

LECTURE SERIES PUBLIC THEOLOGY

An International and Intercontextual Assessment



Berlin Institute
for Public Theology



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

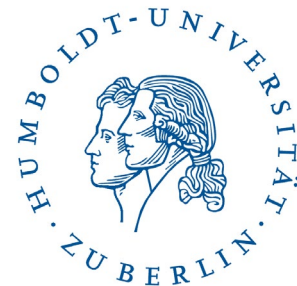
A Communion of Churches

Public Theology – An Interdisciplinary Introduction
Lecture 12

Creation and sustainable development



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Content and learning outcomes (part 1)

content structure

- Prevailing ecological hermeneutics: Origin, factors and ecological perspectives
- Retrieving the notion of sustainability in Genesis 1 and Hosea 4
- Questions for further learning

Learning outcomes

- The student will have an overview of prevailing ecological hermeneutics
- The student will learn how to retrieve ecological wisdom in the text
- The student will learn how the principles of sustainability are bound in the structures of creation as established by the creator-God in Genesis 1 and Hosea 4:1-3

Content and learning outcomes (part 2)

content structure

- Ethical challenges of planetary boundaries, ecology and the term *creation*
- Ethics of sustainability and sustainable development
- Questions for further learning

Learning outcomes

- You will know similarities and distinctions between the terms *environment* and *creation*
- You will know about the dimensions of sustainability, sustainable development and its ethical dimension(s)

Ecological hermeneutics (EH)

- EH: tries to retrieve the ecological wisdom of Christian traditions that can contribute to re-evaluate human-nature relationship.
- EH stands for a kind of ecological Reformation of Christian Theology
- This awareness helps to retrieve ecological insights from ancient text or biblical texts

Factors at the rise of EH

Anthropogenic causes of ecological crisis

Words such as ecocide, geocide or biocide are used to name critical human damages against nature

Lynn White's article: "The historical roots of our ecological crisis" alleged that Christianity made possible today's conquest of nature by insisting that it is God's will for humans to exploit nature for their benefit.

Anthropocentric theology

Creation has not value for itself, but serves as a didactic tool in the history of human salvation (G. von Rad)

Texts on the imminent Ends : 1 Th4-5; Mt 24, 1 Pt 3

They are raised to teach that current crisis is the sign that the Jesus comes soon. Then, working to preserve the earth is working against God's plan

Eco-theological/ hermeneutical responses

Hermeneutics of recovery (ex. The Green Bible)

This EH is very *apologetic* attempting to defend the Bible against Lynn White's accusations.

The Earth Bible Hermeneutics (N. Habel and Earth Bible Team)

It is an Earth-centric approach to the text, urging to resist and reject anthropocentric texts.

Anti-modernism hermeneutics (apocalyptic views)

They say that Biblical texts' authority cannot be questioned by contemporary realities

Revisionist Hermeneutics (Exeter project, D. Horell)

do not aim to defend or to resist Christian traditions, but “**re-claim**” or “**retrieve**” their ecological potential.

Genesis 1:1-2:4a and creation sustainability

- Brundtland report (1987) “our common future” defines sustainability or sustainable development “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- In other words, it is a development that does not undermine the structures that maintain ecological balance
- Genesis 1 conveys that idea that the sustainability of creation is bound within its structures.
- Creation is a network of relationships and interconnection
- Every creature must abide by the principles as established by the creator-God to preserve the durability of the whole created order.
The contrast will bring chaos

How?

- Gen 1 sustains that order is made not from *ex-nihilo*, but from unformed materials (Chaos).
- God made the structures (days 1-3), designate their inhabitants (days 4-6) and defined functions and relationships within the world-to-be
- The firmament hold and separate waters from waters, the Lights rule seasons, light and times, and human beings rule over animals and earth.
- In the process, God works with the earth as partner to generate flora. The expression “plants yielding seed” (v.11) highlights reproductive capacity, which is destroyed by human actions in Hosea 4:1-3

Humans *within* creation

- Humans are created *imago dei* (*image of God*), are given dominion over animals, and the subdual of earth (Gen 1:26-28).
- Although, the Hebrew verbs *radah* (to rule over) and *kabash* (to subdue) denote a violent power, they are here mollified by the overall ideal of Gen 1:
 1. The land to subdue is the same that will receive human descendants (v.27): **it is our Home/ habitat**
 2. Animals are excluded from human food (v.29).
 3. Creation ends/culminates **not** with **humans, but with God, his Sabbath** (Gen 2:1-4a).

