LECTURE SERIES
PUBLIC THEOLOGY
An International and Intercontextual Assessment
Public Theology – An Interdisciplinary Introduction
Lecture 12

Creation and sustainable development

Jonathan K. Kavusa, PhD
Dr. Clemens Wustmans
Humboldt University Berlin
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 it’s 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 אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד**: The expression occurs twice in Hosea (Hos 4:1 and 6:6). In both cases, YHWH deplores 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 פָּרָצו 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 (אֵבַל) and all its inhabitants languish (אֻמְלַל).

• With humans, the root אֵבַל is found in funeral (Joel 1:9) and lament contexts (Isa 19:1-15) and means desperation.

• With the Land as subject, אֵבַל is paired with יַכִּשׁ and אֻמְלַל, 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 יֵאׇסֵפוּ 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 יֵאׇסֵפוּ refers to an abnormal harvest which is caused by drought (אבהל).

- The verb יֵאׇסֵפוּ 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

1. No Poverty
2. No Hunger
3. Good Health
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Renewable Energy
8. Good Jobs and Economic Growth
9. Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land
16. Peace and Justice
17. Partnerships for the Goals

The Global Goals
For 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?