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From Biblical Eco-Theology to Contextual Eco-Ecclesiology: Answer to Peet van Dyk's Second and Third Challenges

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Abstract

The modern ecological crisis stems from Judeo-Christian theological hermeneutics that emphasize dominative anthropocentrism and desacralize nature. The critique, pioneered by Harvey Cox and Lynn White Jr., resonates even more loudly through the challenges raised by Peet van Dyk, who especially questions how to interpret the texts of the Scripture more broadly and avoid erroneous anthropocentric interpretations without distorting Scripture's true worldview.

This study describes and analyses the historical response of the Catholic Church, from the Church Fathers, especially Basil the Great and Augustine, to the Magisterium, especially the teachings of the Popes from the 1960s, extending from John XXIII to Francis. The framework of this answer is characterized as *beyond*. This research shows that the source of the ecological crisis lies not on Scriptural texts, but in moral-spiritual issues and a technocratic worldview. In fact, the Church has long offered a relational, integral, moral and ecological framework that rejects human domination over nature.

The implication of these findings is that Christianity must transform from a corrective effort in biblical hermeneutics toward an ecclesial model responsive to ecological issues. Contextual Eco-Ecclesiology thus becomes a transformative-missionary imperative for the Church to realize integral ecological conversion and universal solidarity as a prophetic response to the socio-ecological crisis.

Keywords: Eco-Ecclesiology, Anthropocentrism, Integral Ecology, Peet van Dyk, Magisterium.

Abstrak

Krisis ekologis modern bersumber dari hermeneutika teologis Yudeo-Kristen yang menekankan antroposentrisme dominatif dan menciptakan desakralisasi alam. Kritik yang dipelopori oleh Harvey Cox dan Lynn White Jr., ini semakin nyaring bunyinya lewat genderang tantangan-tantangan yang ditabuh oleh Peet van Dyk yang secara khusus mempertanyakan bagaimana menafsirkan teks-teks Kitab Suci secara lebih luas dan bagaimana menghindari penafsiran antroposentrik yang keliru tanpa menodai pandangan Kitab suci yang sesungguhnya.
Simakan ini mendeskripsikan dan menganalisa sejarah tanggapan Gereja Katolik, mula-mula dari Bapa-bapa Gereja, khususnya Basilius Agung dan Agustinus, hingga Magisterium, khususnya ajaran Para Paus mulai tahun 1960-an, mulai Yohanes XXIII sampai dengan Fransiskus. Kerangka jawaban yang diberikan bercorak *beyond*. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sumber krisis ekologis bukanlah dari teks Kitab Suci, tetapi dari persoalan moral-spiritual dan pandangan teknokratis. Padahal Gereja sejak awal telah menawarkan kerangka relasional dan integral, moral dan ekologis, yang menolak dominasi manusia atas alam semesta. Implikasi dari temuan penelitian ini yaitu Kekristenan harus melakukan transformasi dari usaha korektif terhadap hermenutika biblik menuju model bergereja yang tanggap terhadap isu-isu ekologis. Eko-Ekklesiologi Kontekstual menjadi perintah transformatif-misioner Gereja untuk mewujudkan pertobatan ekologis integral dan solidaritas universal sebagai tanggapan profetik terhadap krisis sosial-ekologis.

Kata Kunci: Eko-Ekklesiologi, Antroposentrisme, Ekologi Integral, Peet van Dyk, Magisterium.

1. Introduction

Ecology as a consciousness and movement emerged in the 1960s, so it is relatively new.[1] The works of Harvey Cox[2] and Lynn White Jr.,[3] are seen as a reference point for the development of ideas about the environment. However, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is commonly considered as the real beginning of the environmental movement.[4] Despite the difference in references, everyone agrees that ecological awareness and movements only began in the 1960s.[5]

[1] Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *SCIENCE* 155, no. Number 3767 (March 1967): 1203–7; Thomas Sieger Derr, "Religion's Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis: An Argument Run Amok," *Worldview* 18, no. 1 (1975): 39–45, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0084255900020581; Peet van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," *OTE* 32/1 (2009): 186–4; Kivatsi Jonathan Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 1 (2019): 229–55, https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n1a13; dos Santos Brandalize Marisete, Brandalize Carlos Alexandre do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis," *International Journal of Environmental Reslience Research and Science* 05, no. N. 03 (2023): 1–18.
[2] Harvey Cox, *THE SECULAR CITY. SECULARIZATION AND URBANIZATION IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.*, vol. Sixth Printing (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965).
[3] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."
[4] Chad Montrie, *The Myth of Silent Spring: Rethinking the Origins of American Environmentalism* (Univ of California Press, 2018); László Erdős, "The Environmental Movement Is Born–Rachel Carson and Silent Spring," in *Green Heroes: From Buddha to Leonardo DiCaprio* (Springer, 2020), 151–54.
[5] P Montague and M B Pellerano, "History of the US Environmental Movement," *Encyclopedia of Toxicology, Fourth Edition: Volume 1-9*, 2023, V5-303.

However, ecological problems have been happening for a long time, especially since the industrial revolution.[6] Indeed, theology from the beginning had more to do with salvation theology than with creation theology. The world is seen not as a domain of salvation, but in relation to the history of salvation. What is important is that the relationship between human beings, God, and salvation is said to be *salus extra mundus*.[7] But Cox[8] and White[9] assert that environmental issues stem from the interpretation of Scriptural texts, which contain anthropocentrism[10] that is dominative and exploitative.[11]

This paper aims to explain that from the beginning of the Church Fathers to Pope Francis, the Church has taught anthropocentrism that is responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the environment.

2. Research Methods

This study uses two methods, namely historical-descriptive and textual-analytical. Firstly, it presents the problem raised by Cox and White, who accuse Judeo-Christian hermeneutics, especially Roman Catholicism, of being the source of man's domineering view of the universe. Their criticism then caused ripples and waves among theologians. Some see Cox and White's criticism as unreasonable, some consider it too simplistic, and some criticize Cox and White's conclusions. Starting from this increasingly convoluted problem, Peet van Dyk[12] puts the subject back in its place and poses new and important challenges for theologians and the Church. The Church itself, in the trajectory of history, turns out to give a serious view of the integrity of the natural creation.

This historical-descriptive method is complemented by a textual-analytical approach. Cox and White's works are read and dissected to express their true criticism. Furthermore, Peet van Dyk's second and third challenges provide the methodological grounding necessary to understand the roots of the ecological crisis and the Church's overarching responses. Subsequently, texts of Basil the Great and Augustine commenting specifically on the Book of Genesis were read and their views were displayed to show the Church's early views on true Christian anthropology. A textual-analytical approach was also made to documents written by the Popes, particularly those written from the 1960s, when Cox and White's criticism of environmental issues began to become popular. That is why, the Popes who are talked about are starting from Pope John XXIII to Pope Francis.

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[6] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis."
[7] do Nascimento Lorivaldo.
[8] Cox, *THE SECULAR CITY. SECULARIZATION AND URBANIZATION IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.*
[9] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."
[10] Anthropocentrism is a theological framework or worldview that places human beings at the center of all creation, which in ecological critiques is often misconstrued as a justification for human domination and exploitation of nature.
[11] Bron Taylor, "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2016): 268–305.
[12] van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology"; Peet van Dyk, "Mythical Linkage and Mythical Frameworks," *Old Testament Essays* 18, no. 3 (2005): 863–78; Peet J. van Dyk, "Eco-Theology and Losing the Sacred," *Old Testament Essays* 23, no. 3 (2010): 822–33; Peet van Dyk, "Eco-Theology: In and out of the Wilderness," *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 3 (2017): 835–51.

