

CHRISTIANITY – A UNIVERSAL RESOURCE AMONG OTHERS? CREATION FAITH IN AN INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the interdependence between creation faith, and religious and cultural identity. Drawing on examples of local varieties of Christianity and other religions from three different continents, it shows how creation faith is grounded in specific natural and cultural contexts and shapes the identity of a community and its stance towards its environment. It follows that to be vital and ecologically effective, the creation spirituality and ethos of a people must be profoundly rooted in its respective setting. Therefore, regarding the universal dimension of the Christian faith, the article claims that Christian key beliefs about creation, above all other aspects of faith, need to be transferred into particular locations. In the process, ecologically relevant traditions need to be translated and adapted. As this, in principle, applies to all religious traditions, the religions of the world are challenged to undergo transformation by activating their resources as well as to cooperate with each other in order to protect the planet and to establish ecological justice on a global scale. Accordingly, the article discusses shared ecological values and principles from

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various contexts on which a synergetic cooperation of religions could be founded in the future.

Keywords: Ecological Justice; Interculturalism; Interreligious Dialogue; *Laudato Si'*; Missiology; Religious Identity; Theology of Creation

This paper is based on a series of conferences on the spirituality of creation conducted by the Pontifical Mission Society *missio* in Aachen. The aim of the project was to study creation faith, its theological foundations, and its eco-ethical impact from a global intercultural and interreligious perspective. This comparative approach included the perspectives of theologians and environmentalists from different religious traditions and cultures from different nations across three continents: South America, Asia, and Africa. Besides the main theological subject of the conferences, i. e. creation theology, another topic featured prominently in the discourse, namely that of religious and cultural identity. Apparently, among the aspects of a religious worldview, it is above all the creation faith which is grounded in a specific natural and cultural context and which shapes the identity of a community with respect to its environment. Motivated by these observations, I have attempted to research the interdependence between creation faith and identity. Some of the results will be presented in this paper.

Christianity's Universal Truth Claim and the Importance of the Particular

My basic assumption is that any form of creation spirituality and ethos must originate in a specific setting, either because it is autochthonic or has been successfully inculturated, to be vital and ecologically effective. Christianity, however, has a universal claim in respect to creation faith, which is globally inclusive. Even if this claim is interpreted, quite generally, as the belief that each being deserves to be treated as God's creature and in accordance with Christian values, it still asserts a singular truth. Besides, it remains abstract, unless it is grounded in a particular ecological context. This tension between Christianity's universal truth claim and the obvious need for an ecological spirituality and ethos to be rooted in a particular context, constitutes the creation-specific shape of the general missiological dilemma between the universality and the particularity of faith.¹ In fact, both are needed. While the contextualisation of creation faith is essential, its universal dimension must not be

¹V. Küster, "Kontextualität und Universalität des Evangeliums. Ökumenische Perspektiven," in M. Luber, ed., *Kontextualität des Evangeliums. Weltkirchliche Herausforderungen der Missionstheologie*, Regensburg, 2012, 87–100, at 87.

neglected. To meet both requirements, Christian key beliefs about creation (as well as those of any other religion) need to be transferred into particular settings to generate ecologically effective creation spiritualities. This does not only apply to geographical and socioeconomic contexts, but, as is currently becoming apparent, also to ecological ones. Thus, to meet the challenges of an ever-changing environment, ecologically relevant principles and values need to be translated and adapted.

The encyclical *Laudato si'* reveals Pope Francis's awareness of the relevance of both aspects: the universal as well as the particular. In order to protect the earth, a cooperation in ecological matters on a global scale is necessary (LS 3) as well as a sound foundation of religious faith in a specific environment. On the one hand, Pope Francis emphasises the importance of a primary connection to a certain place for the development of a person's spirit and identity, saying:

The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning [...] Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves (LS 84).

Daniel Franklin Pilario considers this paragraph the "heart of the encyclical."² Regarding the universal aspect, on the other hand, Pope Francis defines a new role for Christianity in a globalised world, which acknowledges its pluralistic nature as well as the urgency of an "ecological conversion" (LS 217). Having established that in ecological matters it befits the church to listen to experts (LS 61), he calls on Christians to share the spiritual and ethical resources of their faith with the rest of humankind for the sake of the common good as *one resource among others*:

Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. [...] If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it (LS 63).

