
A Christian Ecological Ethics with Special Reference to Human Stewardship of God's Creation

Kristīgā ekoloģiskā ētika ar īpašu atsauci uz cilvēka kalpošanu Dieva radības kontekstā

Bjørn Øyvind Fjeld, Dr. min. (Norway)

A Christian Ecological Ethics attempts to understand and describe the human challenge related to the ongoing global ecological crises from a Christian perspective and based on a Christian worldview. The discussion implies a special reference to the Stewardship of God's Creation and puts focus on the human possibility to act properly and the human responsibility for future generations. The author discusses different understandings of environmental ethics, i.e. what in creation is morally relevant? Based on a Christian ecological ethics, he defends the intrinsic value of all creation, with a particular emphasis on the dignity of the human being. The concept of intrinsic value is discussed in the light of moral philosophy and theological ethics. Furthermore, the author argues that a proper stewardship of the biosphere and the ecosphere can be carried out only by humans. This involves a theological discussion of biblical anthropology and God's purpose in creation, including the meaning of human activity in regard to the final outcome of the promised new earth. The main challenge, however, is to move beyond the level of analysis and substantiate how to implement practical actions, on the political, personal and global level. This moral and theological issue is related to concepts as the image of God, cultural mandate, freedom of will, sin and the human ability to, in time, act ethically responsible. A Christian contribution to an Ecological Ethics is based on the experience of the sacrificial love of the crucified, and the transforming power of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ and The Holy Spirit. Being a new creature in Christ is the Christian ontological-anthropological foundation for a global Christian ethics, i.e., normative ethics applicable to all mankind, according to which both Christian and all people of good will should live and act toward God's creation in a responsible and sustainable way.

Key words: ecological ethics, image of God, cultural mandate, stewardship, virtues and vices

Introduction

An ecological ethics encompasses how to cultivate and take care of the biosphere and the ecosphere, as well as the material entities beyond biotic life. Biosphere and ecosphere are respectively defined as “the part of the earth’s crust, waters and atmosphere, where living organisms can subsist” (biosphere) and “the part of the atmosphere in which it is possible to breath normally without aid; the portion of the troposphere from sea level to an altitude of about 13 000 feet” (ecosphere, also called physical atmosphere) (Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 149 and 452). The cultivation of the earth should be performed in such a way that both humanity and all creatures on a global scale can be secured by a sustainable development in the future. A Christian ecological ethics deals with this challenge from a theological and biblical perspective. The last decades the term ecotheology¹ has been introduced as a new concept. The term Christian ecological ethics overlaps with the concept ecotheology, albeit the latter has a broader scope than the former.

Fifty years ago, Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* (1962) raised the first serious questions related to ecological issues. With reference to the fast growing industrialisation and the increased focus on economic and financial growth, she asked the provocative question whether the scientific development had gone too far. Had pollution passed beyond the point of no return with threatening consequences for the future of the globe? Today scientists from many disciplines in general and the Climate Panel of the United Nations in particular issue alarming warnings that the climate change represents a serious threat to the future well being of creation.

My task in this essay is to describe, analyse and discuss the challenge related to the climate changes and the ongoing global ecological crises, based on a Christian worldview and with a special reference to human stewardship. A general definition of stewardship is to manage “another’s property [...]” and to administer “anything as the agent of another or others” (Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1395). In this article I will use the following definition of Christian stewardship of nature: The human management of God’s creation performed in accordance with God’s will.

My analysis is an attempt to address and assess a proper stewardship of creation. This includes first an examination of what is the object of stewardship, i. e. what is morally considerable, in general, and Christian stewardship in particular. This assessment will be made in terms of an analysis of the intrinsic value of creation and the dignity of humans. The second main issue relates to the subject of stewardship, i.e., who is the stewards, a question which requires an interpretation of the biblical creation events. Thirdly, I put focus on Christian anthropology and Man’s possibility to act in co-operation with the Creator. This includes a discussion about God’s sovereignty and human free will, as well as a discussion about open theism. Lastly I will discuss the issue of how to implement a Christian stewardship. This includes a discussion of the motivation and possibility to act properly, i.e., the issue of obeying God’s plan in time to avoid a future devastation of the Earth.

Christian stewardship in light of the intrinsic value of creation

Most people have moral views about environmental issues. These views are based on one or several moral principles. Some will argue that the extinction of certain species or a destruction of nature always will be wrong in itself. Others will argue that human actions are wrong because of their consequences. Both arguments are

reasons behind different understandings of the manifold international efforts to secure the integrity of creation in general, for example by establishing a growing number of National Parks worldwide² or by providing solutions for a sustainable development worldwide³.

The ethicist Robert Elliott raises a basic question: What is morally considerable? He develops his answer by raising two new questions: How do we describe an environmental ethics and how do we justify our principles? (Elliott, 2002, 285) Elliott numbers four relevant types of ethics: human-centred, animal-centred, life-centred and “everything” ethics. The latter includes also ground and rocks. The first type is most often based on utilitarian theories, taking maximum human happiness and the interests of human alone as the ethical point of departure for evaluating environmental policies⁴. The animal-centred ethics is based on the interest of living non-human creatures, not only for their utility for humans, but also for their own intrinsic value. That something has intrinsic value means that it has value in itself and that it should be conserved for its own sake. On the contrary what has only extrinsic or instrumental value serves as a means to attain what has intrinsic value. That animals have intrinsic value does not mean that all animals are of same value or are to be equated to humans. The life-centred ethics counts all living entities, additional to humans and animals, like plants and vegetation, as morally considerable. This includes also the biosphere itself and whole ecosystems.

Elliott responds to his second question about how to justify the basic principles of an environmental ethics, by stating that both the human centred ethics and the animal centred ethics attribute intrinsic value to humans as well as to animals. He defends that also a life centred ethics considers all lives as having intrinsic value. Plants do not have interests like humans and animals, but they may still carry properties like beauty, complexities and uniqueness, which have intrinsic values. The same types of arguments related to properties can also be used to defend the moral value of non-living things like a snowflake or a rock.

