From Environmental Justice To Ecological Justice: Toward Ecological Hermeneutics

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The ethical struggle for "environmental justice" in recent decades has delivered for us the great notion of sustainable development, critiquing the untenable (ab)use of the earth's resources and fighting for its equitable and just distribution among peoples. What is neglected in the environmental justice paradigm, however, is the unjust relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world which, according to some thinkers, is the recognizable source of the ecological crisis? Beyond the stewardship paradigm rooted in environmental justice, this paper argues for an "ecological justice" framework in the rereading of some crucial Christian texts– an ecological hermeneutics aimed at ushering an ethical agenda for a fairer world, not only among men and women, but also among humans and the whole Earth community.

Introduction
The Rough Grounds of Payatas as Location

No actual census has been done in Payatas, but estimates suggest around 70–80 thousand people live in the 16-hectare dumpsite.[1] Around 10,000 people are reportedly work in shifts in the dumpsite facility. When our group, the Vincentians, came here 25 years ago, roads were unpaved; it was muddy everywhere; the odor of garbage penetrated one's skin; and millions of flies would

[1] For images of the Payatas dumpsite, see Kiran Kreer, "Life in the Payatas Dumpsite, Manila, Philippines," http://www.imkiran.com/life-in-a-dumpsite-payatas/; "Detailed Satellite Map of Payatas Dumpsite," accessed, 18 April 2018, http://www.maphill.com/search/payatas-dumpsite/detailed-satellite-map/. For an earlier article, see Daniel Franklin Pilario, "Payatas, De Megavuilnisbelt van Manila," *Streven* (2009): 555-559.

be swarming all over the place. Not much has changed after two and a half decades.

One can only imagine the extent of danger and risk such a situation poses to the health of the community. After Sunday Masses, people would invite me to their small houses for some celebrations—be they birthday parties or wedding anniversaries. But I would also be asked to bless their dead, some of them very beautiful children lying in makeshift cardboard coffins who died of diarrhea or lung problems, illnesses otherwise curable with minimum medical intervention.

Moreover, the garbage mountains lie next to the La Mesa Dam, the source of potable water supply for the whole of Metro Manila. [2] Consequently, the garbage seepage contaminates the water table with unthinkable long-term effects not only to the population, but also the life of streams and rivers in the area, and the whole ecological balance itself. Last year, the government temporarily closed the dumpsite due to danger of a new trash slide. Such closure is at best ambivalent: on the one hand, it is a needed respite for the environment and serves as protection from impending disaster; on the other hand, it also displaces a lot of dumpsite workers and their families. There is yet no conclusive government decision as of this writing.

The Payatas situation is interesting to many in various fields, to name some, pastoral theology, community organizing, urban planning, waste segregation, etc. But I refer to this paradigmatic location in order to bring out two contending notions in ecological ethics of our time: environmental justice and ecological justice. The distinction between these two terms was first brought to academic discussion by Nicholas Low, lecturer of the Faculty of Architecture in Melbourne and Brendan Gleeson of the Australian Urban Research Program. "The struggle for justice as it is shaped by the politics of the environment," they write, "has two relational aspects: the justice of the distribution of environments

[2] For example, Glenn L. Sia Su, "Impact on Drinking Water Sources in Close Proximity to the Payatas Dumpsite, Philippines," Journal of Public Health 15 (2007) :51–55.

among peoples, and the justice of the relations between humans and the rest of the natural world. We term these aspects of justice: *environmental justice* and *ecological justice*. They are really two aspects of the same relationship."[3]

Some humans experience a good *environment* like the highly ecological and livable cities in Europe, bragging about their bike lanes, waste segregation or renewable energy. But many others like those in Payatas could not even breathe fresh air even inside the shanties where they live. As I drive every single Sunday to this place, I see young boys segregating waste on running garbage trucks. Since we do not have recycling machines, the trash coming from the richer sections of the city is processed by human hands. As they work, the boys have their meal of *pagpag* — food directly coming from the garbage. As this scene unfolds before my eyes, ironically, from the car radio a disc jockey proclaims that Forbes Park – the most elite subdivision of Manila – is the most ecological quarter because their waste segregation is most successful.