According to Christoph Theobald, this indicates a decisive new missiological course, as the encyclical introduces the Christian faith not from the perspective of its truth claim, but—more modestly—

²D. Pilario, "Herzenssache. Laudato si' auf den Philippinen," in I. Ibrahim / S. Kochuthara / K. Vellguth, ed., *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden. Asiatische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog*, Ostfildern, 2020, 283-285, at 283.

regarding its usefulness as an ecological resource among others in times of crisis.³ Moreover, Theobald suggests that Christianity should follow the example of its founder and provide its resources “for free,” that is, without targeting new exclusive commitments among non-Christians.⁴

Therefore, the crucial question is: Can the universal claim of Christianity be reconstructed in such a way that its creation faith is conceived of as a spiritual resource among others, and can this be done without diminishing its universal dimension? From an ecological perspective, this appears to be not only necessary, but also possible. In the following paragraphs I will describe some observations which support this assumption. Doing so, I will give examples of effective integration of ecologically valuable Christian principles in various contexts. Furthermore, I will outline options for a synergetic cooperation of different religious traditions in respect to ecological issues and put forward some suggestions as to the role which Christianity could play therein.

Examples of an Effective Integration of Christian Principles from Three Continents

In Latin America a successful integration of Christian creation faith with indigenous worldviews can be observed. One example is the concept of a cosmic interdependence and interrelatedness of all creatures. In the worldview of indigenous peoples of the Andes this view is rooted in the belief that all beings are alive and connected in a supplementary reciprocity through Pacha, the all-pervasive spirit of the Andes.⁵ From a Christian perspective this ties in with the Franciscan model of a universal brother- and sisterhood of all creatures and brings to mind the fact that humans are also part of this web of life. In resonance with the cultural and natural context of Latin America, Christian theologians have developed an anthropology which can be summarized in the symbolic phrase: “We are earth.”⁶ It reflects the awareness of the cosmic unity as well as the

³C. Theobald, *Christentum als Stil. Für ein zeitgemäßes Glaubensverständnis in Europa*, Freiburg i. Br., 2018, 209.

⁴Theobald, *Christentum als Stil. Für ein zeitgemäßes Glaubensverständnis in Europa*, 100f.

⁵V. Bascopé, “In Pacha sein und leben, um aktuellen Herausforderungen mit einer Ethik der andinen Völker zu begegnen,” in E. Steffens / C. Pagano / K. Vellguth, ed., *Wir sind nur Gast auf Erden. Lateinamerikanische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog*, Ostfildern, 2019, 71–78, at 76f.

⁶L. Cerviño, “Bemerkungen zu einer ganzheitlichen ökologischen Umkehr im Sinne einer Ökotheologie. Über die christliche Auffassung von der Schöpfung der

belief that the divine can be encountered in nature, including human beings. This view is supported by Afro-Latin-American cultures, which often consist of hybrid mixtures of Christian, (West) African and indigenous elements.⁷ They emphasise the importance of the human body as a spiritual place, as it forms the intersection of the transcendent realm with human and non-human nature, which is expressed in various cults and rituals. Pope Francis, who is a native of the Latin American continent, shares this worldview as becomes obvious when he states that through our bodies “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (EG 215). From a missiological viewpoint the evidence from Latin America shows that inculturation— notwithstanding the hegemonial structure inherent in (post)-colonial contexts—is a process of mutual exchange, in which two or more belief systems impact each other.

In the context of (Sub-Saharan) Africa, complex synergies between worldviews can be found. These can either work implicitly or be initiated through conscious efforts. A key concept in Bantu ontology is that of the *life force*,⁸ which manifests itself in all beings, animate and inanimate—in fact, many African Traditional Religions do not distinguish between beings according to these two categories at all. In contrast to the Western worldview, this life force is only realized in a community of beings, the *vital union*, a concept that has become generally known as *ubuntu*. In fact, Desmond Tutu calls the principle of *ubuntu* “part of the gift that Africa will give the world.”⁹ It implies that the life force of a being can be increased or diminished depending on the presence of the life force in the community.¹⁰ Various African languages express this in sayings like: “A person is a

Welt und des Menschen,” in E. Steffens / C. Pagano / K. Vellguth, ed., *Wir sind nur Gast auf Erden. Lateinamerikanische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog*, 135–143, at 137.

⁷M. Campelo, “Adanidá. Mensch, Umwelt und Orixá,” in: E. Steffens / C. Pagano / K. Vellguth, ed., *Wir sind nur Gast auf Erden. Lateinamerikanische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog*, 81–88.

⁸First described in P. Tempels, *Bantu-Philosophie. Ontologie und Ethik*, Heidelberg, 1956.