3. Findings and Discussion

To properly see the discussion that leads to the importance of the Church's transformation towards contextual Eco-Ecclesiology,[13] we must look back at the criticisms of Cox and White. Next, we dissect what really is the challenge that the Church must answer thanks to the challenges that van Dyk poses. The Church's answer shows that the Church's model of Eco-Ecclesiology is actually rooted in the beginning of the history of the Church.

3.1. Criticism toward Christianity and Biblical Eco-Theology

Harvey Cox, in his work *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective,* [14] views the modern ecological crisis as part of the direct consequences of the process of urbanization and the collapse of traditional religions that marked the modern era (p. 1). In his view, the modern world, with its technological advancement, urbanization, and desacralization of nature,[15] was born out of a theological-cultural project rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which got rid of religious myths and opened nature to the scientific conquest of man.[16] Cox calls this process the *disenchantment of nature*[17] and the *de-sacralization of politics* and the *de-consecration of values,* which result in the separation of man from God and the separation of man from nature, as well as abandoning the sacred dimension and respect for creation (pp. 17-22). According to him, this is a form of *atheistic propaganda* that results in, for example, secular priests being seen as inferior to religious priests. As a result, on the one hand the modern city (*technopolis*) became a symbol of progress, and on the other hand man was alienated from the universe. It was this stage that then led humans to technological freedom and domination that resulted in the destruction of ecology and traditional religions, because nature was reduced to a mere object of technological planning and control (p. 23-24).[18] Cox argues that humanity lives in a *secular city* where the social order is completely detached from religious respect for creation, and therefore there is a need for *a new type of prophecy* that guides the moral and ecological consciousness of humanity (p. 11).

Cox (pp. 1-3) assesses that religion, especially Christianity in its institutional form, actually contributes to the humanitarian and ecological crisis because it loses its prophetic power. He

[13] Eco-ecclesiology is an ecclesial model responsive to ecological issues, wherein the essence and mission of the Church are directed toward realizing integral ecological conversion and universal solidarity.
[14] Cox, *THE SECULAR CITY. SECULARIZATION AND URBANIZATION IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.*
[15] Desacralization is the process wherein the spiritual dimension or sacredness of nature is lost due to modern theological-cultural views, reducing nature to a mere material object to be exploited.
[16] Vicente Vide Rodríguez, "De Una Teología de La Ciudad a Una Teología Desde La Ciudad Globalizada," *Theologica Xaveriana* 72 (2022): 1–33.
[17] Disenchantment is also called de-divinization and refers to the process by which ancient cosmic myths and divine elements are stripped from creation, causing nature to lose its sacred status and come to be viewed merely as a physical fact or utilitarian instrument.
[18] Lucjan Klimsza, "The Influence of Technology on Human Thinking and Values," *Ecumeny and Law* 1, no. 12 (2024): 83–102.

rejected the traditional form of religion which he called a closed metaphysical value system that separates man from the world and his fellow man. In Cox's analysis, since the time of Constantine, Christianity has been entangled in a synthesis of Greco-Roman culture that emphasized a transcendent God and a separate mortal world, thus encouraging the birth of dualism between the divine and the mundane. Such religion, according to Cox (p. 48), is no longer a liberating force but a *neurosis of cultures.*[19] Therefore, he calls for the Church to free itself from such Christianity and to turn into a community of prophets or missionaries directly involved in the struggle of the secular world, including in social and ecological reform. For Cox, we must move away from a theology of history that speaks only of the past towards a theology of change that emphasizes historical present action (p. 249). To speak of God in the modern world is to speak *in a secular fashion,* in the midst of man's struggle to become God's companions, who are free and responsible for giving meaning to the order of human history (pp. 256-257). His sharp critique of religion is not a rejection of faith, but an invitation to rediscover universal forms and new foundations or points of convergence between Christianity and man and society, and a fundamental reorientation for the common life of man in the midst of problems of ethnicity, race, inequality, and poverty.[20]

The most scathing criticism of Christianity with regard to ecological issues comes from Lynn White Jr. In his influential article in SCIENCE Magazine, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,*[21] he asserts that humans are often dynamic elements in their own environment (p. 1203). In that context, the ecological crisis has begun since humans have taken advantage of their environment. Initially, according to White, humans became part of nature, but later masters and destroyers of nature. In subsequent developments, the modern ecological crisis is an accumulation of human technological capabilities rooted in the perspectives and values formed early by some traditions, but especially Western traditions or religions, the Judeo-Christian heritage, and more specifically the Latin Church.[22] According to White, since the Middle Ages Western man developed an exploitative relationship toward nature because he believed that nature was created solely to fulfil human purposes (pp. 1204-1206). In that frame, the creation narrative in Genesis 1:28, for example, is read as a mandate to dominate and at the same time affirm human power over other creation. This view, in White's thought, formed an ideological framework that on the one hand created modern technological and scientific advances that provided convenience, and on the other hand brought about global ecological destruction. Therefore, he called Christianity the most anthropocentric religion that ever existed (p. 1205).[23]

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[19] José Tadeu Batista de Souza and Emerson da Silva, "Religião e Cultura Urbana Na Teologia Da Secularização de Harvey Cox," *Revista de Teologia e Ciências Da Religião Da UNICAP (Descontinuada)* 7, no. 2 (2017): 168–86.
[20] de Souza and da Silva; E O Gavrilov, O F Gavrilov, and E F Kazakov, "Metamorphoses of Religion and the Human in the Modern World," in *The International Science and Technology Conference" FarEastCon"* (Springer, 2018), 716–24.
[21] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."
[22] Christophe Monnot, "La Thèse de Lynn White Jr: Un Programme Retentissant et Son Revers," *ΑΡΓΟS*, 2022.
[23] Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment," 2019; Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana et al., "Anthropocentrism in Christian Eco-Theology: Origin and Debate," *Indonesian Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Humanity* 3 (2024): 197–220.

White sees two of the deepest theological roots of the ecological crisis, namely anthropocentrism and dualism of creation (pp. 1204-1205). According to him, the Judeo-Christian tradition affirms the radical separation between man and nature and between the created world and the divine. Man created according to the *imago Dei* is seen as above the universe and given the right to conquer it (p. 1205).[24] This dualism is not an equal relationship, but hierarchical, human beings as rulers and nature as objects of domination. Furthermore, the theological process desacralizes and abandons nature from its spiritual-divine aspect, so that nature loses its great spiritual value (p. 1205). White argues that Christianity has severed the sacred relationship between man and the world by getting rid of the ancient cosmological myth that sees the divine element in creation. As a result, nature undergoes a process of de-divinization, loses *its imago Dei*, is reduced to a mere utilitarian instrument, and is not a living community that has intrinsic value. He then criticized Christianity by saying that for a Christian a tree is nothing more than a physical fact (p. 1206).[25]

It is here that White sees that modern science and technological revolution are the logical fruits of the de-divinization and de-sanctification of the universe. No longer seen as sacred, human beings are free to control and exploit nature without limits or guilt. Thus, according to him, the ecological crisis is not merely the consequence of industrialization, but the long-term result of a theology that ignores solidarity with creation (p. 1203).[26] Furthermore, White makes a radical appeal: *"More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one"* (p. 1206). With this White is not merely rejecting the old religion, but challenging Christianity to repent from a domineering theology toward the spirituality that recognizes the equality of all creation.[27] As a positive example, he raised Saint Francis of Assisi, because, he said, this saint stripped man of his monarchical rule over creation and introduced democracy among all creatures, a spirituality that sees each being as brother or sister. White calls this saint the Protector of Ecologists because he is a spiritual remedy for religious diseases that cause ecological problems (pp. 1206-1207).