In these difficult contexts, fighting for *environmental justice* becomes indispensable to achieve equitable distribution of environmental goods for all humans — not only for the more privileged ones, but for the whole of humanity. I am not only talking of Payatas, I am referring to the 1.9 billion people (or 26.2 percent of the world's population) who live on $3.20 dollars a day (or 46 percent; nearly half of the world's population live on less than $5.50 dollars a day), as the latest World Bank survey shows (2018).[4]

However, the term *environment* seems to be inadequate to describe the world in which we live in. The non-humans in the Earth community like animals and trees, air space and wide oceans, should not only be defined according to their function to the human world. *Ecological justice* expands the discourse toward the struggle for justice for all of created beings in the Earth community. In both senses of justice, we consider the dimensions of

[3] Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson, *Justice, Society and Nature: An Exploration of Political Ecology* (London: Routledge,1988), 2.

[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/17/nearly-half-the-world-lives-on-less-than-550-a-day.

distribution, recognition and representation. *Environmental* justice expands the notion of justice from how humans relate among themselves to how they appropriate their environment. Three dimensions are contemplated to expand the notion of social justice: distribution, recognition and representation.[5] "Distribution" refers to equal allocation of environmental benefits and perils among humans. "Recognition" points to the way we look at other peoples, other races, other sectors. If we do not recognize the indigenous peoples, for instance, as possessing rights to the goods of the earth and their ancestral domains, we have not rendered them justice, which is mostly the case in many countries. They are not considered as equal partners in development and progress. "Representation" in decision making processes is only possible after such just recognition.

On the level of *ecological* justice, we ask how are the environmental goods *distributed* between humans and other members of the Earth community? How is this level of *recognition* manifested? Does prevalent ecological discourse recognize the importance and centrality of non-human members of the Earth community? Are they given due recognition? How are these non-human agents *represented* in ecological issues and discourses?

Though there are problems with questions of distributional justice in the environment like Payatas (i.e., the large gap in the lifestyle and business of the few rich who produce so much industrial waste and the majority of poor people and their daily garbage), there is also a greater problem of how the humans of Manila treat the non-human world surrounding it. As mentioned earlier, but not known to many, the garbage dumpsite of Payatas where all human waste of Manila is dumped is just one or two kilometers away from the source of potable water for the whole cosmopolis. The way this society treats its waste is neglectful of its nearby water resource. The leachates coming from the garbage mix with the water level, destroying not only humans who depend on it, but also the water supply itself and its existence. Beyond

[5] Teea Kortetmäki, *Justice in and to Nature: An Application of the Broad Framework of Environmental and Ecological Justice* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2017).

environmental justice, *ecological* justice refers to this equally crucial relationship. I will elaborate on these perspectives below and see their relevance to contemporary theological reflections on ecology.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE STEWARDSHIP MODEL

The notion of *environmental* justice, at least in the English-speaking world, started with the North American social movements which protested against the dumping of industrial waste on the areas where black people reside. Mainstream environmentalism, like waste segregation and other ecological programs, was seen as a "white middle class" movement.[6] Toxic waste dumping on poor black immigrant areas amounts to what was then called "environmental racism." Fighting against it meant fighting for the just distribution of resources and risks; basic rights to clean water, air and land use; equal access to food and basic commodities; intra-generational and intergenerational solidarity, etc. All these rights do not exist in situations like Manila and many other countries in the Third World. The same injustice is present within poor countries themselves where small pockets of affluence stand side by side with large areas of filth and garbage, separated as they are by imaginary and actual walls.

But Dobson and his colleagues in fact take a cue from the United Nations' Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 entitled *Our Common Future.*[7] This crucial report was a product of an international analysis submitted by industrialists and government representatives, scientists and experts, NGOs and the general public on the "crucial issues of environment and development"

[6] Andrew Dobson, *Justice and the Environment. Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Theories of Distributive Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

[7] World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, Oxford: (Oxford University Press, 1987). See also in https://sswm.info/sites/default/files/reference_attachments/UN%20WCED%201987%20Brundtland%20Report.pdf.

with a view of formulating innovative and realistic proposals to deal with them, and how the international community can collaborate on these issues. The famous keyword and oft-quoted phrase found in this document is the concept of sustainable development which it defines as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[8] Browsing through this document already reveals the concern talked about in contemporary ecological discourses: population and food security, species and ecosystems, energy and industry, the global commons and peace and security. It is this document that served as the groundwork for the Rio Declaration of 1992[9] and subsequent UN Statements on the environment up to *Agenda 2030* and the Sustainable Development Goals.[10]

The crucial issue of the environmental justice discussion in these documents is the relationship between justice and sustainability which Dobson and thinkers like him actually problematize. But long before them, the World Council of Churches (WCC) already pointed to this problematic.