Sabbath and creation sustainability

- With God's Sabbath, creation becomes a cosmic sanctuary, a sacred arena.
- Sabbath celebrates creation's integrity in its unity and diversity, which is deemed "very Good" by God (Gen 1:31).
- Gen 1 rejects utilitarian views that would consider non-human beings as mere objects, but sacred.
- Implication: Creation is to be treated with respect as a *sacred arena*, and to be committed to its continuing renewal and sustainability.

Hosea 4:1-3 and unsustainable creation

- Hos 4 offers a link between the failures of the human society and the disintegration of the Earth community
- vv.1-2 accuse Israel of certain crimes, and v. 3 says the Earth mourns while its members languish.
- Contrary to Amos 1:2 in which the earth is plagued by God, in Hos 4 the suffering of the Earth is caused by human actions

Three crimes (Hos 1:3)

- **The Absence of תָּמָא and טוֹא:** The expression occurs twice in Hosea (Hos 4:1 and 6:6). In both cases, YHWH deplors cultic and moral attitudes derived from the **The Absence of knowledge of God. It is a non-reliable society**
- **Swearing, Lying, Stealing and Adultery:** the verb פָּצַע depicts a society of randomness and egoism
- **Bloodshed Strikes against Bloodshed :** blood pollute the earth according to Lv18. In Abel's tragedy, the land becomes infertile (Gn4).