Theologians believe that although White's accusations are provocative, he succeeds in revealing the ecological dimension behind the problem of the relationship between man and nature.[28] Richard Hiers[29] rejects White's simplification, but acknowledges that the root of the ecological problem does have to do with the values and ethical attitudes that develop in Western

[24] Martin Meganck, "Lynn White Revisited: Religious and Cultural Backgrounds for Technological Development," ed. Steen Hyldgaard Christensen (et al.) (New York: Springer, 2012), 1–18; Monnot, "La Thèse de Lynn White Jr: Un Programme Retentissant et Son Revers."
[25] Maulana et al., "Anthropocentrism in Christian Eco-Theology: Origin and Debate."
[26] Sean McGrath, "Can the Earth Be Sacred Once Again? Christianity and Climate Change," *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion* 2, no. 1 (2020): 108–23.
[27] Taylor, "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly."
[28] Stéphane François and Adrien Nonjon, "Ecology, Anti-Christianity, and the Far Right: The Readings and Recoveries of Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,'" *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 17, no. 1 (2023): 145–57; Monnot, "La Thèse de Lynn White Jr: Un Programme Retentissant et Son Revers."
[29] Richard H Hiers, "ECOLOGY, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, AND METHODOLOGY: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENVIRONMENT," *Zygon* 19, no. 1 (March 1984): 43–59.

theological interpretations. Martin Meganck[30] responded to White by saying that White's accusations have shaken many theologians because they have changed the face of religion that was once considered the source of progress to be the main culprit of the destruction of the earth. Next, Meganck responded to White by confirming two things. First, White appears to be pessimistic about democracy and the softer forms of exploitation of anthropocentrism, which may contribute to environmental problems. Second, White's fundamental ideas are nothing new. White just puts these ideas in new contexts, such as the context of crisis, exploitation, and the error of Christianity.[31] Kivatsi Kavusa[32] calls White's article a trigger thesis for the birth of ecological hermeneutics, because it opens the awareness that biblical texts and their interpretations contribute to both the destruction and healing of the earth. From this point emerged the *Earth Bible Project*[33] and *Eco-feminist Readings movements*[34], which sought to correct the legacy of anthropocentric interpretation and reclaim the ecological wisdom of Scripture.

3.2. Peet van Dyk's Challenges

Peet van Dyk is a prominent theologian who has conducted extensive research on ecotheology through several important publications. In his 2005 work, *Mythical linkage and mythical frameworks, he demonstrated that* Ancient Near Easter texts relied on mythical linkage, a perceived real connection between heavenly or cosmic realities and earthly places. In his opinion, ancient texts also operated within mythical frameworks. Therefore, modern readers cannot project modern poetic, symbolic, or scientific assumptions onto these texts without losing their original embedded meaning. Within the biblical context, the Bible lacks modern terms like 'nature' or 'culture', leaving scholars prone to misinterpreting ancient creation motifs by treating them as modern symbols or historical accounts.[35]

In *Eco-theology and losing the sacred* (2010), van Dyk explains that Biblical 'sacredness' relied on a pre-scientific magico-mythical worldview involving taboos, supernatural contagion, and physical fear. Attempting to re-sacralize nature today is scientifically naïve and risks reverting to neo-paganism. Instead of scaring people with "sacred" taboos, eco-theology should foster an internal moral responsibility toward environmental care.[36] In another article entitled *Eco-Theology: in and out of Wilderness* (2017), van Dyk states that ancient authors held magico-mythical cosmology that fundamentally clashes with modern scientific worldview. In this context, interpreters must acknowledge this gap and extract overarching ethical foundations rather than pretending ancient biblical writers anticipated modern ecological

[30] Meganck, "Lynn White Revisited: Religious and Cultural Backgrounds for Technological Development."
[31] Taylor, "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly"; François and Nonjon, "Ecology, Anti-Christianity, and the Far Right: The Readings and Recoveries of Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.'"
[32] Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment."
[33] Ernst M Conradie, "TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS : A REVIEW ESSAY ON THE EARTH BIBLE PROJECT," *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 123–35.
[34] Md Rafiqul Islam, "A Study of Deep Ecology and Environmental Sustainability: Through an Eco-Feminist Lens," *Sudurpaschim Spectrum* 2, no. 1 (2024): 105–22.
[35] van Dyk, "Mythical Linkage and Mythical Frameworks."
[36] van Dyk, "Eco-Theology and Losing the Sacred."

awareness.[37] Consequently, he criticizes eco-theologians for engaging in 'cherry-picking' isolated verses or attempting to force ancient texts to align with modern science.

However, it is in his article *Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology,*[38] that he demonstrates how the challenge to ecotheology is not only to answer the accusations of Cox and White, but also to acknowledge why ecological issues have been absent from biblical theology for so long, even though the 1990 Moscow Conference affirmed that environmental issues possess a religious dimension, thereby requiring religious communities to join hands with scholars in protecting the environment (pp. 186-187).[39] Similarly, theologians have attempted to answer accusations that Christianity is indifferent or even hostile to the universe, and have therefore sought to construct a theology that accommodates and respects for the environment.

Peet van Dyk points out that Scriptural texts such as Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 are often interpreted narrowly as legitimizing human domination over nature, and therefore foster a biblical image of hostility and indifference to the environment (p. 186). The first challenge, he argues, is to encourage the emergence of eco-theological discussions among Old Testament scholars by exploring the reasons why there is a lack of attention to environmental issues among theologians and challenging Old Testament scholars to revisit their views, as well as to establish a better ecotheology (p. 188).[40]

The second challenge is to dismantle the theological approach that makes man the center of the salvation narrative, the fruit of the various ideologies brought by Scripture, especially the interpretation of Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8, which also supports patriarchal monotheism and the negation of *wilderness* that actually makes nature cursed and wild animals seen as dangerous.[41] In this context, non-human creations are always treated only as a backdrop for the narrative flow of human redemption and salvation. To this end, van Dyk calls for a new hermeneutics that recognizes that biblical texts are born in different contexts, but still contain moral values that can guide today's ecological ethics (pp. 188-190).