> The twin issues around which the world's future revolves are justice and ecology. 'Justice' points to the necessity of correcting maldistribution of the products of the Earth and of bridging the gap between rich and poor countries. 'Ecology' points to humanity's dependence upon the Earth. Society must be so organized to sustain the Earth so that a sufficient quality of material and cultural life for humanity may itself be sustained indefinitely. A sustainable society which is unjust can hardly be worth sustaining. A just society that is unsustainable

[8] Ibid., Chapter 2, no. 1, 54.

[9] "Agenda 21," United Nations Conference on Environment & Development Rio de Janerio, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992. See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf.

[10] The present UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the Agenda 2030 can be attributed to the continuing spirit of Agenda 21 in Rio (1992). United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

> is self-defeating. Humanity now has the responsibility to make a deliberate transition to a just and sustainable global society.[11]

In all this rhetoric, what surfaces is the concept of sustainable development that is useful for the long term survival of human beings present and future with limited resources in mind. In the center of this discourse is humanity. The earth's resources, the organization of human societies, and whatever progress and development shall all be directed towards the human person.

This discussion has generated thousands, maybe millions, of researches and a good number of library holdings. It is impossible to summarize the debates generated by these works. I would only like to point out how these studies impact on theological literature to date. Let me focus on one of the magisterial documents of the Catholic Church on ecology, *Laudato Si*. A cursory survey reveals how the concept of *environmental* justice pervades the whole document. To sample a few, the following texts directly respond to the call for social justice in our environmental consciousness.

- **Global Warming: Climate as Common Good**

> "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system… Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it… a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent

[11] Cited in Oluf Langhelle, "Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Expanding the Rawlsian Framework of Global Justice," Environmental Values 9, no. 3 (2000): 295–323, 298.

> decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. As these gases build up in the atmosphere, they hamper the escape of heat produced by sunlight at the earth's surface. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system." (LS, 23)

- **Ecological-Social Approach: The Cry of the Earth as the Cry of the Poor**

> "It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. These days, they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage. Indeed, when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile... We have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (LS, 49)

- **Equal Dignity of Humanity: Common Destination of Goods**

> "The rich and the poor have equal dignity, for 'the Lord is the maker of them all' (Prov 22:2). 'He himself made both small and great' (Wis 6:7), and "he makes his sun rise on the

> evil and on the good" (Mt 5:45). This has practical consequences, such as those pointed out by the bishops of Paraguay: 'Every *campesino* has a natural right to possess a reasonable allotment of land where he can establish his home, work for subsistence of his family and a secure life. This right must be guaranteed so that its exercise is not illusory but real. That means, that apart from the ownership of property, rural people must have access to means of technical education, credit, insurance, and markets'." (LS, 94).

- **Intergenerational Solidarity: Justice Between Generations**

> "The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity... Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: 'The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next.' An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision." (LS, 159).

- **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities**

> "[S]ince the effects of climate change will be felt for a long time to come, even if stringent measures are taken now, some countries with scarce resources will require assistance in adapting to the effects already being produced, which affect their economies. In this context, there is a need for common and differentiated responsibilities. As the bishops of Bolivia have stated, 'the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused.'" (LS, 170)

Corollary to the view of environmental justice present in *Laudato Si* and ecological theology is the stewardship model of the relationship between humans and their environment. From the "dominion model" which was once a predominant hermeneutical-exegetical frame of Gen 1: 26-28, the Christian view of creation moved into the concept of "stewardship."[12] It acknowledges that the Earth is God's gift to all. The call is "to till and keep it" (Gen 2: 15). To "till" means to serve; and to "keep" is to protect. The first man Adam is *adamah* ("earth"); in Latin *humus.* Humble service—not arrogant domination—characterizes the attitude of the steward to that which is given into his or her care. As stewards, we need to examine our habits of consumption, the way we use the earth's resources because we owe its conservation for the future generation.[13] Intergenerational solidarity is thus founded on the stewardship model. An Indian proverb expresses this dramatically:

[12] Jennifer Welchman, "A Defense of Environmental Stewardship," *Environmental Values* 21, no. 3 (2012): 297–316.

[13] See, for instance, Nelson Boch, *An Eco-theology: Toward a Spirituality of Creation and Eco-justice*, (December 2013), 433–446.