⁹M. Mulemfo, *Thabo Mbeki and the African Renaissance. The Emergence of a New African Leadership*, Pretoria, 2001, 58.

¹⁰S. Dube / G. Maferi / U. Chitau, “Bin ich denn der Hüter meines Bruders?” Eine Analyse des Wissens, der Praxis und der Grundhaltungen städtischer Gemüsebauern im Kontext traditioneller afrikanischer Religion(en) und Schöpfungsethik,” in M. Awinongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen. Afrikanische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog*, Ostfildern, 2021, 55–70.

person through other persons,” or: “I am, because we are.”¹¹ The idea of the vital union includes non-human beings as well as humans.¹² Christian theologians like Aidan Msafiri seek to integrate the traditional wisdom into an ecotheology which is able to “carry the living building of African spirituality.”¹³ Msafiri’s so-called “Holistic African Credible Ecological Model”¹⁴ combines classic Catholic norms and values with African traditional concepts like that of a vital union. Neo-Pentecostal movements take this integrative approach a step further. They merge aspects of Christianity with indigenous beliefs into new religious conceptions, which claim to be designed to rid Christianity of its European heritage and make it more authentically African.¹⁵ Through the ongoing effort to root Christianity in the African soil, Christianity has become an influential presence on this continent, as the following occurrence illustrates: At the conference on African creation spirituality the representative of African Traditional Religions, Sinikiwe Dube, delivered a paper on creation ethics by the title: “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”¹⁶ When asked why she had chosen this title, she replied that given the great variety of indigenous religions, Christianity served as an “umbrella religion.” The choice of this term is remarkable, as it signifies protection as well as unity. Referring to the question whether Christianity can conceive of itself as one resource among others, living up to the protective and unifying role ascribed to it here, might be an option.

Christianity, as a minority religion in most countries in Asia, seems to be oriented towards a universal church, as the papers of the Christian scholars reveal, who mainly refer to European or to other

¹¹J. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Oxford, 1969, 108f.

¹²S. Dube / G. Mafere / U. Chitauru, “Bin ich denn der Hüter meines Bruders?” 62f.

¹³A. Msafiri, “Eine afrikanische Spiritualität der Schöpfung. Ein wertorientiertes Paradigma und bewährte Vorgehensweisen in Tansania,” in K. Krämer / K. Vellguth, ed., *Schöpfung. Miteinander leben im gemeinsamen Haus*, Freiburg i. Br. 2017, 315–343, at 316.

¹⁴A. Msafiri, “Auf dem Weg zu einer transformativen und glaubwürdigen Ökotheologie für Afrika. Eine katholische Perspektive,” in M. Awinongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 211–239, at 229–232.

¹⁵The example of the Ngabwe Covenant, in which a Christian minister assumes the role of a Traditional Leader and proclaims himself as King Ngabwe VI., illustrates; cf.: C. Kaunda, “Ich gieße Jesu Blut über dieses Land.” Der ‘Ngabwe-Bund’ und die Erfolgsaussichten für öko-pneumatisch-kulturelle Vorstellungen in Sambia,” in M. Awinongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 177–194.

¹⁶Cf. n. 11.

non-Asian publications. The contribution of the Indian theologian Saji Mathew Kanayankal may serve to illustrate this phenomenon in a twofold way: Kanayankal points out that in the creation narratives the God of Israel transcends his original local context and becomes a universal Creator God of all peoples.¹⁷ Doing so, he quotes the South African scholar Adrio König, which in itself indicates a global perspective.¹⁸ Still, the contributions of Christian theologians from Asia show a certain proximity to the other religions of the continent, as they emphasize the basic holistic principle of the belief in creation. With their focus on the unity and interrelatedness of all beings they converge with the great Asian traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. An integration of Christian values and principles will certainly have taken place among the Dalits or Adivasi of India, as many Christians belong to the lower social class and/or the *First Nations*. It is not clear, however, to what extent those baptized Christians recruited from indigenous cultures understand their religious identity as a purely Christian one.¹⁹ Among the representatives of the indigenous religions at the conference, two different stances can be discerned: With the indigenous Jesuit Hector D'Souza, who works among the peoples in North-East India and approaches their faith with profound knowledge and respect, there is nothing to suggest that his loyalty belongs to a religion other than Christianity.²⁰ In contrast to this, the Catholic Goldy M. George, who advocates the rights of the Adivasi and Dalits, seems to identify with the faith of the Ganda more than the Christian one. In terms of his religious identity or ideological affiliation, he merges the tribal spirituality of his people with the Catholic faith and communist ideology.²¹ Concerning the importance of a specific locality for the actualization of the Christian creation faith and ethics, it is worth mentioning that Daniel Franklin Pilario

¹⁷S.M. Kanayankal, "Die Bedeutung der biblischen Schöpfungserzählungen für die gegenwärtige Ökologiebewegung," in I. Ibrahim / K. Vellguth / S. Kochuthara, ed., *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden*, 201–220, at 204f.

