products of the Industrial Revolution, instead of doing the same on its mission which is stewardship of the earth, which is scanty. The church has shown lacklustre interest on issues of the environment.”

In this way the church loses a great evangelistic opportunity, which is desired by many, culminating in the church promoting consumerism.

Consumerism has created a global crisis, the result of humanity’s exploitation of each other and of the earth. The powerful exploit the powerless and the earth to satisfy their desire for wealth, comfort and power (Field, 2001:69; Nürnberger, 2007:215-216). Field (2001:69) emphasises in this regard:

“The powerless have in turn been forced to exploit the earth to survive. Hence, the radical questions about the future of human society as we know it and the growing recognition of the interrelationship of all dimensions of the biosphere, the awareness that humanity is part of and not separate from nature. Humanity’s prosperity is thus dependent on the health of the earth community (ecosystem), not on the wealth of certain individuals.”

Consequently, humanity has created a world of wealth, in an attempt to organise and integrate poverty and inequality, but has instead promoted and imposed “globalisation” as the ultimate answer.

“Neo-liberal economic globalisation has not reduced poverty, inequality and ecological destruction. On the contrary, globalisation has led to the destruction of the environment and widened the gap between the rich and the poor, making societies less resilient. It has marginalised the most vulnerable of the affected groups:

women, youth, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and the impoverished” (Kennedy 2010:147).

Because people yearn for evangelistic preaching, a major challenge for the church is to listen to the prophetic voice of those people who take care of the environment and employ a new way of analysing, reflecting on and acting against economic and ecological injustices.

Regarding the above notion, Nürnberger, (2007:217) argues that “in a closed system like that of poor countries or underdeveloped countries construction of energy (focus on development) in one area is always matched by a higher degree of deconstruction (affecting the poor) elsewhere in its environment.” He adds that “energy must after all come from somewhere. Although technology enhances the ‘throughput’ from resource base to waste, accelerating the entropic process, there is in the meantime a steady import of energy from the sun into the ecosystem of the earth. The process is slow, leading to something like partial closure.”

This explains why the partial closure cannot keep pace with the rate of development in technology, consumerism and globalisation. It thus has an adverse impact on the environment, especially the natural world, which is already groaning under the impact of modern malicious practice by humanity and consumerism. This can be seen in the vastly populated parts of the world such as China, India, Indonesia, Latin American and Africa that were successful in their bid to achieve American and European living standards. All the while there is still rampant population growth in the poorest countries, partly as a result of poverty and partly due to traditionalism. If this were to continue, the ecosystem would hardly be able to bear the overload.

7. *Missio Dei*

In addressing the above and perpetuating *missio Dei*, *leiturgia* as one of the attributes of *missio Dei* could be used in reminding the community that the earth and all that is in it belongs to God. Furthermore, the evangelistic preaching content of *leiturgia* could be an instrument for highlighting the need for the preservation of the earth.

Evangelistic preaching, which is profound in nature and brings glory to God, is encapsulated in Psalm 19. The psalmist illustrates how glory is bestowed upon God as the creator, by incorporating components of nature (*viz.* the heavens, the earth and the sea). He gives a clear explanation of how the heavens bring glory to God in the way they are created, highlighting that God’s abode is filled with glory (Psalm 19:1).

The other two components, *viz.* the earth and the sea, bring about the beauty of creation. The heavens bring glory and the earth and sea bring beauty. It is for this

reason that the psalmist declares, in verse 2, the firmament the handiwork of God and in it is the glorification of God.

The above paints an unblemished picture of creation. It is purity and glory in itself. The glory of this creativity serves as an example of the perfectness that converts the soul (Psalm 19:7). The converted soul is a sign of true discipleship. It is one of the characteristics that moulds a true disciple.

8. *Leiturgia* and discipleship

True discipleship and effective nature conservation, coupled with effective *leiturgia*, can make a distinct contribution towards saving the environment from imminent destruction. Liturgy, which acknowledges the environment as an act of God, and the protection of the environment as the glorification of God, would bring about the awareness that the earth belongs to God and it must be preserved at all costs: “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).

Okonkwo (2011:36) explains that “It is in the liturgy, more than elsewhere, where harmony between humanity, God and environment is realised, because it (liturgy) brings into the midst of the community the risen Lord, the Lord of creation, with all his compassion and self-giving. Worship can in no way be alienated from the concrete life of the people, otherwise environmental damage already inflicted on nature by technological advancement will not be remedied. This remedy may, however, not be possible if human beings fail to appreciate nature as graced and sanctified.”

Certain churches’ practices do not, however, promote earth preservation. Hymns selected for church services have moved away from praising the earth or environment. Such praise also rarely features in sermons and dogma. There is a lack of creation hymnals that refer to creation and extol the earth in both the mainstream hymn collections and African traditional religion. This concern is voiced by Witt (2012:17) who argues that “our singing helped focus our eyes upwards and away from the earth. We learned that life on earth means exile for us until our deaths when Jesus takes us safely away from here.”