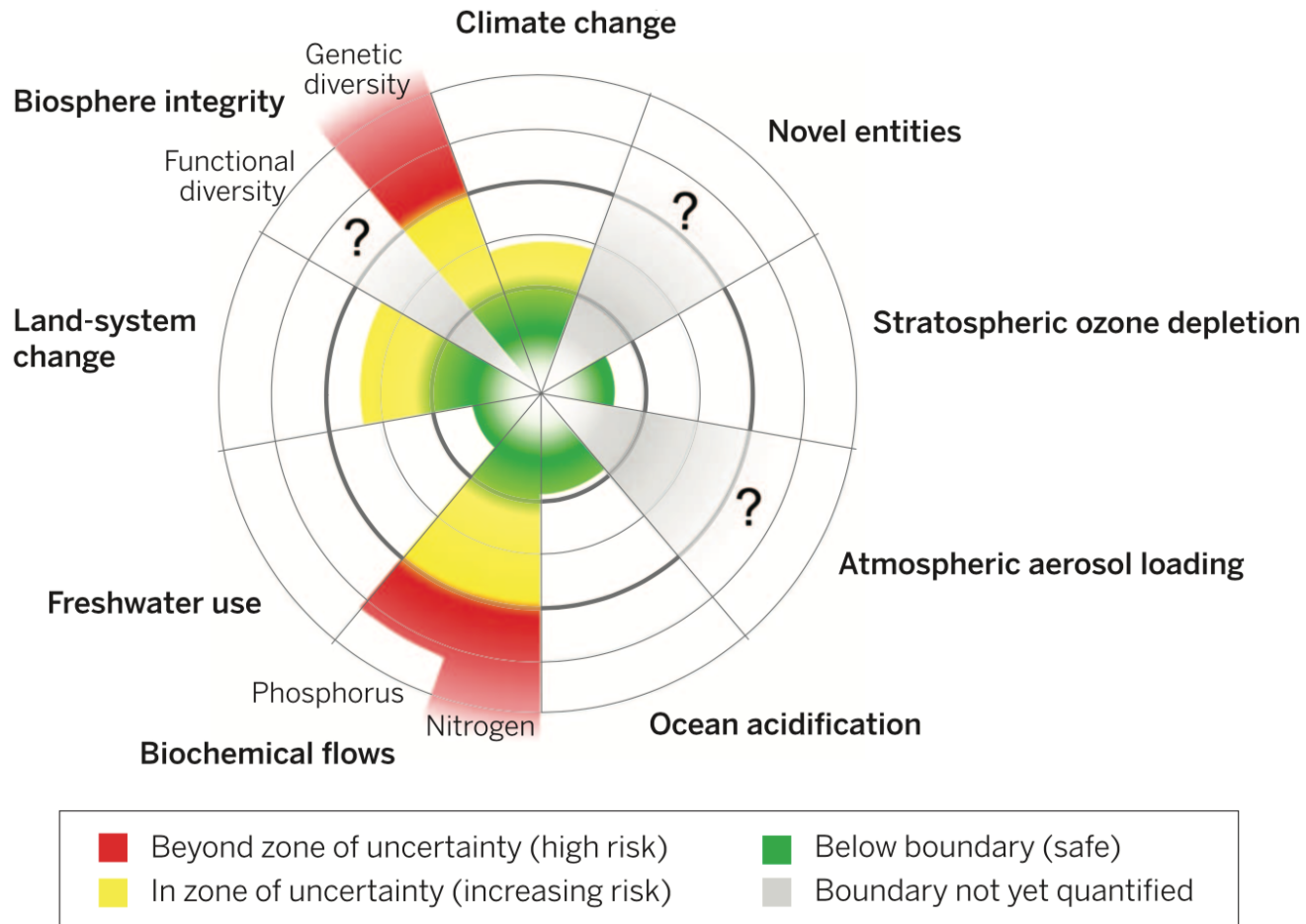
The earth and its members cry

- The earth mourns (אָבַל) and all its inhabitants (כָּל-יוֹשְׁבֵי) languish (אָמְלַל).
- With humans, the root אבּל is found in funeral (Joel 1:9) and lament contexts (Isa 19:1-15) and means desperation.
- With the Land as subject, אבּל is paired with יָבֵשׁ and אָמְלַל, and relates to drought (Jer 12:4; Am 1:2).
- To mourn means here drought.
- Just as in mourning rituals, the land is deprived of water, plants wither and dust is everywhere during drought.
- Hos 4 implies a kind of depression in the natural world

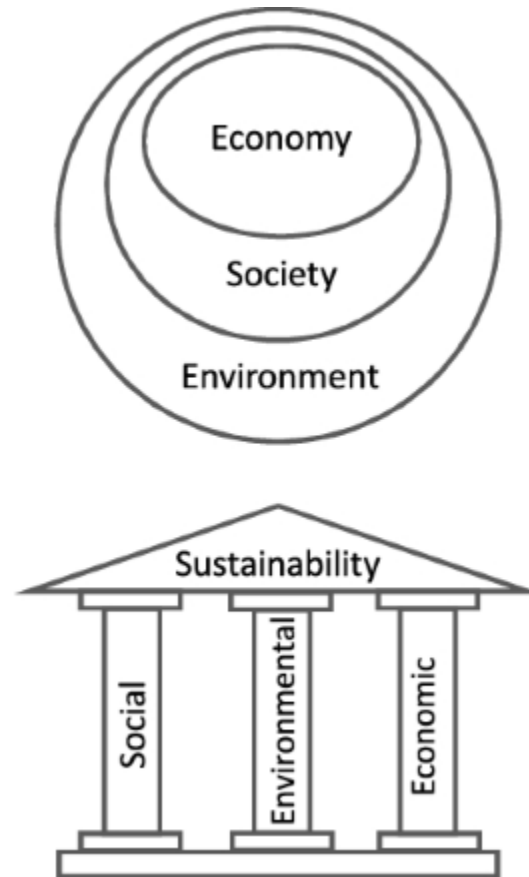
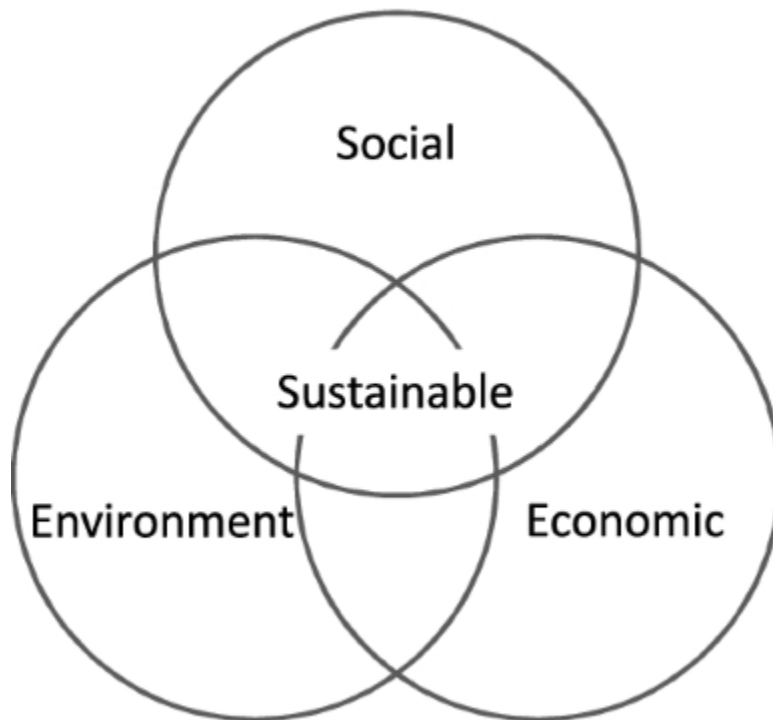
Aquatic life perishes