¹⁸A. König, *New and Greater Things. Re-Evaluating the Biblical Message on Creation*, Pretoria, 1988, 76.

¹⁹Markus Luber deals with this topic in detail; cf.: M. Luber, "Kontextuelle Theologien in Indien," in T. Schreijäck / K. Wenzel, ed., *Christus in den Kulturen. Anstöße des II. Vatikanums für eine Theologie der Interkulturalität in Indien*, Ostfildern, 2013, 127–149.

²⁰H. D'Souza, "Schöpfungserzählungen indigener Völker. Eine nordostindische Perspektive," in I. Ibrahim / K. Vellguth / S. Kochuthara, ed., *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden*, 31–39.

²¹G.M. George, "Schöpfungsspiritualität. Eine indigene Perspektive aus Sicht der Dalits," in I. Ibrahim / K. Vellguth / S. Kochuthara, ed., *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden*, 41–63.

develops his approach of an inclusive ecojustice against the background of Payatas, the huge garbage dumpsite of Manila. In this setting, which Pilario calls a “paradigmatic location,”²² the insoluble link of the fate of human and non-human creatures as well as that of the exceedingly rich and the desperately poor becomes visible: Working with the vast amounts of garbage produced by the rich not only affects the health of the garbage people, what is more, the garbage seepage contaminates the source of the main potable water supply of the region. As a result, the whole ecosystem is affected.²³

The call for ecojustice also has its advocates among theologians in Latin America, where ecotheology is understood as an extension of the theology of liberation,²⁴ and in Africa, as for instance the ecofeminist approach of Musa Dube shows. Under the influence of Setswana creation mythology, according to which the earth brings forth all creatures, Dube sees all members of the earth community as God’s incarnated Word, which cooperate with God in the creation of humankind and have rights of their own.²⁵ It can be concluded that the quest for ecojustice originates in specific contexts, from which, subsequently, global networks of theologians across various continents and denominations emerge.²⁶ This tendency of contextual theologies to transcend the particular contexts in which they originate and to form new universal communities, can be observed in feminist, liberation and ecologically oriented theologies.²⁷

Perspectives for a Synergetic Cooperation of the Religions of the World

As the observations mentioned above illustrate, Christian creation faith has the power to integrate various cultural and religious traditions and to bring forth new hybrid collective identities. However, the alterity of the religious ‘other’ must also be acknowledged and respected. In this regard, Joseph Ratzinger’s statement that “outside of modern technical civilization there is no

²²George, “Schöpfungsspiritualität,” 240.

²³George, “Schöpfungsspiritualität,” 244.

²⁴L. Cerviño, “Bemerkungen zu einer ganzheitlichen ökologischen Umkehr im Sinne einer Ökotheologie,” 135.

²⁵M. Dube, “And God Saw That It Was Very Good.” An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1,” *Black Theology* 13, 3 (2015) 230–246.

²⁶Among these are, apart from the above-mentioned: Leonardo Boff, Sallie McFague, Steven Bouma-Prediger, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Jürgen Moltmann, and Norman Habel.

²⁷V. Küster, “Kontextualität und Universalität des Evangeliums. Ökumenische Perspektiven,” 96f.

such thing as religion-free culture”²⁸ serves as a reminder. Therefore, the options for a synergetic cooperation of different religions in matters of creation theology and ecological ethics have been dealt with separately and will be briefly presented in the following paragraphs.²⁹

Two main areas in which a cooperation seems possible have already been sketched above. First of all, the concept of a cosmic interrelatedness and mutual interdependence of beings, which prevails among indigenous cultures across all three continents. This pervasive concept includes all life forms, and it also unites the natural world with the spiritual dimension, and the past with the present as well as with the future. This becomes obvious in the vivid connection with the ancestors, which play an important role among all the indigenous religions that were represented at the conferences. In Hinduism and Buddhism, a holistic worldview, which transcends all dualities, is supported by the belief in reincarnation which connects all sentient beings, as it means that any creature could be a person’s late relative. Gautama Buddha is said to have reached enlightenment the very moment he gained insight into the cosmic unity and interconnectedness, and in Hinduism the Superior Being, Brahman, is the unifying force in creation. As regards the Abrahamic religions, this concept is rooted in the conviction that God is the origin of all life and thus all creatures are related through this common life source.