Furthermore, Witt (2012:18) demonstrates his concern on how liturgy does not play a prominent part in environmental issues as follows:

“What seems to be a harmless omission of hymn texts honouring the earth is much more damaging than that. At least part of the function of music in our churches has been to actively sing ourselves off the earth, purposely seeking to escape this home for another. At best, this world-denying repertoire has been a diversion. At worst, it has been a drug numbing us to the importance of God’s work and our work alongside God and the rest of creation.”

Witt (2012:19) asserts that “the church is running away from its responsibility as a steward of the environment”. He perceives the church, which is supposed to inculcate a spirit of preservation of the earth, as achieving the exact opposite. The church has lost its purpose and intention as Christ’s ambassador and has instead become an enemy of the preservation of earth. Witt (2012:22) explains as follows:

“Of course, the body of songs we sing is constantly changing. Consequently, some earth-denying hymns are no longer around (e.g., it is difficult to find ‘I’m But a Stranger Here, Heaven Is My Home’ in a modern mainline hymnal). Nearly all recent hymnals and songbooks have some new thematic section related to creation. When we gather for worship now, there are songs that acknowledge the physical place where we are as a place of salvation; God meets us here on earth, in this place. There are songs in ‘Christian Hope’ sections of our hymnals that point us to earth as well as heaven. There are new hymns for the Eucharist that emphasize it as a meal with real food, served for all, and there are closing hymns that clearly send us back to the earth to join God’s work. Still, those who want to explore a more ecologically rooted repertoire need to be intentional about searching for it, both within and outside their own denominational resources.”

Addressing the above and enabling a clear understanding of God’s mandate to humanity, it is imperative for humankind to give praise and adoration to the Creator. A disciple of Jesus always endeavours to glorify God as the Creator and that bears the implication of giving due attention to environmental issues in his *leiturgia* during worship. In order to promote an environmental missional paradigm, all who meet together in worship need to attend to addressing environmental issues. This is made possible by instilling a sense of duty in regard to earth preservation through the church, as a vehicle for implementing earth preservation strategies.

It is brought about by inculcating this responsibility in all who are gathered together in the name of the church of Christ, in accordance with Jesus’ instruction on the preservation of the environment. The promise of “where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (Matthew 18:20) reflects God’s presence at every worship service. God provides the wisdom and reveals the strategies his people can implement where the environment is concerned. It is thus imperative that earth preservation be proclaimed in churches, gatherings, meetings and even at social events. It enables man to understand God’s will and address the consequences of sin.

9. Worship services and environment

The sinfulness of humanity is clearly illustrated in a service like Ash Wednesday. This service provides a symbolic understanding of the “ash”, where the cruciform

sign on the forehead with ash depicts the relationship between humanity and the earth. Alm (2011:182) argues as follows:

“Ash Wednesday is the reconciliation of humanity to the earth, from which it came. Creation and fall and burial and murder and wrath are wrapped in that sign of baptism. The burial and resurrection of Christ become the restoration of the connection between the earth and humanity. It marks the soil’s return into the scheme of God’s giving to humanity. The earth once more serves humanity as mother, as giver of life, as it disgorges Christ. Ash Wednesday marks the reconciliation of creation and humanity. In the death and resurrection of Christ, in the baptism, humanity is bound together in fruitfulness to the earth, receiving her harvest for life.”

The other amongst many is Eucharist (Holy Communion) service that can be linked to environment. It portrays the grace and importance of the environment to humanity, especially in terms of worship, can be seen in celebrating the Eucharist. According to Okonkwo (2011:35), it challenges the worshipping community “to live in such a way that what they experience in the liturgy can be carried into the larger world. One of the ways of doing so is to ensure that the fruitfulness of the earth and the lives of other creatures will be safeguarded through their lives.” This is how the environment, its present inhabitants and future generations will be saved from disaster. Benedict XVI (2009:48) puts it more eloquently by stating that “the environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.” However, this is very difficult to realise if there is a disconnection between liturgy and real life. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council called this a severe misconception of the norm - the dichotomy between the faith which they (Christians) profess and their daily lives.

10. Role of discipleship in leiturgia in preservation of the earth

Worship brings glory to God. God must be worshipped all the time. Man is made in God’s image from the soil and thus part of the earth. Even if technology has overworked the earth, to drain it of minerals for development, and leaving the earth groaning, the fact remains that humanity relies on the earth to feed and clothe itself, without which it would not survive. It thus becomes imperative to show God glory and gratitude to the Creator of heaven and earth.

If the worship service’s liturgy is genuinely understood, human beings would pay more attention to and be more concerned with earth preservation. Liturgy would be given its proper place and human beings would be inclined towards affirming, cherishing and enabling to promote earth preservation at all times.

Okonkwo, (2011) explains as follows: “since created in God’s image and likeness, human beings have been set apart from other beings in nature. This is not a licence to dominate or treat with cruelty, but to deal with them responsibly and benefit from all they offer. God entrusted the whole of creation to man and woman that they may share in his unfolding plan for creation. Worshipping God raises the awareness of fallibility and sinfulness, but also deepens the relationship with God to enable and inspire sharing in God’s plan. Acting against this plan has its consequences; when humanity turns away from God’s plan who is the Creator, humanity provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order.”