Elliott concludes by trying to find a determinant of moral considerability, like the property of being a natural object, different from products of technology or human culture. Pointing to naturalness, diversity of parts and beauty as such determinants, he states that he has provided a basis for an environmental ethics which reaches beyond the human and animal centred ethics and “possibly beyond a life-centred one as well” (Elliott, 2002, 292). Elliott gives nature preference over culture. His determinants are defined as creatures, humans and non-humans, with intrinsic values. Elliott accepts a possible grading among different creatures but, in principle, are all creatures on earth, living and non-living, morally considerable.

Elliott’s position can easily be defended, in regard to the intrinsic value of all parts of creation, as well as to his grading of the intrinsic value between and within the different groups of creature.

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess represents a radical life-centred ethics, named biotic egalitarianism, i.e., advocating not only that all living things are morally considerable, but that they are of equal moral significance. Naess introduced the concept of deep ecology⁵, in contrast to shallow ecology, the latter meaning to defend an egoistic and consumer oriented lifestyle. His position allows only quantitative, not qualitative, judgements, i.e., two living things count for more than one. This is a different position from most life-centred ethics that allows different values within a group of living things (Elliott, 2002, 288). “Everything ethics” may also give an

equal moral value to rocks and deny degrees of moral significance to non-living things, but the most common of the latter position allows for a gradation of moral values.

Professor of Philosophy, Daniel Holbrook, takes a different position. He rejects both a religious and a deep ecology point of departure for justifying environmental activism. His ethical theory is based on “ideas of welfare (or well-being) and consequentialism [...] which only takes human welfare into account” (Holbrook, 1990, 131f). He sets up a range of eight necessary conditions for justifying progressive levels of welfare from an egoistic view to “the welfare of the ecological systems taken as a whole”. These are: 1) myself and my family, 2) my community, 3) citizens of developed nations, 4) humanity, 5) beings capable of self-consciousness, 6) beings capable of pleasure and pain, 7) all living things and 8) the biosphere/the Solar system.

Holbrook rejects both Naess’ concepts of deep ecology and what Naess calls shallow ecology. The former term “roughly coincides” with Holbrook’s precondition eight, while the term “shallow ecology” corresponds to “being near the third level of this progression” (Holbrook, 1990, 132), i.e., precondition one, two and three above. Holbrook emphasizes the preconditions in between (4-7) and states that humanity is clearly part of nature, but rejects the principle “that intrinsic worth is determined at the level of ecological systems” (Holbrook, 1990, 134). His highest value and emphasis are on humans and the welfare of humans alone. His conclusion is that the issue of ecology should not be based on deceptive ideologies that is “environmental propaganda and scare tactics” but on a reinforcement of conservative values, explained as “scientific facts” and “the logical outcome of desires that come naturally to humans” (Holbrook, 1990, 141).

The positions and discussion above must be evaluated and compared with the hierarchical thinking about the heavenly and earthly entities, which are found both among philosophers of the Greek antiquity and theologians in the early and medieval church. I will briefly examine Aristotle’s (384-322 B.C.), Origen’s (185-254 A.D.), Augustine’s (354-430 A.D.) and Thomas of Aquinas’ (1225-1274) metaphysical thinking on this issue.

Among the early Greek philosophers there were several answers regarding how to understand reality, in particular related to the structure and the basic substance (Gr. *ousia*) of cosmos. Most of the thinking was hierarchical, from the higher to the lower entities. In his hierarchical metaphysics, Aristotle gave the invisible and unchangeable (the immovable mover) the highest value. Number two was the visible and imperishable substances (the moon, sun and stars) and the third level in the hierarchy was the visible and perishable substances, which includes living substances like humans, animals and plants, and non-living substances like stones and mountains. The Greek philosopher valued humans above plants and animals due to the human soul and the human ability of thought and reason. These abilities were the justification for making man responsible in terms of ethics (Tollefsen *et al.*, 2002, 123-139).

The Augustinian hierarchical structure of creation builds upon Plato’s and Aristotle’s thinking. However, in sharp contrast to Greek philosophy, according to Augustine, God created cosmos out of nothing (Lat. *ex nihilo*). The Greeks mostly held that the world existed from eternity. Still, creation was as an expression of God’s eternal plan, (*cf.* Plato’s world of ideas). The theory is named exemplarism. However, in contrast to Plato’s thinking, Augustine emphasised the incarnation of the eternal God in Christ. Nevertheless, also for him creation of the world was organised from a higher to

the lower levels: 1) God, 2) angels, 3) humans 4) animals 5) plants and 6) non-organic realities. God was the great Creator of universe, still he became a human himself. In this way, God was both transcendent to and immanent in creation. (Tollefsen *et al.*, 2002, 188-191).

The theory of exemplarism was in opposition both to atomism, an early Greek theory stating that the basic substance consisted of continually material processes (Democritus), and the theory that everything was fleeting and changing without any plan or purpose, (Gr. *panta rei*: Heraclitus). Early Christian theologians and philosophers were in agreement in their opposition to this tradition of ancient Greek understanding of cosmos. Already two centuries before Augustine, Origen (185-254 A.D.) developed a creation theory with a special emphasis on creation as coming forth from God and ultimately going back to God. The emphasis was further developed by the Cappadocian fathers and taken to its peak by St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662 A.D.). He advocated that certain divine ideas (energies) were found in the form of all created things and during the course of time all things will be brought back to God and completed in him according to *exitus et reditus*. This salvific event will be fulfilled through Christ and his Church. A teaching about the close relation between cosmology, salvation and deification has through many centuries characterized the Eastern traditions and Orthodox theology up until today (Tollefsen *et al.*, 2002, 178-179). I will later return to this question.