Peet van Dyk himself attempted to find the texts of Scripture, especially within the Pentateuch, the Books of Wisdom, and the Prophets, that could serve as a source for environmental protection efforts. However, he saw that Proverbs 10 – 24, for example, remains anthropocentric. Likewise, the texts of the Pentateuch and the Prophets provide less direct support for environmental ethics. Therefore, van Dyk sought support for the philosophical, social, and theological views that formed the basis for interpreting scriptural texts. Nevertheless, Greek philosophy, such as that of Plato with its dichotomous view, gave birth to Western philosophy and Christian theology that devalued the material and natural worlds, ultimately paving the way for industrial revolutions, capitalism, and colonialism. Similarly, the

[37] van Dyk, "Eco-Theology: In and out of the Wilderness."
[38] van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology."
[39] Ernst M Conradie, "THE FOUR TASKS OF CHRISTIAN ECOTHEOLOGY : REVISITING THE CURRENT DEBATE," *Scriptura* 119, no. 1967 (2021): 1–13.
[40] Conradie.
[41] Maulana et al., "Anthropocentrism in Christian Eco-Theology: Origin and Debate."

history of salvation and millenarist views have suggested that today's world is unimportant and meaningless for salvation.[42]

According to Peet van Dyk, eco-theological discussions show that biblical texts do not seem to care about the environment because they carry a dominant and exploitative anthropocentrism over the universe. The Scriptures do not seem to support efforts to maintain the universe, a situation compounded by the lack of support from philosophical, social, and theological views. This then opens up new challenges for theologians (pp. 200-201). First, can ecotheology become part of the mainstream theology? Second, how can we interpret the texts of Scripture not only narrowly (within their immediate context) such as Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8, but more broadly (within a wider canonical, theological, traditional, Magisterial teaching framework)? Third, how can we avoid the dominative and exploitative biblical anthropocentrism in ecological discussions without undermining the true anthropocentrism of Scripture? Fourth, can eco-theologians avoid misconceptions of intent and design regarding the elements of creation? Fifth, if the Age of Enlightenment witnessed *paradigm shift* from a magical-mystical to a rational-scientific worldview, can we enact a new *paradigm shift* from rational-scientific back to magical-mystical? [43]

3.3. Responses to Peet van Dyk's Second and Third Challenges

The challenges raised by Peet van Dyk are fundamental and require further responses. The responses themselves generally come directly from African theologians. The Catholic Church itself provides responses that in my opinion are *beyond,* in the sense of going beyond the period before and after the challenges posed by van Dyk.

3.3.1. Responses from Some Theologians

In response to Peet van Dyk's challenges, several African theologians have given mixed responses. Lubunga W'Ehusha[44] sees that environmental problems must be solved in the human view of the world. Therefore, the conversion of views must be sought. More specifically, since that view is concerned with teaching, redemption must occur in the priesthood role of the theologian. In this context, W'Ehusha emphasized the importance of a practical transition from a prophetic to a priesthood role in providing daily teaching for the sake of respect for the sacredness of nature and environmental restoration. What can be seen here is a more personal approach and not an institutional, personal theological responsibility and not the implementation of responsibilities organized by a religious institution.

Buhle Mpofu[45] argues that the problem of the lack of harmony between nature and man in South Africa, which results in floods, droughts, and pollution, is caused by the tendency of consumerism in the world economy. In that context, Mpofu proposes two things. Firstly, healing and reconciliation, liberation and restoration not only into man but also and especially

[42] van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology."
[43] van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology."
[44] Lubunga W'ehusha, "Redeeming the Priestly Role," *OTE*, vol. 27, 2014, www.worldwatch.org.
[45] Buhle Mpofu, "Pursuing Fullness of Life through Harmony with Nature: Towards an African Response to Environmental Destruction and Climate Change in Southern Africa," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6574.

into man's relationship with nature and all of God's creation based on the African worldview of *Ubuntu*. Secondly, he encourages the African Church to build a constructive theology that does not separate the spiritual or the sacred from the physical, and to respond proactively to ecological issues through education, including education on climate and environmental justice. Mpofu does prioritize the role of religious institutions, but it is still limited to churches included in *the World Council of Churches (WCC).* Thus, Mpofu leaves the space as well as the role of the Catholic Church which actually contributes a lot in ecology.

Mogomme Alpheus Masoga[46] prioritizes the involvement of religious communities in efforts to conserve the environment by adopting the African Indigenous Knowledge System in the context of Practical Theology. So, there is a synthesis that he made by creating a *theological framework of eco-praxis.* According to him, this synthesis can be useful for instilling religious beliefs into the context of actual life, especially in the context of *apartheid* where black people lose land ownership and they are thus prevented from pursuing environmental conservation. That is why, Masoga proposed that it is necessary to pursue a continuous awareness program that focuses on the practical uses of environmental maintenance at the local and national community levels for ecological balance. Masoga thus abandons the discussion of biblical interpretive issues and historical approaches that have been pursued so far, which can actually be a solid foundation for conservation efforts to balance the environment, which can be made by religious institutions.

3.3.2. Responses from the Catholic Church: from biblical eco-theology to contextual eco-ecclesiology

The responses I am referring to here are not first of all chronological but *beyond,*[47] because they touch on the substance of the challenges posed by Peet van Dyk. Historical evidence suggests that substance itself was discussed long before van Dyk's challenges. Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si[48] was born out of the Church's views and practices from the very beginning.[49] That is why, in this section I will show the responses of the Church Fathers, namely Basil the Great and Augustine, and of the Popes from John XXIII to Francis.

3.3.2.1. Fathers of the Church

Surely the Church Fathers did not make ecological descriptions to answer either Hervey Cox and Lynn White or Peet van Dyk. They also do not even talk directly about ecology as it's been understood since the 1960s.[50] Nevertheless, the theology of the Church Fathers can be

[46] Mogomme Alpheus Masoga, "The Interface between Ecotheology and Practical Theology: An African Indigenous Knowledge Systems Perspective," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 9, no. 2 (2023): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n2.a12.
[47] Robertus Wijanarko, "Postcolonialism and Theological Studies," *Philosophical and Theological Studies* 8 (2008): 123–33.
[48] Francis I, "Laudato Yes," *Vatican Publisher*, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
[49] Theodore Lai and Cecilia Tortajada, "The Holy See and the Global Environmental Movements," *Frontiers in Communication* 6 (2021): 715900.
[50] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis"; Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Green Patriarch, Green Patristics: Reclaiming the Deep Ecology of Christian Tradition," *Religions* 8 (2017): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8070116.

seen as an inspiring theology of ecology.[51] Cloete asserts that Christian monasticism, ecofeminism, *covenantal ethics* and cosmic Christology developed within Christianity or the Church and became the source of the transformation of human attitudes towards the universe and a brighter ecological future.[52] Besides, the texts of Scripture also do not speak of themselves about dominative and exploitative anthropocentrism. Were not the texts "made to speak"?[53] So I think that I am not wrong to "make the Church Fathers speak" and provide inspiration both to answer Cox and White, and to respond positively to van Dyk's challenges.

The Church Fathers chosen were Basil the Great and Augustine. The reason is that they directly commented on the text of the Book of Genesis. Basil the Great commented with his sermons on the six days of creation (Greek: *hexaemeron*: *hexa* means *six*; *emeron* stands for *day*) and Augustine explains how to correctly and comprehensively interpret the Book of Genesis. It must be admitted that the source used for this section is the study of several theologians.