"We do not borrow the world from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

However, the stewardship model has also been criticized as too managerial, hierarchical and androcentric with God acting like a patriarch.[14] A parallel critique is the "absentee landlord" metaphor which comes from Matthew Fox who argues that God is the absentee landlord and humans are "serfs" who, without freedom and spontaneity, are accountable to the boss.[15] Clare Palmer for her part critiques the stewardship model as separating God from the earth which is incompatible with the immanence of God – a far better worldview to respect nature as the household of God's indwelling presence. The "landlord" or the "absolutist God" outside creation lends itself to hierarchical relationality and, ultimately, to a decidedly anthropocentric paradigm. If you are a steward, you also decide on how to dispose of other 'things' — living or non-living — for one's use. You can be very responsible but still the rest of creation is seen as disposable. The dominant worldview is still utility and function other Earthlings have in the service of the network of human community. No matter how evenly distributed are the goods of the earth, the recognition and representation we give them are not given serious consideration. This brings in the concept of *ecological* justice.

ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND THE RELATION OF RECIPROCITY

Ecological justice understood as the relationship between humans and non-humans views that beyond the human person, other members of the Earth community are "recipients of justice." Many moral theorists, John Rawls among others,[16] exclude non-

[14] R. J. Barry, ed., *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2006).

[15] For a summary of these criticisms and defense, see Robin Attfield, "Environmental Sensitivity and Critiques of Stewardship," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present,* ed. R. J. Barry (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2006), 76–91.

[16] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 512.

humans from considerations of justice. We owe the Earth our moral duty of compassion and responsible utilization, but not duties of justice. Only human beings can be moral agents of justice, liberal discourses argue. Recent developments in ecological science, however, propose to expand the world of justice – from "social justice" to "environmental justice" and beyond – toward the notion of "ecological justice," that is, the relationship of humans with the Earth community, or at least with some of its non-human forms.[17]

Human beings' relationship with non-human creation is not new. On the one hand, it is engendered by many religious worldviews—be it in its pantheist or panentheist varieties. For some groups, nature is either seen as God or as God's cosmic indwelling. For others, non-human forms share with humans a common essence or a common ancestor, thus, leading to a sense of wonder and respect. For many, nature will all be absorbed in the divine at the end times (divinization); for others, human beings can incarnate into non-human forms in the next life (reincarnation). All these differing and sometimes contradictory beliefs lead to a more intimate relationship with non-human creation beyond use and function. On the other hand, its secular versions inspired by evolutionary theory, Gaia hypothesis and other parallel developments clash with the dominant utilitarian capitalist paradigms. If the world is seen as a living reality, human beings need to respectfully relate with it and render it justice.

There are a host of objections to this move from social justice to ecological justice. For instance, if non-humans are not free, how can they be moral agents and subject of a certain kind of rights? There is also a whole spectrum of positions on who is included into the sphere of moral justice among the non-humans. On the one hand, Low and Gleeson include all "natural entities" because every individual and collective is "entitled to enjoy the

[17] Arne Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary," *Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1973): 95-100; Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Indiana: Temple University Press, 1988); Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

fullness of its own form of life."[18] On the other hand, Brian Baxter would limit it to living organisms alone, not to ecosystems.[19] But even hardliners accept at least the present common consensus: "non-human organisms, although not themselves moral agents, may intelligibly be said to have claims upon the actions of moral agents."[20]

I do not intend to arbitrate between these long-standing debates in political and moral theory. I just want to alert us to the fact that Christian theology also benefits from these contemporary discussions. Let me single out a group of ethicists and environmentalists with ecological biblical hermeneutics in mind. This group identified five principles—all taken from the current discussion of ecological justice—which they use in the interpretation of the Bible and theological reflection.[21]

THE PRINCIPLE OF INTRINSIC WORTH

The "earth and all its elements–no matter how small or apparently insignificant—have intrinsic worth. Their value is not dependent upon whether they have been endowed with unusual beauty—as humans may define beauty or whether they are found useful for particular human purposes."[22] No, they have a value in their own right.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONNECTEDNESS

Earth is a community of interconnected created reality mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. Western modernity from Descartes and Newton onwards—values dualism (mind vs. matter). What characterizes this mechanical worldview is separation and individuality. These hierarchical binaries separate and kill the earth's life and harmony. The principle of

[18] Low and Gleeson, *Justice, Society and Nature*, 156.
[19] Brian Baxter, A *Theory of Ecological Justice* (London: Routledge, 2005).
[20] Ibid., 3.
[21] Norman Habel, "The Challenge of Eco-justice Readings for Christian Theology," *Pacifica* 13 (2000): 125-141.
[22] Ibid., 128-129.

interconnectedness rejects this absolute duality and believes in the intimate complex relationship between animate and inanimate, humans and non-humans, male and female, subject and object, in all the levels of their existence (biological, emotional and socio-cultural).