The Augustinian concept of God's eternal plan, having the archetype of everything in his mind (exemplarism), is also defended and further developed by the western church, e.g. by Thomas of Aquinas. The concept implies that all created entities originated in God's thought and consequently that all parts of creation have an intrinsic value. "God loves all existing things" (*Summa Theologica*, pt. I, q. 20, art. 2)⁶. Thomas adds some hierarchical levels, i.e., heavenly bodies are of a higher value than earthly bodies, and he introduces anew the Aristotelian difference between completeness, which alone is ascribed to God, and the cosmological incompleteness. The teleological concept implies that all parts of cosmos are constantly striving towards the divine completeness. The human task therefore, is to bring everything closer to the divine completeness as originally created and embodied in the Garden of Eden. This means that creation should not be exploited, but cared for and protected (Tollefsen *et al.*, 2002, 227-235).

A common Christian understanding of God's creation was already expressed by the Early Church in the Apostolic Creed: *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth*. It is even more precisely expressed in the Nicene Creed (325): *We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen*⁷. The first article of these two different Creeds reflects creation as an activity linked to God the Father. The creative act itself is seen as an expression of the ontological truth that the world belongs to God and that all creation has intrinsic value. Likewise, the atoning work of salvation is linked to Jesus Christ, while the divine power and giving of life is related to the Holy Spirit. The three articles of faith reflect the triune God, not as three separate entities, but as different persons and activities within the triune God.

To sum up so far: The shallow ecology illustrates an unacceptable ethics which is egoistic and short-term oriented. The ethics of deep ecology is unacceptable due to its rejection of qualitative judgments. Holbrook's welfare point of departure is commended because it emphasizes the value of all living things. However, Holbrook's

position cannot be defended due to his denial of the intrinsic value of humans and other beings. For Holbrook, worth and values are not based upon life alone, but upon a utilitarian perspective of life.

Elliott's ecological point of departure and his four types of ethics have several similarities with the Aristotelian level of all living and non-living substances. The hierarchical structure and value of Christian theologians comprise the same categories as Aristotle and Elliott. This common view aligns the intrinsic value of humans, animals, plants and "everything ethics", even though the grading of values may differ among and within these creatures. However, as pointed out by several of the theologians, humans have an added value because they are created in the image of God. Later I will discuss the issue further, but here I want to underline the fact that this added value gives humans dignity and worth, making them qualitatively different from other creatures. The philosopher Immanuel Kant emphasizes the same dignity when he asserts that humans are priceless and therefore they should never be reduced to means. Humans should always be treated as an end in itself (Aasen *et al.*, 2009, 22-25).

From a theological point of view the value issue of creation means that humans, all living creatures and non-living nature have intrinsic worth, are morally considerable and are objects of human stewardship of God's creation. I have also shown that most of the creatures for stewardship are overlapping whether there is a philosophical or a Christian basis for an environmental ethics. However, a Christian ecological view adds that humans have a particular dignity, which also gives them a particular responsibility. I will now move on to discuss more exactly who the responsible agents are and how the stewardship of God's creation should be performed. This brings us to the creation stories of the Old Testament.

Christian stewardship in light of the view of God, biblical anthropology and the cultural mandate

According to Christian theology, the concept of being created in the image of God defines the human nature as justifying its own intrinsic value, Gen. 1: 26-28. However, it is not easy to give a precise and accurate definition of what this means in practice.

A working group of the Lausanne movement presents three different interpretations of the expression "being created in God's image". The *substantial* view implies that the image of God is imprinted on a person similar to an image on a coin, i.e., the human nature reflects God and therefore has an intrinsic value, differently from all non-humans. The *relational* view is dynamic, a more intangible kind as the one we see in a mirror, i.e., determined by relations, fellowship and the notion of the image as a future possibility. The third interpretation is the *functional* view which emphasizes personhood more than humanity, i.e., the capacities of humans, such as intellectual capacity or decision making capacity. The functional view "holds that the image of God is found in the exercise of 'dominion' and 'stewardship' of the rest of the creation" (Chia *et al.*, 2004, 4). The latter view implies that not all humans may qualify as persons, while some non-human animals might. (*Cf.* Holbrook's view referred to above). One interpretation of the relational view may also imply that some humans are excluded as image-bearers, "namely those who seem incapable of relationships" (Chia *et al.*, 2004, 5-6).

My focus is limited to humanity's relationship to creation, i.e., the relation between the Creator and humans, the Creator and other living and non-living creatures and the relation between the humans and the rest of creation. In the first creation story, all the earth and its creatures are declared to be good, an expression which usually is taken as a valid justification that all created things have intrinsic value. The phrase "and God saw that it was good"⁸ is repeated all six days. Gen. 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25 and 31. It is true, for example, that plants have instrumental value for man and animals. This fact, however, does not alter the intrinsic value of vegetation "because they are God's creatures that reflect his glory and are the objects of his delight" (Davis, 2004, 270). When humans were created in the image of God it is given an extra statement that God saw the entire creature and he saw that it was very good, Gen. 1:31, a justification for humans' specific intrinsic value and dignity. Creation of man gives a separate justification which implies a special protection related to human life and death. This fact also gives man a special responsibility as a caretaker (*cf.* Heiene & Torbjørnsen, 2011, 208).

The most debated issue of the creation stories is related to the so-called cultural mandate, in which God told man to fill the earth and subdue it, Gen. 1: 27-28. What does the term "subdue" or "rule" mean? Professor Lynn White stated in his much quoted article from 1967 that the biblical concept of ruling over creation was the main reason for the modern exploitation of creation. "We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (cited from: Davis, 2004, 263).

American professor, Stanley P. Saunders, confirms that White "was essentially accurate" in his assertion. He asserts that Christians in the west were guilty of *dualism* (separating God from nature), *anthropocentrism* (humans are the only figures in creation made in the image of God) and *human chauvinism* (creation exist ultimately for human sake) (Saunders, 2007).

Christian ecologists today will refute White's interpretation of the Christian understanding of the cultural mandate. Most interpreters support an understanding that the verb "subdue" implies more caretaking than ruling. The cultural mandate over the whole creation seems more to be like Adam's caring for the garden, Gen. 2:15. According to this interpretation, the Christian worldview is neither anthropocentric (man in center) nor ecocentric, (cosmos in the center), but theocentric, i.e., God is the center and owner of the earth and everything in it, Psalm 24:1. The cultural mandate places man as a benevolent king (Davies, 2004, 270), or as a vice-king (Tro og skaperverk, 2009, 4) who is responsible to cultivate and take care of creation on behalf of the owner. Two important aspects of Christian ecology are therefore "divine ownership and human stewardship" (Geisler, 1997, 302).