Simply put, humanity needs to obey the mandate of stewardship given in the Garden of Eden. Observing and revisiting this truth brings glory to God and preserve the earth for future generations. This exercise is called discipleship and it shows execution of *missio Dei*.

Embedded in this exhortation is a call for a positive attitude towards all creatures. All religions can do so through the instrument of ritual/liturgy. It is, therefore, important that theologians, religious scholars, heads of the faith religious bodies explore (more) avenues through which it can constantly be brought to the consciousness of the worshipping community (and entire humanity) that they have a role to play in salvaging the environment from further deterioration. The extent to which this call is hearkened will go a long way in addressing some of the world’s problems, the greatest of which is hunger.

In addressing the “spiritual hunger”, the churches should compose and inculcate hymns that speak of the environment and pertinent passages in the Bible should be used to raise awareness about the sin connected to failing to preserve the earth as God, the Creator, intended. The church should be prominent in matters that affect the environment and voice their concerns as a collective, demonstrating its part in *missio Dei* and fulfilling its duty as God’s agent in environmental issues.

11. Conclusion

Facing the present catastrophe of earth destruction, climate change, global warming, drought, and all, the church needs to start engaging with other stakeholders who share its vision of saving the earth. The church must engage in all intervention strategies and use the “pulpit” as the platform to bring the Good News of peace with the earth, thereby inculcating the “spirit” of saving the environment.

In conclusion, the following words of Wright (2006:404) especially resonate:

“We humans, being creatures ourselves, share in that reason for existence - our ‘chief end’ is to bring glory to God, and in doing so to enjoy ourselves because we

enjoy God. So that God- focused goal of human life (to glorify and enjoy him) is not something that sets us apart from the rest of creation. Rather it is something we share with the rest of creation. That is the chief end of all creation. The only difference is that of course we human beings must glorify our Creator in uniquely human ways, as befits our unique status as one creature that has been made in the image of God. So, as humans we praise God with hearts and hands and voices, with rationality as well as emotion, with language, art, music and craft - with all that reflects the God in whose image we were made.”

References

- Alm, P.G. 2011. Theological observer - Ash Wednesday. *Concordia theological quarterly*, 75(1):180-183.
- Barth, K. 1949. Dogmatics in outline. London: SGM Press.
- Benedict XVI. 2009. Caritas in ventate - charity in truth. London: Alive Publishing.
- Bohlin, R. 2014. Christian environmentalism. *Probe ministries*, 5-8. //www.probe.org. Date of access: 20 Oct. 2015.
- Brueggemann, W. 1972. From dust to kingship. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche wissenschaft*, 84(1):1-18.
- Cock, J. 1991. Towards the greening of the church in South Africa: Some problems and possibilities. *Missionalia*, 20(3):174-185.
- Conradie, E. 2011. Christianity and earth keeping: In search of an inspiring vision. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.
- Deddens, K. 1993. Where Everything Points to Him. Inheritance Publications. Canada.
- Field, D.N. 2001. The Gospel, the church, and the earth: Reflections on the ecological eclesiology. *Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, 111:67-69.
- Grudem, W. 2010. Systematic theology: An Introduction to Biblical doctrine. Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd.
- Stromsmoe, L. Making Disciples: A Foundation for Integrated Program. A Thesis submitted to the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Religion). University of Calgary.
- Kennedy, J. 2010. Renew the face of the earth: Long road through Copenhagen to whole earth justice. *The Ecumenical Review* Vol 62:2; World council of churches: 141-158.
- Nürnbergger, K. 2007. The living dead and the living God: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Okonkwo, I. 2011. Ecological crises: From the perspective of Christianity and African traditional religion. *Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, 141:32-44.
- Rhoads, D.M. 2009. Stewardship and creation. *Currents in theology and mission*, 36(5):335-340.
- Rottenberg, I.C. 2000. The idea of a Judeo-Christian worldview: Religio-political reflections. *Journal of ecumenical studies*, 37: 401-420.

- Thomson, A. 2012. Worldviews: Some unanswered questions. *Journal of education & Christian belief*, 16(2):179-194.
- Van der Walt, T. 2007. The Messiah has come! A guide in the gospels for serious student of the Bible. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Theological Publications.
- Van Seters, J. 1989. The creation of man and the creation of the king. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 101(3):333-342.
- Warmback, A.E. 2012. Bread and butter issues: Some resources from the work of Steve de Gruchy for the church's response to climate change. *Journal of theology for Southern Africa* 142(3):21-36.
- Westermann, C. 1987. Gen.: A practical commentary: Text and interpretation. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Witt, T. 2012. Singing with the earth and the global church. *Liturgy*, 27(2): 17-30.
- Wright, C.J.H. 2010. The mission of God's people: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- It should be Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (Please correct it!)
- Wyatt, N. 2014. A royal garden: The ideology of Eden. *Scandinavian journal of the Old Testament*, 28(1):1-35.