The Principle of Voice and Resistance

Earth is a living entity capable of voicing its cries against injustice. Indigenous peoples and the Jewish biblical tradition are sensitive to the voices of creation. Present science also discovers that the earth and the whole ecosystem are not helpless and fragile, but have the resilient capacity to survive when given a chance for its "groaning"—to borrow a word from St. Paul–to be heard. Justice is not only due humans; it is also for the earth.

The Principle of Purpose

The universe and all its components are parts of a dynamic cosmic design where each piece has a place in its overall goal. The living cosmos has a fundamental purpose beyond its use for humans. From the best of Western theology to the best of modern philosophy like Kant's, only humans possess this intrinsic value. But contemporary science tells us about an evolving story of the universe—a cosmogenesis–where the Earth serves not only as a passing abode for humans, but exists as its own wondrous mystery.

The Principle of Mutual Custodianship

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where humans function as responsible custodians rather than as rulers to sustain the balance and diversity of the Earth community. But the history of the word "steward" has been unidirectional. The challenge is to acknowledge this mutual custodianship. "A custodian has a sacred responsibility to maintain the rites of a site or a species with which members of the custodian's community have kinship. A custodian

sustains life forces and maintains kinship. Earth has long done that for humans; now humans need to see their role in similar terms."[23]

How do we assess the position of *Laudato Si* vis-à-vis the ecological justice framework? Some of the above principles are repeated in the following verses of *Laudato Si*. Let me mention a few examples.

- **Each Creature is Willed in its Own Being**

> "In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, 'we can speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*.' The Catechism [CCC 339] clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: 'Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man [sic] must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things'." (LS, 69)

- **The Caress of God**

> "Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The

[23] Ibid., 138.

history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves." (LS, 84)

- **Interconnectedness of Reality**

"It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation. Just as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand. A good part of our genetic code is shared by many living beings." (LS, 138)

"Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." (92)

- **God as the Ultimate Destiny of the Universe**

"The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things.[53] Here we can add yet

> another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator." (LS, 83)

- **Creation in the Trinity, the Trinity in Creation**

> "For Christians, believing in one God who is trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation. Saint Bonaventure went so far as to say that human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature 'testifies that God is three'. The reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in nature 'when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened'. The Franciscan saint teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key." (LS, 239)

There has been some discussion whether Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* still harbors the stewardship model or goes beyond it towards that which is contemplated in the ecological justice discourse. One commentary lends this observation: "There's a striking absence of 'stewardship' language in Pope Francis' recent

encyclical, *Laudato Si.'* The term, which often features heavily in faith-based calls for environmental concern, accounts for just two of approximately 42,000 words."[24] One can find it in paragraphs 116 and 236. Even Cardinal Turkson, then the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and one of the framers of the document, points out that contrastingly the word "care" appears dozens of times. This signals a shift of paradigm from the ethical injunction of stewardship to the virtue ethics of care. While stewardship speaks to a relationship based on duty, Turkson says, "when one cares for something it is something one does with passion and love."[25]

However, other commentators still read *Laudato Si* from the perspective of stewardship viewed from a relation of reciprocity, in Pope Francis's original Spanish, *relación de reciprocidad*. One author writes: "Genesis 2:15 explicitly appoints the gardener to serve and to keep the garden even as it implicitly recognizes that the garden serves and keeps the gardener... The expectation of stewardship – both in antiquity and in biblical text – is that human beings will return the services of the garden, including its 'ecosystem services' with services of their own. Thus the 'stewardship text' of Genesis 2:15 gives the appointment 'to serve' (*avad*), is one of 'con-service,' and the appointment 'to keep' (*shamar*) is one of 'earthkeeping'."[26] In this context, stewardship is in fact reinterpreted as the culture of care. In our cursory survey of *Laudato Si*, we have seen that the texts oscillate between the two paradigms not as an either-or but as both-and. Whatever is the interpreted key in reading this most recent official position of the Church, we have seen that we are already ushered into an expanding and evolving consciousness of the Earth community and the whole universe as our equal partners—"brothers and sisters," to

[24] Henry Longbottom, "Duty Free? Virtue Ethics in Laudato Si," https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/duty-free-virtue-ethics-laudato-si%E2%80%99.