Basil the Great: *homilies on the six days of creation*

Saint Basil the Great (Basil of Caesarea) paid great attention to the cosmological and liturgical significance of the work of creation in his *work Hexaemeron,* the Homilies on the Six Days of Creation. In his sermons that spoke on various themes, such as cosmology, meteorology, and astronomy, he read that the act of creation was not just a mechanical cosmic event, but a manifestation of God's wisdom and mercy.[54] "In the beginning God created" refers to a noble order. The world had its beginning because the world was created by the Creator of the beginning. The world, although it has a different essence from its Creator, expresses the will and greatness of the Creator, so that every aspect of creation has divine value and purpose.[55]

Basil's reading emphasizes that nature is not an empty object to be used alone, but a reality that invites praise, gratitude, and ethical responsibility from humans created in relation to the Creator. Basil affirmed that the cosmos is not only a living organism, but also an image of God and must be directed to Him.[56] From the point of view of contextual biblical ecotheology,

[51] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis."
[52] Newton Millan Cloete, "Retrieving a Christian Ecological Spirituality in Response to Our Contemporary Ecological Crisis.," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 4 (2023).
[53] van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology"; Cherryl Hunt, "Be Ye Speakers of, and Listeners to, the Word: The Promotion of Biblical Engagement through Encountering the Scriptures Read Aloud," *The Expository Times* 129, no. 4 (2018): 149–57.
[54] David C DeMarco, "Textual Issues in Basil of Caesarea's Homiliae in Hexaemeron 4 and 5," *The Classical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2018): 292–304.
[55] Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, "The Concept of the Cosmos According to Basil the Great's «On the Hexaemeron»," *STUDIA PELPIN'SKIE*, 2016, 161–69; Robert D Holmstedt, "The Syntax of Genesis 1: 1–3," *Journal for Semitics* 31, no. 2 (2022): 1–16.
[56] Kochańczyk-Bonińska, "The Concept of the Cosmos According to Basil the Great's «On the Hexaemeron»"; Giovanni Filoramo, "Imago Naturae. Cristiani e Pagani a Confronto Nello Specchio Della Natura (IV-V Secolo)," *Antiquité Tardive* 29 (2022): 139–47.

Basil's approach provides a theological basis for seeing nature as *a locus theologicus* and demands a contextual attitude of reverence for being a privileged theological place.[57]

When attributed to the challenge of Peet van Dyk, Basil's legacy helps to reverse the pattern of narrow reading of Genesis 1:28. The text does not speak of the legitimacy of domination and exploitation, but rather of a mandate to serve and supervise creation within the framework of gratitude and praise. Basil emphasized the contemplative view of nature as "a beautiful sign, a pillar of spirituality".[58] So people who understand such creations will learn to behave differently towards natural resources. All creation is important and created according to God's plan, and in the created world harmony can be found. In creation, the Creator can be seen and admired. The cosmos is a sign of God.[59]

Basil wrote that man would find that the world was not conceived by chance and without reason, but rather intended for useful purposes and the greatest benefit to all creation. According to him, the world is truly a school where intelligent souls train themselves to know God by contemplating what they see.[60] This Basil's view helps biblical eco-theology to formulate a hermeneutics that restores the sacred dimension of Scripture as well as pastoral practices that are sensitive to environmental issues. Basilius is an early reliable source for asserting that the response to Peet van Dyk is indeed *transcendent.* In the view of this Church Father there are elements that oppose to the dominant, exploitative, and destructive anthropocentric reading of the universe.

Augustine: *De Genesi ad Litteram, libri duodecim*

Saint Augustine paid careful hermeneutic attention to the text of the Book of Genesis. He rejected rash literal readings and placed interpretation within the framework of moral and spiritual theology. Against the teachings of Manichaeism and Gnosticism, Augustine retained together the literal and figurative, spiritual and material elements of the Old Testament writings, especially the Book of Genesis.[61] For this reason, he intended to prioritize the literal and historical meaning of the Creation Story and God's goodness in creation. The literal meaning is meant to show the authorship of Moses and offer the faithful an account of what has happened. But Augustine emphasized that this literal meaning still provides room for spiritual figures to act in due course. In that sense, his understanding of literal meaning differs from modern understanding. Augustine was also open to symbolic meanings that are

[57] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis"; Alex Fogleman, "Learning to See God in the School of Creation: Theoria and the Teleological Character of Creation in Basil of Caesarea's Hexaemeron," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 4 (2022): 439–59.
[58] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis."
[59] Kochańczyk-Bonińska, "The Concept of the Cosmos According to Basil the Great's «On the Hexaemeron»"; Ivan Platovnjak, "Contemplation of the Beauty of Nature in the Light of Christianity," *Nova Prisutnost* 22, no. 3 (2024): 593–608.
[60] Kochańczyk-Bonińska, "The Concept of the Cosmos According to Basil the Great's «On the Hexaemeron»"; Fogleman, "Learning to See God in the School of Creation: Theoria and the Teleological Character of Creation in Basil of Caesarea's Hexaemeron."
[61] Evgenïa Moiseeva, "What Did Augustine Learn about the Old Testament as a Manichaean Hearer?," *Augustinianum* 64, no. 1 (2024): 103–35.

Christocentric in nature. For him, there was no strict separation between the spiritual and the physical. He supports unity that means harmonious.[62]

Creation for Augustine was good and functioned as a means of man's faith in God. Therefore, tracing the moral-theological intent of the text is more important than simply claiming the mandate of human domination over creation that comes from Genesis 1:28.[63] This approach facilitates a reading that rejects the justification of the exploitation of the universe because the text of Scripture also demands wisdom, self-control, and an organized love in the view of created things.[64]

Augustine actually rejected the reading and interpretation of the text of Scripture which was based on a philosophy that thought that it was part of *operational science* when in fact it was *theoretical science*, which could be contrary to the authority of the Church and the Catholic faith. Augustine himself prioritized the interpretation of Scripture in line with the Church's faith teachings. Even if this interpretation differs from operational knowledge, then he proposes an alternative interpretation of the text of Scripture.[65] This means that the meaning of the text of the Bible has never been subordinated to science, let alone the theoretical knowledge of his time was derived from non-Christian philosophy or personal secular views. For this reason, Augustine taught Christians not to be indifferent to secular knowledge and not to abandon the Church's teachings by turning to secular theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, Christians are invited to bring out the meaning of Scripture by such extraordinary efforts as harvesting wheat, gathering sheaves, separating the wheat from the sheaves, threshing it, and obtaining good wheat.[66]

In contextual biblical eco-theology, Augustine's legacy encourages a reading that balances the historical realism of the Scriptural text with the demands of contemporary ethics, namely understanding the text in the framework of the civilized relationship between man and nature, not as a license of domination, since creation is *the memory of Dei.*[67] Therefore, Augustine can be an important reference when we affirm that the *imago Dei* must be interpreted in the context of the relation and order of love, and not a hierarchy that exploits and destroys the universe. God created man and the universe not out of necessity but out of goodness.[68] This Augustinian approach is suitable for contextual biblical eco-theology because it allows biblical theologians

[62] Mark J Boone, "How Does the Bible Refer to Christ? Interacting with Augustine the Allegorist," *The Heythrop Journal* 00 (2023): 1–15.
[63] Twardziłowski, "The Command to Rule over the Creation (Gen 1: 26–28) in the Ecological Hermeneutics of the Bible"; B Eguiarte and A Enrique, "Ecology in De Genesi Ad Litteram Libri XII," *Mayéutica* 48, no. 105 (2022): 145–88.
[64] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis."
[65] Carl Séan O'Brien, "Augustine's Approach to Scriptural Interpretation," in *The Fathers on the Bible* (Routledge, 2022), 153–71; Enrico Moro, "Provare per Credere: Lo Sguardo Di Agostino Sul Rapporto Tra Esegesi e" Scienza"," *MEDITERRANEA* 9 (2024): 409–32.
[66] Moro, "Provare per Credere: Lo Sguardo Di Agostino Sul Rapporto Tra Esegesi e" Scienza"."
[67] Eguiarte and Enrique, "Ecology in De Genesi Ad Litteram Libri XII"; Inostroza, "Climate Crisis and Biblical Ecological Readings in Pope Francis's Writings."
[68] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis"; Eguiarte and Enrique, "Ecology in De Genesi Ad Litteram Libri XII."

to formulate normative arguments without negating the authority of the Scriptural text, and opens up space for the integration of environmental science in moral interpretation.