The cultural mandate raises some further questions related both to theology and anthropology: How is the cooperation between the Creator and his stewards and who is in control, at the end? According to the substantial view of being created in God's image, God the Creator is in control. He created everything according to his will. After having consulted the divine council, he lastly created humans, Gen. 1: 27-28. Humans are meant to reflect his will and essence, since they are created in his image. The cultural mandate will consequently be colored by the view of the Creator. According to critics of the substantial view, human image-bearers of God must pursue their task in accordance with a patriarchal view of God. They assert that the view opens up an avenue for manipulation and exploitation of all created non-human entities, such as

animals and plants as well as non-living creatures, i.e., the ground and all its resources. Cf. the above contested view expressed by White and defended by Saunders.

American professor of The Old Testament, Terrence E. Fretheim, represents the relational view of the relation between the Creator and the creature and emphasizes a strong approach to the ecological crisis at hand. He affirms that all creatures are dependent upon God. However, at the same time God and humans are interdependent for the *creatio continua*. Fretheim refers to three stages in creation: originating creation, continuing creation and completing creation. The first stage is completed, the second stage is in process and the third step is in the future (Fretheim, 2005, 5-9). Most interpreters will be in accordance with Fretheim regarding the three stages of creation; however, the outworking of the steps might vary among them.

Fretheim argues that God in his originating creation has chosen to establish an interdependent relation to his creation. Indeed, even more: In regard to the furtherance of God's purposes in the world, God "has freely chosen to be dependent upon both human and non-human" (Fretheim, 2005, 270). He states this position as a deliberate limiting of God's absolute control. Such a relational perspective means that God's sovereignty "gives power over to the created for the sake of relationship of integrity". He admits that "this move is risky for God, for it entails the possibility that the creatures will misuse the power they have been given, which is in fact what occurs" (Fretheim, 2005, 272). The consequences of the fall even increased the future risks. However, such a relational understanding of the triune Creator, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, also lead to a relational understanding of the cultural mandate. The mandate is to be pursued in freedom and love, in accordance with the relational interpretation of God the Creator, in whose image man is created.

Saunders supports the relational approach to the ecological crises and regards Fretheim's "alternative reading of the Biblical account of creation" [...] as a "significant step toward a viable Christian version of deep ecology". He states that the relational interpretation applied to the creation accounts refutes White's conclusion. Saunders further develops this perspective by adding the principle of hospitality, i.e., making room for others. Divine self-limitation opens a room for humans and non-humans to be active co-Creators. Real relationship means sharing place. This is what God the Creator does, and this is what all created beings are called to do (Saunders, 2007).

The assertion that the relational model of creation represents a Christian version of deep ecology is however, not generally approved. It is a fact that deep ecology movement represents philosophical and religious traits which are not in accordance with the Christian faith. Fred Krueger rejects the deep ecology movement as a "sought to construct a new religion around pseudo-religious values...", even though he clearly defends that ecology is an important challenge for Christian ethics (Krueger, 1995). Deep ecology movement is connected to a *New age* type of religion, which not only asserts the inherent value of nature, but also regards nature as sacred and untouchable. The mission statement of deep ecology reads: "We believe that current problems are largely rooted [...] in the loss of [...] behavior that celebrates the intrinsic value and *sacredness* of the natural world [...] (emphasis added). According to a Christian worldview, the deep ecology position does not distinguish clearly between the Creator and creation and represents a non-theistic or a pantheistic worldview by talking about nature as sacred. It is easier to affirm the deep ecology movement when it rejects "shallow ecology", i.e., a short-term approach "often promoting technological fixes [...] based on the same consumption-oriented values and methods of the industrial economy" (Foundation for Deep Ecology Movement, 2012). Cf. the view of Naess above.

God's sovereignty, human free will and open theism

The relational position of Fretheim and Saunders was introduced some decades ago under the term "open theism". The issue at stake relates to the sovereignty of God, his foreknowledge and the human free will, themes which all have been debated throughout the history of theology, e.g. in particular the debate between the successors of the reformer Jean Calvin (1509-1564) and the Dutch reformer Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). The discussion was raised anew by Adventist theologian, Richard Rice⁹, and brought further by Evangelical theologian, Clark H. Pinnock¹⁰. The term "open theism" stands in contrast to "classical theism". According to open theism, God is able to anticipate the future, but he is still fluid and flexible. God is open to respond to prayers by changing his mind as well as to react to decisions made by humans. This applies whether humans are obedient or disobedient. Rice talks about the "free-will theism", which expresses the free will of humans and the corresponding limitation of God's knowledge. "The question is whether God's knowledge about the future is exhaustive" (Rice, 1989, 121-139). Another of the proponents of this view suggests that the term "open futurism" is better than "open theism" (Boyd, 2001).

Representatives of open theism have critiqued the understanding of classical theism, which endorses God's sovereignty and that God's will and purpose are decisive in regard to the final outcome. Human life and the development on earth are determined, some would say, more or less predestined. The sovereignty of God is dominant. Human activities are of less importance. To work for a changed lifestyle, or to suggest a reduction of the emissions of CO₂ and an attempt to pursue political or economical decisions correspondingly, may not be futile or in vain, but is less likely to make a difference.

Open theism is more optimistic, stressing that what humans do and what they refrain from doing, will influence the future on all levels. Humans co-work with God, who lovingly confirms their freedom of will, even though he continually risks their disobedience and wrong decisions. The final results are open, depending upon the obedience and faithfulness of the stewards. Proponents of open theism invite humans in general and Christians in particular, to become agents for change to protect and preserve all creatures as well as to support a holistic perspective of creation.