Secondly, the concept of ecological justice has been mentioned. It is part of a larger complex of values and principles, which include responsibility for the earth, and intergenerational as well as intragenerational justice. These concepts are key beliefs in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The parable of the man who plants a tree whose fruits will not grow in his lifetime and which he will not be able to enjoy (Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 23a) illustrates the

²⁸J. Ratzinger, “Der christliche Glaube vor der Herausforderung der Kulturen,” in Paulus Gordan, ed., *Evangelium und Inkulturation (1492–1992)*, Salzburg, 1995, 9–26, here p. 15.

²⁹European missiologists and religious scholars disagree whether Intercultural Theology includes interreligious approaches (Henning Wrogemann, Volker Küster und Klaus Hock), or whether Interreligious Theology is the main category into which all other subcategories should finally coalesce (Schmidt-Leukel). In considering the interreligious and the intercultural aspect separately, in the knowledge that they are bound together through the hybridity inherent in all religious and cultural identities, this paper follows the line that Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher take. Rettenbacher states that “Intercultural Theology is a purely inner-Christian affair.” cf.: S. Rettenbacher, “Interreligiöse Theologie-postkolonial gelesen,” in R. Bernhardt / P. Schmidt-Leukel, ed., *Interreligiöse Theologie. Chancen und Probleme*, Zürich, 2013, 67–111, at 78.

principle of intergenerational care and justice, which has become influential in secular contexts. All Abrahamic religions see the responsibility to protect the earth as a responsibility before God. Islam particularly emphasises this view, insofar as the term *Khalifah* (= steward) implies a status which requires certain qualities like knowledge, skills, and obedience to God. So, although all humans have the potential to obtain this position, they have to prove worthy of it by meeting such requirements.³⁰ If seen in its ecological dimension, as a few Muslim scholars suggest,³¹ this concept means that stewardship is earned through an effort to protect all creatures. In addition to this, like in Christianity, the belief in a Last Judgement seeks to ensure moral well-behaviour. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the law of Karma plays a comparable ethical role, as it holds humans responsible for the consequences of (wittingly performed) actions, even if they cannot be immediately noticed, as is often the case with environmental pollution and destruction.³²

A further set of beliefs and viewpoints that religions in general share, is the perception of the intrinsic value of all beings. According to various traditions, one way in which the intrinsic value of God's creatures manifests itself is their beauty. Reformed Christianity, following Calvin's view of creation as a "theatre of God's glory," asks of humans to revere and respect its beauty as it reveals God's wisdom.³³ Particularly in Islamic cultures, beauty is a highly acclaimed value. The beauty of the creatures reflects God's greatness, and through their beauty they praise him. This awareness forms the core of Islamic creation spirituality. Seyyed Hossein Nasr claims that destroying a species entails stopping a whole class from worshipping God.³⁴ The importance of acknowledging the beauty of non-human creatures lies in the fact that this protects their worth independently

³⁰Y. Dadoo, "Gottes Sachwalter in islamischer Theologie," in M. Awinongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 73–96.

³¹It has to be noted that there are various interpretations of the concept of *Khalifah*, including a mystic one (as in Sufism) and also a rather problematic political one (as in the concept of the caliphate in current fundamentalist branches of Islam). Among the scholars who focus its ecotheological dimension Dadoo mentions Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mohammad Hashim Kamali. cf. Dadoo, "Gottes Sachwalter in islamischer Theologie."

³²O. Dwivedi, "Dharmic Ecology," in Christopher Key Chapple / Mary Evelyn Tucker, ed., *Hinduism and Ecology. The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, Cambridge, MA 2000, 3–22, at 14.

³³H. Knoetze, "Reformierte Theologie im Dialog mit der Schöpfungsspiritualität im Kontext des religiösen Pluralismus in Afrika," in M. Awinongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 159–175.

³⁴S. Nasr, *Introduction in Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, New York, 1993, 96.

from their usefulness to humankind. In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis expresses the need of this attitude in order to bring about deep change in ecological matters: "By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple" (LS 215).