3.3.2.2. Some Popes

As already mentioned, the problem of interpretations with the pattern of dominant and exploitative anthropocentrism and movements to pay attention to both ecological problems and efforts to care for the universe only emerged in the 1960s. That is why, the popes appointed in this section are those who have led the Catholic Church since the 1960s, from Pope John XXIII to Pope Francis.

Pope John XXIII: *Pacem in Terris*[69]

The Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (PT; 1963) marked an important milestone in the development of the Church's social teaching.[70] In it Pope John XXIII affirmed the importance of universal peace in truth, justice, love, and freedom. According to the Pope, true peace can only be realized if man respects the divine law written in the order of nature. In this context, PT does not speak directly about ecology or environmental issues.[71] Nevertheless, as Fahey notes,[72] PT speaks to the political context of its time, namely the Cuban missile crisis, by presenting a vision of universal peace rooted in global responsibility and cosmic solidarity.

Pope John XXIII emphasized that peace on earth can be firmly established only if the order of creation established by God is honored with responsibility (PT 1). In that sense, the law of nature is inseparable from the moral law. The two have an intrinsic relationship as part of one Divine will. For God created all things and filled them with the fullness of His own wisdom and goodness (Pt. 3). Thus, according to the Pope, the question of peace is related to the whole and the integrity of the creation system. The destruction of world peace due to the development of evil, the reign of injustice, the absence of love and the loss of true freedom is also the destruction of the universe order.[73]

Furthermore, Pope John XXIII prioritized another important aspect, namely the interdependence and cooperation of association countries and political communities in overcoming the problems of these countries, especially economic problems by improving the order, security, and peace of each country (PT 130-131). This view is truly inspiring for ecological concerns and movements and efforts, because it prioritizes relationality as the essence of all creation. With this we are also made aware that ecological problems are also caused by the breakdown of relations between nations and between creation. Respect for and maintenance of the creation system must prioritize love between others, freedom that is maintained, and the norms of justice and balance in society (PT 137). This is what is expected

[69] John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris," *Vatican Publisher*, 1963, https://doi.org/10.29386/reb.v23i2.5280.
[70] Charles E Curran, "Pope Francis's Social Encyclicals and the Social Teaching of the Church," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 19, no. 2 (2022): 181–203.
[71] Eduard GIURGI, "PEACE IN THE WORLD CONDITIONED BY THE PEACE IN THE HEART: A CLOSER LOOK AT PACEM IN TERRIS," *Dialog Teologic*, 2023, 66.
[72] Joseph J. Fahey, "Pacem in Terris: Historical Context & the Call for Global Governance," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 8, no. 1 (March 3, 2024): 174–84, https://doi.org/10.69755/2995-2212.1249.
[73] GIURGI, "PEACE IN THE WORLD CONDITIONED BY THE PEACE IN THE HEART: A CLOSER LOOK AT PACEM IN TERRIS."

to create a *communio creationis* that Conradie[74] calls a *community of life, fellowship with all other creatures,* in which there are points of relationality, participation and sacramentality of creation, which are themes that destroy the erroneous anthropocentrism that is hierarchical, dominant, and exploitative.[75]

The legacy of Pope John XXIII gives magisterial legitimacy for biblical theologians in the local context to develop a theological response that is synergistic with public policy, whether in the political, military, economic, scientific and humanitarian solidarity movements as pursued through the League of Nations.[76]

Responding to Peet van Dyk's challenge, Pope John XXIII showed that Catholic theology cares about ecological issues and the preservation of the environment. In fact, between man and the universe there is no dominant and exploitative hierarchical relationship, but an ethical relationship that must be maintained and universal solidarity that must be expressed in actions of ecological care.[77] Thus, what is emphasized is no longer the basis of the interpretation of Scripture but the ethical morality of the Church's mission to preserve the universe.

Pope Paul VI: *Populorum Progressio*[78]

The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (PT; 1967) is the response of the Church (Pope Paul VI) to the socio-economic realities after the Second Vatican Council, which is characterized by progressive development and serious and urgent problems to be addressed (PP 1). These problems of progressive development are particularly experienced by newly independent countries, which are experiencing difficulties within their countries and within the international community (PP 6).[79] For this reason, the Pope himself, as a positive response to the problems of world development, established a new *Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace* (PP 5).

Faced with the extraordinary development of the world, PP emphasizes that true development is not only related to the economy, but must also be comprehensive, experienced by everyone (PP 14), which is called integral humanism, a new humanism (PP 20), where individuals are open and can experience love and friendship, prayer and contemplation, which lead people to a truly human condition (PP 42).[80]

In the context of such developments, Pope Paul VI reminded us of these three important points. Firstly, development must be made in such a way that the earth that God created can be used by all men and all nations. For this reason, development must encourage humans to

[74] Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology* (Stellenbosch: SUN PRESS, 2006).
[75] Fabián Leonardo Rueda, "El Valor Intrínseco de Las Criaturas. Desde La Contemplación de La Creación Hacia La Superación de Las Implicaciones Negativas Del Paradigma Tecnocrático," *Revista Albertus Magnus* 14, no. 2 (2023): 86–121.
[76] Fahey, "Pacem in Terris: Historical Context & the Call for Global Governance."
[77] Alessandro Andreotti, "La Tutela Dell'ambiente Nella Dottrina Sociale Della Chiesa," *Stato, Chiese e Pluralismo Confessionale*, 2023.
[78] Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio," *Vatican Publisher*, 1967, https://doi.org/10.1086/642083.
[79] Francisco de Aquino Júnior, "Populorum Progressio: Um Guia Da Leitura," *Teocomunicação* 52, no. 1 (2022): e42322–e42322.
[80] José María Larrú Ramos, "La Evolución Del Modelo de Desarrollo Humano Integral Desde La Populorum Progressio En Diálogo Interdisciplinar Con Otras Escuelas de Desarrollo," *Revista de Fomento Social*, 2018, 243–66.

regulate private property so that development is not enjoyed by a few, but by all people. The "conquest" in Genesis 1:28 must be placed in the context of social justice, so that the goods of creation flow fairly to all (PP 22). Secondly, the PP sharply criticizes greed and greedy people, who pursue material possessions, own and control them exclusively, and hinder the right development, moral growth and true humanity (PP 18, 19). Personal rights are not absolute and unconditional (PP 23). Thirdly, the peace that occurred in the world after World War II did not only mean the absence of war. Peace is also related to the experience of better justice. Therefore, there should be no wide gap between nations because of injustice. This will threaten world peace (PP 76).[81]

The PP does not provide a direct description of ecology. But the PP, when talking about development, alludes to the basis and even ethical regulations that are important to take into account the future generations (PP 17), self-control from greed (PP 18, 19), and technocratic regimes (PP 34), responsible use of the earth (PP 24), freedom from unbridled liberalism (PP 26), just relations between rich and poor countries (PP 8, 44, 49), and the moral-ethical foundation for environmental justice (PP 24).[82] For this reason, the PP positively calls for the search for a new humanism (PP 21) which is characterized by the spirit of poverty as an antidote to materialism and extravagance (PP 53), the establishment of the *World Fund* (PP 51). All of this is expected to ensure the creation of equitable development for world stability (PP 76). With this, the PP provides an ecological framework for development.