The theology of open theism has, however, been strongly objected by a number of theologians, mainly from the Calvinistic tradition. The Baptist preacher and author, John Piper, defends the faith of a sovereign God. He states that God is pre-determinative in his actions both in creation, incarnation, the Great Commission and the conversion of individuals, e.g. "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). In particular Piper critiques the concept of God as a risk-taker. He states as truth "that God does not and cannot take any risks" (Piper, 2001, 55). He explains that the term "risk" implies uncertainty, e.g., like uncertainty in gambling. On the contrary, he asserts that God, according to the Scripture, has both a precise intention and plan and foreknowledge. He refers to Acts 2:23 and Psalm 115:3: "God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases". Questions we do not understand are explained by the fact that God "can allow his cause to suffer temporary setbacks (both individually and globally) [...] But to describe him as a risk-taker calls into question his omniscience and sovereignty, and therefore takes away the very foundation of our confidence" [...] (Piper, 2001, 62). Regarding the issue of foreknowledge, this is clearly the position of classical theism.

I believe the substantial model best takes care of the necessary gap between the lordship of God and the sinfulness of man. Already in the early church, Saint Ephrem the Syrian (c. 310-373 A.D.), wrote about the ontological gap between humans and Christ and the Creator (*cf.* Brock, 2007, 25). This gap was the main reason for rejecting Arianism in the early Church. Arianism asserted that Christ was created, not born by God from eternity. The apostle Paul underlines that God is the one who creates and the one who completes everything in Christ (1 Cor. 15: 20-28). The history of redemption is therefore an important part of the continuing and completing creation. Christ is the agent of God, as the incarnate word of God (John 1:14). Neither the continuing creation nor the final completion of creation will take place unless it is related to and based on his work of redemption (Rom. 8: 17-25). Human creativity and scientific innovation are essential parts of the cultural mandate. However, in regard to the theological and teleological perspective of creation, the ultimate goal will never be reached without divine action and intervention. Classical theism secures God's supremacy. God will one day, in Christ, renew, re-create the whole creation.

Against this background, one can better make an evaluation of the different interpretations concerning God's relation to creation, the cultural mandate and the present ecological crisis.

On the one side, I will argue in favor of some aspects of both traditions. The relational view and open theism emphasize human responsibility more clearly than a deterministic point of view. However, the substantial view and classical theism underline the importance of God as the Almighty, his providence and his steadfast promises. Open theism weakens the promises, since the final result can be determined more by human actions, than by God's fulfillment of his promises. To describe God as a risk-taker, is to take "away the very foundation of our confidence" (Piper, 2001, 62).

On the other side, I will also argue against some positions both of classical and open theism. I raise the question against the background of biblical doxologies to God, e.g., "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable is his judgments" [...] Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11: 33-34). It seems that both sides of the discussion are too cognitive and rational in their approach. It appears that the logic and arguments underestimate the wisdom and "unsearchable judgments" of God in regard to his foreknowledge and predestination. My question is somehow answered by the mutual accusations put forward: Pinnock accuses his opponents "of silencing Scripture with 'Calvinistic logic'" and Piper responds by referring to Pinnock's "neo-Armenian logic, not Scripture" (Cited from: Piper, 2001, 57, n. 6). In a foreword Pinnock analyses the debate and admits he is not sure whether "the debate over divine sovereignty and human freedom is capable of being resolved by human minds" (Pinnock, 1989, x). I would rather back off from some of the logical arguments and emphasize the mystery and sovereignty of God, and thus argue in favor of the apophatic tradition of the early church, i.e., that God can only be described by negations, never by positive descriptors (McGrath, 1999, 118). This is supported by Paul, when he writes that "now we see indistinctly in a mirror [...]" (1 Cor. 13:12).

The universal church knows that the cultural mandate is given and the church is confident that a good stewardship is realistic and possible. Cardinal Kasper asserts that humans, created in God's image, "must be understood as a relational and dialogic being. [...] Neither force, money, power and influence, not the self-assertion 'of the fittest', but instead tolerance, respect, solidarity, forgiveness, goodness and practical love shall determine the course of the world" (Kasper, 2009, 95).

I will now discuss how Christian stewardship, in accordance with Kasper's view, can be implemented and possibly influence the ecological future and possibly even enhance the final Kingdom of God on earth.

Christian stewardship in light of moral motivation, transformation and a new heaven and a new earth

In Henrik Ibsen's dramatic poem from 1867, *Peer Gynt* says:

The thought, perhaps the wish the will
Those I could understand; but really
To do the deed! Ah, no that beats me!¹¹ (Ibsen, 1867: Act III, Scene 1)

Ibsen's poetic expression catches the universal question already raised in the Ancient Greek philosophy about the problem of moral motivation: How is the relation between knowing and doing? Plato asserted that knowledge about what was good and right is both a necessary and a sufficient prerequisite to act correspondingly. Aristotle affirmed the need for knowledge, or the intellectual virtues, but added that it was not sufficient. Due to the problem of the weakness of the will (Gr. *akrasia*) the duty to act justly and properly was also dependent upon the moral virtues, which were to be obtained by practical training and imitation of good examples (*cf.* Johansen and Vetlesen, 2002, 23). Moral virtues were based on a deliberate choice between two extremes (the golden way in the middle). Later on, through growing, the middle way became a steady habit. Lastly the habit developed into a dispositional pattern that became an integral part of the personality.

The modern science of psychology is wrestling with the same problem of moral motivation. In dealing with the issue of violence and abuse against children, Mogens and Ane Ugland Albaek discuss why theoretical instruction so often is insufficient to ensure implementation of the necessary tools to improve the treatment of psychological traumas. After referring to a study made by Joyce and Showers, they conclude that implementation of change in practice does not take place until the information, discussion, practical training and feedback, was followed by personal coaching and training over time (Albaek, 2010, 49).

The examples above are all pointing to the same conclusion. The Aristotelian emphasis on training (coaching) is affirmed, and the Platonic optimistic view of knowledge alone as motivation for action is rejected. Knowing the good does not necessarily lead to doing the good. The balanced view of Aristotle is affirmed also by many ethicists. Furthermore, the ethical theory of virtues as a complement of duty ethics is resumed in recent years, including the teleological emphasis of what is just and good (*cf.* MacIntyre, 2007).

