

The earth is the LORD's. (Ps 24)

Eco-theology from a protestant perspective on the 500th anniversary of the reformation event

Ladies and gentlemen,

dear brothers and sisters,

I am greatly honored to be invited to speak to you at this distinguished meeting of dialogue and prayer for peace today.

We are witnessing a rising environmental crisis with a wide range of environmental threats, including global warming, the ozone hole, lack of fresh water, the destruction of tropical forests, and the decline of biodiversity – to name just a few...

Obviously,

the causes of all these problems are bound to our behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

The environmental crisis is caused by the deification of the market and by an uncontrolled business theology of supply and demand.

Resisting this ecological misery,
an ecologically grounded theology concerns itself with
the cultivation and care of people of faith
who inhabit God's world well.¹

In Psalm 24 (twenty-four) it says:

*“The earth is the LORD's,
and everything in it,
the world,
and all who live in it.”*

– Creation belongs to God,
blessed be His name.

This is one of the most fundamental biblical teachings of all.

In fact,

the concept of creation frames the Bible:

The Hebrew Bible starts with two stories of creation.

And the New Testament ends in the vision of a new heaven
and a new earth;

to cite the prophecy of Isaiah 65:

¹Cf. Ayres, Jennifer R., Cultivating the Unquiet Heart. Ecology, Education and Christian Faith, in: Theology Today 74,1 (2017), 57-65, 58.

“*See,*

I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,

nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight

and its people a joy.” (Isa 65,17ff)

According to many biblical accounts,

God does not leave the world after the work of creation,

as a master builder leaves the ship,

handing it over to the sailors.

On the contrary,

we can “have no feelings,

no thought,

except that God brings it about”,

Martin Luther said in one of his sermons on the book of

Genesis (Martin Luther, Genesis sermons, WA, XXIV, 21.30).

– Johannes Calvin,

another *founding father* of our protestant tradition,

was even more radical in drawing our attention to this concept

of *creatio continua* in the biblical sense.

He wrote:

Weltfriedenstreffen der Gemeinschaft Sant' Egidio Münster/Osnabrück

“To make God into a creator for [only] a moment,
a creator who then puts his work behind him
once and for all,
would be cold and unproductive.

We should distinguish ourselves from the children of this world
precisely

in that the light of the presence of his power
in the continuing existence of the world
falls on us just as does the light of its first origin.”

(Calvin, Inst 1.16.1)

Creation is an unfinished world in which we live
and move

within an unfolding history of creation
and towards a new creation.

We live in the in-between

and we are called to be good housekeepers for God's creation,
sharing God's own compassionate
and ongoing caretaking.

Speaking to you as a Protestant pastor
and church leader today,

I relate the topic of eco-theology also to the 500th anniversary
of the reformation event that we celebrate this year.

However, I see no dividing line here at all

- neither between Protestants and Catholics,

nor between Jews and Christians,

nor between me

and anybody else inhabiting God's creation.

Pope Francis is much to be applauded,

not only for his 2015 encyclical on the environment

and human ecology.

Laudato Si is an approach towards the environmental crisis

from a distinct religious point of view.

Laudato Si addresses "everyone living on this planet"

and calls for a new way of looking at things.²

What Christians need, Pope Francis says,

"is an 'ecological conversion',

whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ

become evident in their relationship with the world around

them.

Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork

is essential to a life of virtue;

it is not an optional

or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience."³

²Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si. On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015, 3.

³Cf. *Laudato Si*, 217.

In particular,

I am struck by the far-reaching political demands that Pope Francis outlines so convincingly:

The orientation towards the poor and issues of justice and equality constitute the document's most important contribution, and frames the questions that it poses to all of us.

Pope Francis declares that ecological problems must be seen through the lens of inequality and poverty:

“Today,” he writes,

“we have to realize that a true ecological approach

always becomes a social approach;

it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment,

so as to hear *both the cry of the earth*

and the cry of the poor.”⁴

We are united here today from all our various religious traditions,

Jews,

Christians,

Muslims

and many others,

in the urgent need for a new reformation.