Pope John Paul II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*[83] and *Centesimus Annus*[84]

Pope John Paul II expressly incorporated ecological concerns into the realm of social ethics. In a message he wrote during the 1990 World Day of Peace *"Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation"*, he called the ecological crisis an ethical problem that demands global solidarity. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRC; 1987), a document published to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the publication *of Populorum Progressio* (1967), and also in *Centesimus Annus* (CA; 1991) he emphasized the importance of integral development, concern for the poor, and the responsibility of the present generation for the future. All of these things show the integration between the themes of social justice and environmental concern.[85]

From the beginning of the SRS, Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of solidarity as a basic principle of social organization that springs from brotherly love to help the weak and safeguard the world's sources of life, common well-being (SRS 10-11). The Pope said that all of humanity and all creation are bound together morally and socially (SRS 38-42). That is why, according to Lorivaldo do Nascimento,[86] this view of the Pope really confirms that the problem

[81] GIURGI, "PEACE IN THE WORLD CONDITIONED BY THE PEACE IN THE HEART: A CLOSER LOOK AT PACEM IN TERRIS."
[82] Ramos, "La Evolución Del Modelo de Desarrollo Humano Integral Desde La Populorum Progressio En Diálogo Interdisciplinar Con Otras Escuelas de Desarrollo."
[83] John Paul II, "Solicitudo Rei Socialis," *Vatican Publisher*, 1987, https://doi.org/10.32418/rfs.1988.172.3004.
[84] John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," *Vatican Publisher*, 1991, https://doi.org/10.32418/rfs.1991.183.2882.
[85] Guillermo Otano Jiménez, "Social Justice as Environmental Justice. An Interpretation of the Social Teaching of the Church from the Practices," *Revista de Fomento Social*, 2018, 305–23.
[86] do Nascimento Lorivaldo, "Patristic-Augustinian Contributions to Today's Environmental Crisis."

of consumerism, for example, is seen as just as destructive in nature as the problem of the environment.

Pope John Paul II introduced and strengthened the terms that are important for modern ecology, namely ecological solidarity with the vulnerable.[87] What is meant is the poor people and the universe that are prone to human exploitation. In addition to promoting socio-ecological solidarity, he warns of "structures of sin" (SRS 36-37, 43-47) that can be a source of greed and social injustice, which can undermine the social and ecological order. In addition, the erroneous anthropocentrism, the view that humans are the center and not the guardian of the universe, can again make freedom independent of the truth and create the destruction of social and ecological relations (CA 13-15, 17). Furthermore, he also emphasized the importance of awareness that human relationships with themselves, others, and nature are interrelated. That is why, in order to maintain such a relationship well, he calls for the importance of "repentance of the heart" (SRS 38; CA 45-47).

This conversion also involves a change of mind and behavior that puts morality above economics and technology (CA 36-38). This is what can prevent humans from the urge to destroy nature for economic purposes and because of technological encouragement. In that sense, human development can take place integrally, taking into account the whole of humanity, and is the embodiment of participation in God's work of salvation (CA 29-32, 37-39). The conversion of the heart, embodied in inner renewal and behavioral change, leads man to ecological repentance.

Here the Church is shown as *a sacramentum salutis* present in the midst of the world not only to interpret the texts of Scripture by avoiding them from the view of dominating and exploitative anthropocentrism, but to live the Word in real praxis by preserving creation.[88] In this context, emphasis is also placed on eco-ecclesiology, the Church as a community living together, of and for creation, carrying out Christ's mission to "reconcile all things, both on earth and in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). The Church's proclamation and work of love are tangible participation in the restoration and maintenance of the universe. Thus, the challenge of Peet van Dyk no longer needs an answer at the level of biblical hermeneutics or biblical eco-theology, but at the level of eco-ecclesiology, that is, the essence, existence, and mission of the Church itself to be together in love with God, others, and the universe.[89]

Pope Benedict XVI: *Caritas in Veritate*[90]

In general, Pope Benedict XVI*s Encyclical Caritas in Veritate* (CV; 2009) contains a continuation and deepening of the thought of *Populorum Progressio, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* and *Centesimus Annus*. However, unlike previous popes who emphasized morality and ethics in environmental issues, Pope Benedict XVI enriched the ecological discourse with

[87] Lai and Tortajada, "The Holy See and the Global Environmental Movements."
[88] Pablo Blanco-Sarto, "(Um) Welt-Ethos. Creation, Ecology and Environment in Ecumenical Perspective," *Studia Oecumenica*, no. 22 (2022): 59–73.
[89] Conradie, "THE FOUR TASKS OF CHRISTIAN ECOTHEOLOGY : REVISITING THE CURRENT DEBATE."
[90] Benedict XVI, "Caritas in Veritate," Vatican Editorial, 2009, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

metaphysical and anthropological dimensions because the force of love has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth (CV 1).[91] The Pope affirmed that the "love of truth" is the main driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity (CV 3). By putting forward the love of truth, the Pope shows the spiritual (love) and rational (truth) dimensions that can lead man to the recognition of the universe as God's grace (CV 5:6). The Pope further affirmed that true love is closely related to justice, which gives birth to respect for human and other created rights (CV 7).

In that context, development must be based on love and truth, justice and respect for humans and the universe. Development has not only economic and technological aspects and goals, but also and above all moral and spiritual, social and ecological (CV 48-51).

The emphasis on truth-illuminated love reveals what lies behind the social and ecological global crisis, which is the moral and spiritual crisis that separates love from truth, man from creation, the universe from God. By restoring love and truth in the unity of Divine love, the CV deepens and expands the social theology of the Church into an integral and theocentric theology.[92] This is where Pope Benedict XVI's important response to Peter van Dyk comes in, namely that the root of the environmental crisis does not stem from the text of Scripture and Judeo-Christian interpretation as Cox and White alleged, but from the separation between love and truth, between faith and responsibility for creation. The Pope pointed out that the Church is a *communio caritatis et veritatis* called to bear witness to God's love in a world marked by injustice, violence and exploitation. The Church is sent to proclaim social and ecological solidarity in order to restore all creation in harmony with God's love and truth. The Church receives and gives *Caritas in Veritate in re sociali,* the truth of Christ's love in society (CV 5). In that sense, what is needed is not biblical ecological hermeneutic conversion but eco-ecclesial conversion, which makes the Church a sign of divine love and truth for the restoration and preservation of the whole creation.

Pope Francis: *Laudato Si'* [93] and *Fratelli Tutti*[94]

Through the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS; 2015) Pope Francis, staying true to the teachings of the Magisterium as it became evident in the views of previous popes, really speaks of contemporary ecology in its scientific language. He combines the moral, spiritual, and social perspectives already emphasized by previous popes, with an ecological-scientific perspective, and thus takes the theme of the Church's ecology to a new level.[95]

In the LS Pope Francis affirms that the universe is "our common home" and, to borrow the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, declares that the earth is the sister and mother of us all, who sustains our human life (LS 1). This is where we find the so-called "integral ecology" in which

[91] Mary Frances McKenna, "In Search of Justice and Peace: Benedict XVI's Questions to the Cultures and Religions of the World," *Religions* 13, no. 10 (2022): 910.
[92] Glenn Joshua Morrison, "A Spiritual Theology of Integral Human Development: To 'Grow in Holiness,'" *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): 1233.
[93] Francis I, "Laudato Si'"
[94] Francis I, "Fratelli Tutti," *Vatican Editor*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.5771/9783451822513.
[95] Celia Deane-Drummond, "Pope Francis's Integral Ecology Paradigm: An Exploration of Its Theological Foundations and Ethical Implications," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2023): 99–111.

humans and nature are interconnected (LS 138) and environmental problems are inseparable from social and economic crises (LS 139-142). *Fratelli Tutti* (FT; 2020) then reinforces this assertion by stating that we must be increasingly aware that we are one family occupying and sharing a common home (FT 17).