[25] Cited in Naomi Klein, "A Radical Vatican," https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-visit-to-the-vatican.

[26] Calvin De Witt, "Earth Stewardship and Laudato Si" (Four Commentaries on the Pope's Message on Climate Change and Income Inequality," *The Quaterly Review of Biology* 91 no. 3 (2016): 274.

borrow the words of Francis of Assisi–in the context of our common home.

Invitation To Conversation: Toward Ecological Hermeneutics

The present challenge for Christians is to found these ethical ecological principles on our central narratives like the Bible. Since the Bible and the history of its interpretation has been anthropocentric, it needs to be read anew from the view of all the participants of the Earth community–humans, sentient beings, vegetation and the whole cosmos. For instance, Pope Francis already started rereading crucial texts in *Laudato Si*. Cain's murder of Abel did not only destroy his relationship with God and his brother, but also with the earth (LS 70): "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground" (Gen 4:9–11). The story of Noah shows that God threatens to destroy humanity with forces from nature because of the human failure to render justice to the earth. Or, the Sabbath as day of rest (LS 68) as not only for humans, but also for animals, "that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and so the son of your maidservant" (Ex 23:12).

This is the task of ecological hermeneutics: to counter the dominant anthropocentric reading of the Bible and its theological interpretations. There are several movements already engaged in this task, to name a few, the *Earth Bible Project* of Norman Habel and his group, the *Exeter Project* of David Horell and his group, the *Green Bible*, the *Earth Charter*, and many others.[27] As narrative ethics already taught us, narratives and how we understand them are crucial to the way we live our moral lives. There is an interdependent relationship between the stories we tell, who we are, and the things we ought to do–our narratives, our identities and ethics.[28] Postcolonial theories also tell us to deconstruct the

[27] A good summary of these projects is found in Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, Anna Rebecca Solevåg, "Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics: The Case for Ecolonialism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 4 (2016): 665-683.

[28] See Richard Kearney and James Williams, "Narrative and Ethics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 70 Supplementary Volumes*, (1996): 29-45, 47-61.

power structures implicit in our inherited texts and their interpretation. Liberation and feminist theologies has already done such re-readings for economic location, race and ethnicity and gender. It is now the time for ecological theology to do its job. The suppressed "others" and buried voices have spoken back—other religions, other cultures, other peoples. Now is the time for the neglected narratives of the Earth community to speak up. The role of anthropocentric theology is to listen.

I do not intend to give a conclusion to this initial exploration. I merely want to challenge the reader to a conversation on ecological hermeneutics. In order to give a concrete example in this direction, let me refer to how ecofeminist Musa Dube read Genesis 1 (priestly creation narrative) from the perspective of ecological hermeneutics.[29] May her lead keep us conversing. Some of her important findings, as I understand them, are as follows. First, when God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1: 1–3), the whole Earth as formless void covering the face of the deep was already seen as the "host of God's Spirit, God's word, God with us, the host of all members, the co-creator with God." Second, since the whole Earth community was made through the word of God ("Let there be light," etc.), it is the whole creation which bears the image of God. God's image was later "extended to human beings through God's consultative invitation to the Earth community, namely, 'let us make humankind in our image' (Gen 1:26–27). Instead of thinking of the human being as the pinnacle of God's creation, Dube invites us to see that the other created members of the Earth community are "co-creators" with God in the making of the human being who is the latest entrant into the creation drama. Furthermore, "for human beings to fill the Earth, to have dominion over living creatures, to subdue the Earth, to multiply and fill the Earth is a role that is understood as adhering to the God-given standard of recognizing the sacredness of all members and to work towards maintaining the goodness of all creation, thereby being mindful of the image of God in all members of the Earth

[29] Musa W. Dube, "And God Saw that it was Very Good": An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1, *Black Theology* 13 no. 3 (2015): 230-246.

Community."[30] If we examine the verses in Genesis 1, verses 1–25 are all about the other members of the Earth community. Only 5 verses toward the end (Gen 1:26–30) are about the human member, which in effect speaks about "the minority position of human beings in the passage." The narrative ending writes: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen 1: 31). Take note, it says "everything that he made," not just humans as the dominant interpretation otherwise always wants to emphasize. The last verse invites the human community to uphold that it is the whole creation and all members of the Earth community which comprise the full "image and likeness of God"—a title which humans for a long time have proudly arrogated unto themselves.

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[30] Ibid., 245.