⁴Cf. *Laudato Si*, 49.

Some of our traditional beliefs need to go through a “recycling process so that they are more suitable for the modern world”.⁵

Let me briefly outline three of these recycling and reformation needs that I see currently:

An ecological model that values diversity

Firstly,
we need to challenge our models of hierarchical order and start to appreciate the values of diversity.
On the first day of creation,
God “*separated the light from the darkness*” [Gen 1,4],
“and in doing so
separated both of them from himself.
In other words,
the first action the Bible attributes to God
is one of decentralization.”⁶

⁵Cf. Kwok, Pui-lan, *Ecotheology and the Recycling of Christianity*, in: D. G. Hallman, *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North*, Geneva 1994, 107-111, 109.

⁶Cox, Harvey, *The Market as God*, Harvard 2016, 264f.

Accordingly,
also on the following days of creation,
God decentralizes His own power
and decides to share with His creation
even His power to create.

In the same way,
we need to work towards a democratization of the economy
and the market,
providing equal access to the blessings of creation to everyone.
An ecologically-based theology does not project God as away
from the world
but values diversity,
respects multiplicity
and demands justice for all.

Ecological solidarity that shares mutual responsibility

Secondly,
we need to move from selfishness
and from an ecclesial solidarity
to an ecological solidarity
that assumes mutual responsibility
instead of creating new victims.

Human equality springs from our common origin,
our common nature,
our common destiny.

All of us are here by equal permission of the Creator,
and we shall share the same earth,
preserving it also for future generations to come.

Passionate spirituality that enables us to work for shalom

Finally,
we need to move from passive spirituality
to an ecologically-based
and passionate spirituality
that enables us to work for *shalom*.

As Jürgen Moltmann wrote in his landmark text
“God in creation”,
we need an ecological awareness by which we
“express the experience of creation in thanksgiving and praise
(...) to discern the world in full awareness of God’s hidden
presence,
and to understand it as communication of God’s fellowship.”⁷

⁷Moltmann, Jürgen, God in Creation, 70.

We need to become “a Church of the Unquiet Heart”⁸
– as well as a “Synagogue of the Unquiet Heart”,
and a “Mosque of the Unquiet Heart”
and so on.

As people of faith with unquiet hearts
we need to be awaiting,
discovering
and anticipating the redemption of creation
with our whole ecosystem.

In our anticipation,
we need to be forces for good
and for change
that can no longer tolerate the overexploitation of creation,
but seek ecological responsibility
and shalom for God’s creation
and His creatures.

⁸Ayres, *Cultivating*, 61. – Cf. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21.

In 1980, the Synod of our Protestant Church in the Rhineland declared,

speaking about the community life of Jews and Christians:

“We both [Jews and Christians] confess

and witness

the common hope in a new heaven

and a new earth

and the spiritual power of this messianic hope for the witness

and work of Christians

and Jews

for justice

and peace in the world.”⁹

I hope Jews, Christians

and Muslims alike

will share responsibility for peace,

justice

and the integrity of creation.

As people of faith,

we need to become agents of change.

We need to safeguard God’s creation out of our deepest

theological convictions and beliefs.

⁹<http://www.ekir.de/www/downloads/TowardsRenovation.pdf>

We need to work towards *tikkun olam*,
as the Jewish tradition calls it,
towards healing and repairing creation.

We need to listen to the
“groaning of the whole creation as in the pains of childbirth”
(Rom 8,22)

and we need to respond to it,
because God Himself will not stay aside!

Let me conclude by quoting Pope Francis’
“Prayer for our earth”¹⁰

– and I invite everybody to join me in that prayer
or to listen in a moment of meditation:

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

¹⁰Lautato Si, 246.

Fill us with peace,
that we may live as brothers and sisters,
harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world
and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty,
not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor
and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us,
we pray,
in our struggle for justice,
love
and peace.

Amen

Ca. 1.624 Wörter (15 min)