However, a Christian perspective on this question must correct also the Aristotelian view. The apostle Paul expresses a more realistic view on human weaknesses. He writes: "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Rom. 7: 18-19). Paul is not rejecting the value of training and moral virtues, but he turns the whole issue into a question about life and death. He asserts that to reject the evil in human nature we have to die from the old life, i.e., to die together with Christ. Only a new, resurrected life together with Christ can enable humans to realize the stewardship by implementing the will of God (*see* Gal. 2:20; Rom. 12: 1-2).

In Romans, chapter 8, Paul discusses human sinfulness and human disability to implement the will of God, the individual's death and resurrection with Christ as well as the glorious, reconciled future, when both humans and nature will be released from the present bondage. The will of God (the law) is good, just and spiritual and is given in the Bible as rules and regulations for ethical behaviour. The moral problem, however, is not the law, but the human nature: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son [...]" (Rom. 8:3). The law gives proper and satisfactory information, but it is without power, due to the nature of men. However, Christ "condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). The Spirit is a spirit of power, which acts as a personal coach and enables Christians to live lawfully.

The indwelling Spirit promotes spiritual fruits in Christians (*cf.* Gal. 5: 19-22). The fruits are identified as Christian virtues, i.e., faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13). These virtues come in addition to the classical cardinal virtues, i.e., courage, wisdom, moderation and justice. The Christian virtues are manifold and specified as nine fruits: "Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). Some of these virtues may overlap the classical virtues. The apostle Paul contrasts the fruits of Spirit (virtues) with the fruits of the sinful nature (vices). Of the latter he mentions vices like immorality, debauchery, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambitions, factions and envy (*see* Gal. 5:19).

In an environmental perspective, there is a great difference between humans who are motivated and driven by virtues in contrast to vices. An anthropocentric environmental ethics is most often combined with a utilitarian perspective (Heiene and Torbjoernsen, 2011, 204). Utilitarianism should emphasise altruism, but is in practice often limited to a nationalistic or a narrower group of people's interests, sometimes also combined with a short term time perspective. This may leave out the interests of non-human creatures, nature itself and even the interest of future generations. Therefore the modern utilitarian perspective on environmental ethics may better be characterised by egoism and vices than by altruism and virtues. The classical emphasis on virtues, closely related to the teleological ethics, is to be distinguished from utilitarianism and modern consequentialism (MacIntyre, 2007, 150).

A Christian view on human possibility to implement good stewardship does not mean a rejection of the goodness of all humans and an assertion that sin and egoism prevail in mankind. The mentioned overlap of classical and Christian virtues affirms a common ground in terms of ethical values (Phil. 4:8). However, a Christian view implies an extra dimension in terms of overcoming hindrances and enhances the implementation of adequate actions. The fruits of the indwelling Spirit give the possibility to exhibit personal modesty and increase love for neighbours. These elements are strong ethical motives.

In addition to the empowering of believers and the fruits of virtues by the Holy Spirit, transformation is a concept of utmost importance in regard to human stewardship of God's creation. The present environmental crises raise the general issue of how change is possible. As discussed above, there is inertia in terms of concrete decisions for the necessary change of the prevailing political and economic course. With reference to the challenges for a renewed Kyoto-protocol and recent international climate conferences (Copenhagen, 2009; and Cape Town, 2011) this inertia is once again exposed as a worldwide phenomenon.

The biblical concept of transformation is about a turn around of humans, individually as well as collectively. In theological terms: Sinners are to be sanctified. This is the purpose of the act of incarnation. God became man in order that humans should become divine (Rom. 8:3). In the early church this was called "the Irenaeus-Athanasian exchange principle" (Chia, 2011, 131). Transformation is a process in which humans is changed from solely loving themselves to loving God and exercising concern for neighbors' welfare. The great commandment calls humans to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22: 37-39).

In the analysis of open and classical theism above, I discussed God's properties. To answer even more precisely the question about whose image humans are transformed to be like, God the Creator must be further examined. Some definitions of some worldviews are relevant: Worldviews reflect different relations between the Creator and the creatures, which also imply how God is understood. For example, atheism asserts that there is no God or metaphysical reality outside cosmos, nature or living creatures. According to atheism and the functional view the world emerged out of matter, *ex materia*, and "traditional materialists hold that the world is an endless process of generation" (Geisler, 1997, 302). The worldview of deism states that God created the world, ignited life and then left the scene. There is no longer any contact or relation between the Creator and the creatures. According to pantheism, God and cosmos are identical. Cosmos arose out of God, *ex deo*. The two entities are synonymous and penetrate each other. This worldview often implies that all creatures and nature are divine and sacred. Cf. the view of deep ecology above.

The concept of theism denotes a relation between God and cosmos where the two are clearly separated and immensely differs from each other. This is the position of the Christian worldview: God creates cosmos out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. But God has a plan with creation and he cares for all creatures (see Psalm 24:1, 10; Psalm 104: 1-35). In the New Testament God is fully revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the early church developed the concept of the triune God.

In between pantheism and theism, there is a worldview called panentheism which means that God is greater than cosmos, as an eternal force behind universe; however, everything in cosmos is also in God. The philosopher Baruch Spinoza advocated panentheism, when he asserted that the universe was made of two attributes, thought and extension (Lat. *res cogitans* and *res extensa*), but God had many additional infinite attributes. However, God and cosmos are only one substance. His view led to a defacing of the difference between God and creation (Tollefsen *et al.*, 2002, 338).

The concept of panentheism is partly in agreement with the theistic position of Christian theology that God is a distinct being not synonymous with universe. And panentheism is partly different from theism, because panentheism asserts that everything, including humans, is regarded as going "out of God" and being "identical with God". Many theologians interpret certain passages in the New Testament according to panentheism, e.g., there is a union between believers and God (cf. John 15:4, 17: 21-23), and the many "in Christ" in the Pauline letters. And the apostle Peter writes about how believers through "very great and precious promises" may "participate in the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). The latter quotation is one of the references for the Orthodox teaching about deification.