Pope Francis strongly condemns consumptive and consumeristic cultures and the view that man is the dominant and exploitative master and ruler of the universe (LS 2, 67, 117).[96] It is this culture and view that makes the exploitation of the universe and the abandonment of the poor (LS 22, 43, 48). In fact, the Pope's condemnation becomes even sharper when he mentions that not only goods or food are thrown away due to consumptive culture, but also the poor (LS 18-20), embryos, the disabled, and the elderly (LS 129; FT 19). FT also mentions other issues related to this "throwaway culture", namely discrimination, human trafficking and slavery (FT 20, 24). Here the Pope again reminds that ecology cannot be separated from the problem of injustice and demands a comprehensive moral-ethical change, because the world is facing not only ecological problems, but also complex social environmental problems (LS 139) caused by the dominant technocratic paradigm and only prioritizing economic benefits (LS 101). FT continues this idea by raising the issue of social and political indifference that marginalizes and marginalizes many people (FT 69). In fact, because of the lack of attention to everyone due to political decline, there are other parties that are destroyed (FT 15).

That is why Pope Francis calls for "ecological repentance" (LS 217) as an answer to today's environmental problems. This ecological conversion is not only inward but also and especially active.[97] Spiritually, people are invited to learn to be grateful and unpretentious and responsible in consuming (LS 220-221) and to actively build solidarity to care for the creation together (FT 114-117). The Pope affirms that all beings are interconnected (LS 16) and thus need to form a universal communion (LS 89), where people feel interdependent and in need of each other, so that a new and universal solidarity needs to be sought (LS 155), in order to overcome the impact of environmental destruction on the entire planet (LS 164). In the FT this new and universal solidarity gained a universal expansion that transcended geographical boundaries. It is this universal solidarity and brotherhood that must be the new dream of humanity (FT 8). The Pope affirmed that the experience of covid-19 teaches us that we cannot survive alone, we can only be saved if we walk together (FT 32).

What is distinctive of LS as the culmination of the Church's vision of ecology is an integral ecology as a framework of seeing and thinking that overcomes divisions (LS 137). Another fundamental point of Pope Francis' document is that the environmental crisis is not seen as a crisis separate from a social crisis (LS 139) and the center of attention of the protection efforts made by all individuals, namely the protection of human dignity (LS 160). Therefore, LS calls for the importance of ecological repentance that includes also social repentance, including repentance from a consumeristic lifestyle (LS 211). This is the repentance that destroys violence and domination, exploitation and selfishness through daily acts of love (LS 230).

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[96] Fr Benigno P Beltran, "Earth Stewardship, Economic Justice, and World Mission: The Teachings of Laudato Si'," *Missiology* 48, no. 1 (2020): 39–56.
[97] Aloys Budi Purnomo, "The Importance of Ecological Conversion for the Care of the Earth and Human Health in the Encyclical Laudato Si'," *Dialogo* 8, no. 2 (2022): 132–39.

In response to Peter van Dyk, Pope Francis is not afraid to depart from the interpretation of the text of Scripture which van Dyk allegedly finds difficult to "liberate" from interpretations that contain the seeds of human superiority over other creations. Pope Francis proposed a more comprehensive reading. According to him, a reading of Genesis 1:28 that has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by portraying man as domineering and destructive, as accused of Judeo-Christian thought, is not a correct interpretation. This text must be read in its context and with proper hermeneutics. In that context, Pope Francis emphasized that Genesis 1:28 must also be read in the light of Genesis 2:15, where humans are commanded to "cultivate and maintain", cultivate and care for, work and preserve. This is a reading that sees the commandments as norms that relate to fellow humans and the universe. This is the commandment that recognizes that other creatures have intrinsic value before God, which leads man to the reverence of every creation (LS 66-69).[98]

Pope Francis shows the importance of a balanced emphasis on two things, namely biblical eco-theological hermeneutics and eco-ecclesiology.[99] However, in the context of today's world marked by "what is happening to our common home" such as pollution and climate change, water problems, biodiversity loss, declining quality of human life and social deterioration (LS 17-52), global inequality demands more correct understanding, education, and concrete action from the Church in dialogue and cooperation with various parties to bring about ecological repentance and seek and maintain the whole creation. It is important that we must place emphasis on contextual eco-ecclesiology.

4. Conclusion: *from Biblical Eco-Theology to Contextual Eco-Ecclesiology*

Scriptural interpretation cannot be seen as the cause of the environmental problems as Cox and White allege. Because interpretation is the fruit of a very complex context. Likewise, we cannot accuse the interpretation of the text of Scripture as the source of acts of indifference and destruction of nature. Because there are economic, political, and technological factors that trigger ecological violation practices. The Church herself from the beginning is involved in the correct interpretation of texts, spirituality, and ascetic practices of environmental conservation.[100]

From the very beginning of the Greeks' view, the cosmos had a soul animated by the Soul of the World, just as it was experienced by man. In the Christian view of the World Soul, it is none other than Christ as the basis of cosmological salvation. Likewise, the sacramentality of the whole earth is central to the sacramental spirituality of the Church Fathers as in Irenaeus (2nd century). Likewise, the Franciscan Tradition, as manifested in the spirituality, attitude, and actions of Francis of Assisi and in the views of Bonaventura and monasticism for 1500 years, shows total protection of the universe and the world as the place of the work of salvation. Prayer and fasting, vegetarianism and restrictions of personal celebrations, anti-consumerism,

[98] Twardziłowski, "The Command to Rule over the Creation (Gen 1: 26–28) in the Ecological Hermeneutics of the Bible"; Ira D Mangililo, "An Assessment of the Dominion Mandate of Humans: Ecological Implications of Genesis 1: 26-28," n.d.
[99] Teresa Messias, "From Ecotheology to Ecospirituality in Laudato Sí—Ecological Spirituality beyond Christian Religion," *Religions* 15, no. 1 (2024): 68.
[100] Inostroza, "Climate Crisis and Biblical Ecological Readings in Pope Francis's Writings."

and a balanced monastic life, and the Church Fathers' teachings and practices are proofs of respect for the universe.[101]

So, the response to Peet van Dyk should be in the form of a plan of movement and action going forward. In that context the eco-ecclesiological model of the church, characterized by a correct understanding of the world, an awareness of ecological missionary responsibility, and real and joint actions to preserve the universe, is far more important than forcing oneself to find loopholes to treat the interpretation of Scriptural texts that are accused of being a source of exploitation and destruction of nature.[102] In this sense, a broader and more profound response has been given by the Church from the beginning and by the Popes who have issued important documents that are directly or indirectly related to ecology. Now is the time for us to give appropriate responses to environmental problems and maintenance of the nature as the Church is sent to the world to bring the salvation of all creation.

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[101] Blanco-Sarto, "(Um) Welt-Ethos. Creation, Ecology and Environment in Ecumenical Perspective"; Cloete, "Retrieving a Christian Ecological Spirituality in Response to Our Contemporary Ecological Crisis."
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