- The verb יִאָסְפוּ occurs in *pu'al* (an intensive passive form) to suggest that the victims are violently gathered.
- While crops are normally harvested at the end of a season, in Hosea the verb יִאָסְפוּ refers to an abnormal harvest which is caused by drought (אבל).
- The verb יִאָסְפוּ evokes the removal of all that the earth produces and the earth fertility Potential.

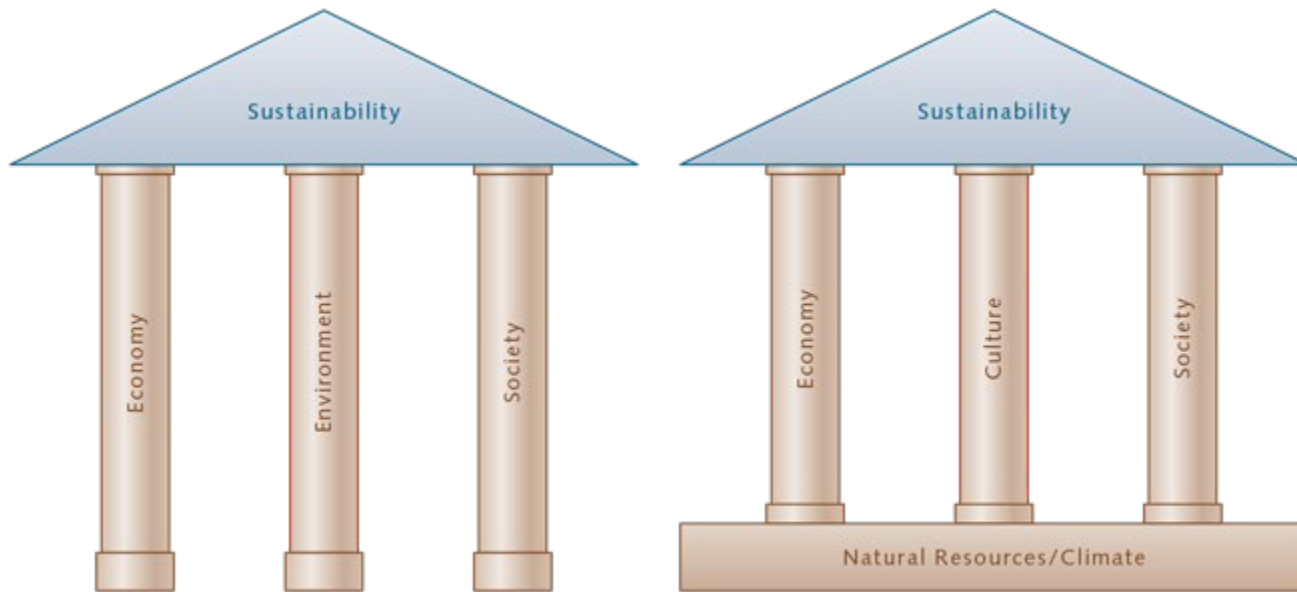
Part 2: Environment and sustainable development as ethical challenges



Sustainability



Cultural Sustainability



Sustainable Development



Questions for further learning

- Which ecological Hermeneutics would fit your context? Explain your reasons
- How far can we read biblical texts in relation with modern problems without being anachronistic?
- Qoheleth 1:3 has no doubt about the sustainability of the earth as he says “one generation goes and another comes, but the earth remains forever”. Do you agree with him? Can you explain?
- How could you describe the relation between religion and the idea of cultural sustainability?
- Where do biblical and hermeneutical insights match with the program of Sustainable Development Goals?