There are, however, aspects of panentheism that are not coherent with classical theology. All the main church traditions affirm the Creeds of the early church and

consider creation to be clearly different from God, Creator. The triune God is uncreated, while everything else is created (*cf.* the above reference to the ontological gap). In the Orthodox Church, creation is part of the divine workings, i.e., a result of God and belongs to God. The teaching on creation (cosmology) and the teaching on salvation (soteriology) are closely related, and both teachings are closely related to incarnation. “Orthodoxy has a strong grasp on the interconnectedness of the whole cosmos, arising from its belief in the Spirit as ‘everywhere present and filling all things’” (Evangelical Alliance, 2001, 32). This position has some traits which may be misunderstood and confused with pantheism. Orthodox theology, however, makes an important distinction between the essence of God and his energies. Creation is a result of the divine energies, which are communicable attributes of God, but not of God in his divine and incommunicable essence (Gr. *ousia*) (Chia, 2011, 129).

Most Christians agree about the final Christian transformation, which is to “be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:3). However, there are different church traditions regarding when and how this process of transformation will take place between conversion¹² and fulfillment. The Lutheran confession emphasizes justification by faith alone (Lat. *sola gratia*), most often strictly interpreted as a divine declaration in the heavenly court, and less emphasis is put on sanctification or the transformative aspect of salvation. The Catholic Church emphasizes the grace of God given to all Christians in baptism. Grace is not interpreted as God’s favor, as among the Lutherans, but as infused grace (Lat. *gratia infusa*). Thomas of Aquinas talks about the “habitual grace” which means to “possess the favor of God in such a manner that a supernatural change comes about [...]” (McGrath, 2001, 452). God’s grace empowers Christians to do good works. The Orthodox Church puts the emphasis on transformation and deification. Roland Chia discusses the declarative view of Lutherans and the transformative view of the Orthodox Church, and, albeit the two terms designate two different metaphors and answer two different questions, he concludes that “they are not antithetical to each other. Instead, there is a profound coherence between the two concepts” (Chia, 2011, 128).

In the biblical texts, the concept of transformation, like the concept of salvation, is described as an ongoing process related to a past, present and future experience. *Cf.* the following passages: Mt. 9:22, Rom. 8:24 (past tense), 1 Pet. 3:21, 1 Cor. 3:18 (present tense), Mt. 10:22, John 5:34, Rom. 5:9 (future tense). With reference to the need for a responsible environmental stewardship here and now, passages talking about transformation in present tense are of particular interest. “And we who with unveiled faces all reflect (or: contemplate) the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (1 Cor. 3:18).

The context explains how Moses had to cover his face because of the glory of God. In the new covenant, however, the cover has been removed. By turning to Christ, the Lord, all Christians are enabled to see God’s glory, uncovered, but we do not yet see face to face, only like in a mirror. At the present time believers are allowed, only indirectly, to approach his glory uncovered. However, the main message in our passage is the result of such a focused contemplation (NIV’s alternative translation) to the Lord: Those turning to him are being transformed to the same image.

According to Christian theology, there is an ongoing transformation taking place in the lives of believers. Christians who are seeking the triune God, in prayer, reading of the Bible, the Lord’s Supper and the Christian community, are continually being

transformed to the image of God. This is how *Imago Dei* is being restored in believers already here and now. By this divine transformation believers are not only becoming coworkers or partners with God, but they are actually taking part in the continuing creation of the triune God. It seems as if the more Christians are paying attention to God, the stronger seems the transformation to take place. This is the transforming power of God, the Holy Spirit.

The process of being transformed may take place individually through devotion, meditation and contemplation. Throughout the centuries, the church history has told the stories of many holy men and women, e.g. Antony of Egypt (c. 251-356 A.D.) (Foster, 1998, 99-106) and Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). Francis' reverence for all creatures, as well as his praises to the heavenly entities, expressed in his hymn to the sun, is well known (McGrath, 1999, 149-151). However, divine transformation takes normally place in the fellowship of believers in the church. This is a common understanding and emphasis among all classical church traditions. The Lutheran faith underlines the importance of the church fellowship (Lat. *Communio sanctorum*). The Catholic Church puts the focus on the office of the Bishop, as the uniting office in the church. The Orthodox Church emphasizes the Eucharist as the focal point where the glory of the Lord continually is revealed. The Evangelical and Pentecostal church traditions likewise underline the importance of the local church – as Christian fellowship in Christ – where the word of God and his Holy Spirit reveal the universal presence of triune God. A viable and proper Christian stewardship will always be anchored in and based on the spiritual transformation which runs out of the presence of God's glory, in and through his church.

The biblical term “reconciliation” may be regarded under a twofold perspective, partly as a process and partly as the result of the process. As a process it refers to the ongoing struggle to realize reconciliation among peoples, between humans and God and the other creatures, and to ensure the richness and diversity in all creation. As a result of this process it refers to the eschatological fulfillment of the promised new earth and the new heaven (*cf.* Rev. 20:1 and Rom. 8: 18-27). The twofold perspective contains a tension related to the concept of the kingdom of God, which is already at hand, and still belongs to the future, the “already” and “not yet” perspective. Applied to the environmental question, mission leader Kjetil Aano accepts that the goal is ultimately the responsibility of God, while the process is the responsibility of the church (Aanom, 2007, 170). *Cf.* Mt. 24:14 and 2 Pet. 3: 12-13.

The last statement implies another important issue related to the final outcome of the environmental crisis. At the same time it is both continuity and discontinuity between the present world and the final outcome. Some Christians believe that the world on the day of destruction will burn in fire and disappear (*see* 2 Pet. 3:10). Others teach that Jesus returns to the world every time the local church helps the oppressed and liberates the poor. There is no future return of a personal Messiah. I reject both these extreme positions and argue for a balanced view, i.e., “to think correctly about the relation between creation, salvation and the completion” (Tro og skaperverk, 2009, 11). On the one side, the belief in discontinuity is correctly based on a divine intervention, i.e., the kingdom of God will one day be completed when the Messiah returns in power and glory (*see* Luke 21: 27-28; Mt. 24: 30), *cf.* a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). On the other side, the belief in continuity is secured by the fact that creation is to be renewed, not replaced, released and not rejected (Rom. 8: 18-21). Christian stewardship of God's creation is justified in terms of human participation in the continuing creation, as well as enhanced by proper motivation and transformation.

Summary and concluding remarks

In this article I have outlined the intrinsic value of God's creation, including both humans, non-humans and the non-living nature, albeit there are good reasons for a grading of intrinsic values. Humans alone are created in the image of God and have a particular dignity and responsibility as stewards of God's creation. I have also discussed different interpretations of biblical anthropology and the issue of human weakness and sin and paid a particular attention to the relational view of the Creator and the cultural mandate. I have raised some objections to the view that God "has freely chosen to be dependent upon both human and non-human" as well as critical remarks to the open theism and the relational view. Furthermore, I have discussed the issue whether knowledge alone is sufficient to implement proper acts. I advocate an understanding of Christian ecological ethics that emphasize the incarnation, reconciliation and resurrection of Christ as the ultimate basis for the human stewardship. Spiritual empowering, the fruits of the Spirit as Christian virtues and a theology of transformation, are necessary for the implementation of God's will in today's world. I evaluate the pantheistic worldview in light of Orthodox' and Protestant's theology and clarify some necessary conditions for avoiding non-Christian worldviews. Lastly, I analyze the tension between the continuity and the discontinuity in regard to the fulfillment of the human stewardship of God's creation.

The present state of the environmental crisis and the ecological challenge are a global task, a divine mandate and a responsibility for all humans in general and for the global Christian church in particular. Those who confess the triune God are already involved in a divine process of being empowered and transformed, a process that continually develops as a participatory act between the Creator, on the one side, and individual believers and the church, on the other side. The good process and its fulfillment are finally promised by God, but for the time being, humans, and especially Christians, are God's stewards as his responsible agents in his creation. A Christian ecological ethics is primarily binding for Christians, but its applicability allows all humans to practice it.

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- 1 See two book titles in the Bibliography (Kristiansen and Mæland).
- 2 Yellowstone National Park was established as the first American national park in 1872.
- 3 The Brundtland Report, from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), published in 1987, gives an often quoted definition: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need”.
- 4 This is most often referred to as the anthropocentric perspective.
- 5 The phrase “deep ecology” was introduced to environmental literature in 1973. Naess is regarded as founder of the Deep Ecology Movement. See the homepage: Foundation for Deep Ecology.
- 6 Quoted from: Davis, 2004, 332, n. 36.
- 7 Citations after the most common Lutheran translation of the Apostolic Creed, and the 1988 ecumenical version (ELLC) of the Nicene Creed.
- 8 All Bible quotations are taken from NIV, unless otherwise is indicated.

- 9 See his book (1980): *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will*.
- 10 See his book (editor) (1994): *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.
- 11 The Norwegian original reads: "Ja, tænke det; ønske det; ville det med, – men gjøre det! Nei; det skjønner jeg ikke".
- 12 Conversion in this context means acceptance of the Gospel by an individual sinner through baptism and faith.

Kristīgā ekoloģiskā ētika ar īpašu atsauci uz cilvēka kalpošanu Dieva radības kontekstā

Kopsavilkums

Kristīgā ekoloģiskā ētika mēģina izprast un aprakstīt cilvēka izaicinājumus attiecībā uz pastāvošajām globālajām ekoloģiskajām krīzēm, raugoties no kristīgas perspektīvas un balstoties kristīgā pasaulesuzskatā. Diskusija ietver īpašu atsauci uz Dieva radības kalpošanu, uzsver cilvēka iespējas rīkoties atbilstoši, kā arī cilvēka atbildību par nākošajām paaudzēm. Autors rakstā aplūko dažādas izpratnes par vides ētiku, piem., kas radībā ir morāli nozīmīgs? Balstoties kristīgajā ekoloģiskajā ētikā, autors aizstāv visas radības iekšējo vērtību, liekot uzsvāru uz cilvēka cieņas konceptu. Iekšējās vērtības koncepts tiek aplūkots morālās filozofijas un teoloģiskās ētikas perspektīvā, turklāt autors apgalvo, ka atbilstošu kalpošanu biosfērai un ekosfērai var nodrošināt tikai cilvēks. Tas ietver teoloģisku diskusiju par biblisko antropoloģiju un Dieva nodomu radībā, ietverot cilvēka rīcības nozīmīgumu attiecībā uz absolūtās jaunās zemes gaidāmo rezultātu. Tomēr galvenais izaicinājums ir iet tālāk par analīzes līmeni un pamatot, kā var tikt realizēta praktiska rīcība politiskā, personīgā un globālā līmenī. Šis morālais un teoloģiskais jautājums ir saistīts ar tādiem konceptiem kā Dieva tēls un līdzība, kultūras pilnvarojums, gribas brīvība, grēks un cilvēka spēja īstajā brīdī rīkoties ētiski atbildīgi. Kristīgais piensums ekoloģiskajā ētikā ir balstīts Krustātsistā upurgatavajā mīlestībā, kā arī augšāmceltā Kunga Jēzus un Svētā Gara pārveidošajā darbībā. Kristīgi ontoloģiskais-antropoloģiskais pamats globālajai kristīgajai ētikai ir cilvēka tapšana par jaunu radību, t.i., tāda normatīvā ētika, kas ir aplicējama visai cilvēcei un atbilstoši kurai jādzīvo gan kristiešiem, gan visiem labas gribas cilvēkiem, darbojoties Dieva radības pasaulē atbildīgā un ilgtspējīgā veidā.

Atslēgas vārdi: ekoloģiskā ētika, Dieva tēls, kultūras pilnvarojums, kalpošana, tikumi un netikumi



Dr. min. (Dr. theol.), assoc. prof. Bjørn Øyvind Fjeld

Ansgar College and Theological Seminary (Norway)

Address: Fredrik Fransons vei 4, Kristiansand NO-4635, Norway

Phone, fax: +47 38106506; +47 38106599

E-mail: fjeld@ansgarskolen.no