Referring to this, Pilario suggests that a "conversion to beauty" is called for to heal the earth community.³⁵

Last but not least, a virtue that all religions advocate in one way or the other, is that of self-restraint. It features dominantly in the indigenous religions, as various taboos indicate. Taboos come in the form of food restrictions or the prohibition to utilize certain plants or areas. In some cultures, as e. g. in the rainforest of central India, those taboos are connected with the totem system. This means that each totem clan has to observe specific food rules and prohibitions concerning general usage of natural resources. By this measure the extinction of species is prevented.³⁶ Another example is the Kipsigis culture in Kenya, where certain areas are strictly reserved for ritual purposes (e. g. the seclusion of initiates) and not available to the community for everyday usage. This, in connection with the totem system, is an effective means to preserve biodiversity.³⁷ The aim which those communities pursue is that of self-preservation, in contrast to the accumulation of goods. In this regard, people in the industrialised parts of the world can learn from the indigenous cultures. Of course, this does not mean to say that totem systems should be globally installed, but rather that the spiritual resources in all traditions that help to benefit the natural environment by limiting human exploitation should be reactivated. Various ascetic traditions indicate that religiously motivated self-restraint has its place in the religions of the far East, Christianity and probably all other religions. In the Qur'an, for instance, it says that Allah "does not like the wasteful" (7:31). In 1990 Pope John Paul II called on Christians to practise "[s]implicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice" [...], lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless

³⁵Pilario, "Herzenssache," 284.

³⁶V. Xaxa, "Umweltethik aus der Perspektive indigener Völker," in I. Ibrahim / S. Kochuthara / K. Vellguth, ed., *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden*, 65–79.

³⁷N. Rop, "Die traditionelle kosmozentrische Weltanschauung und Schöpfungsspiritualität der Kipsigis und ihre Bedeutung für die Erhaltung der Umwelt," in M. Awinyongya / G. Faimau / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 31–48.

habits of a few,"³⁸ and has, therewith laid the foundations for the "ecological conversion" (LS 217) which Pope Francis advocates.

A New Role for Christianity

From the eco-ethical concepts presented above, it would seem that religions are able to give their contribution in the protection of the earth. What about the specific part of Christianity in this, though? Referring to the suggestion I have initially put forward, namely, to view the Christian creation faith as one resource among others, the following role for Christianity in a pluralistic and global context can be envisioned:

If Christianity were to provide its resources "for free," in keeping with Jesus' inclusive hospitality, as Theobald suggests, that is, without expecting formal conversion, the indigenous peoples should be the first to benefit. Christianity could help to make heard the "silenced voices"³⁹ of those who lack representation in religious, political and cultural discourses. In this way they might even be enabled to give a valuable contribution in ecological matters. As has been shown, traditional cultures are often eco-sensitive and have spiritual resources, which have not yet been effectively translated into the changing ecological contexts. A further, practical measure the Christian churches could take is to provide space and opportunities for all people (who are interested) to experience creation as a meeting place with God. The research has revealed that (eco)spirituality needs a connection to a natural environment and that a lack thereof diminishes all religiosity and eventually harms the relationship with God.⁴⁰ Therefore, it would be beneficial to integrate creation-experience into service or to initiate ecological projects which give people the opportunity to experience and to protect nature. This would ensure a new understanding of religious practice, even of liturgy. In this respect, the projects of the Taiwanese Tzu Chi Foundation, a large faith-based NGO, particularly their garbage recycling centres, are exemplary: People work in these institutions for the benefit of the environment, and in return they profit from the

³⁸Pope John Paul II., *For the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990*, 13, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html (07.11.2020)

³⁹G. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in G. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation*, Wien, 2008, 21–118, at 103.

⁴⁰C. Devadass, "Schöpfungsspiritualität. Eine christliche Perspektive," in I. Ibrahim / S. Kochuthara / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 221–239, at 225.

positive spiritual, social and psychological effects this work has on them. Apparently, this meaningful work has a healing effect even on people who suffer from depression, addiction or other diseases. Most remarkably, this ecologically and socially profitable work is classified as religious practice and the workplaces are considered as “new kinds of Buddhist temples.”⁴¹

As regards the dilemma between the local and the global aspect of creation faith, the research, some results of which have been presented here, has shown that most individuals and communities feel love, care and responsibility towards the land to which they have a primary link. Ideally, they would be able to transfer these emotions and attitudes to different contexts. In this way, the metaphor of the homeland could be extended to that of the ‘earth as home’, that is, from the particular spot on earth in which individuals take their first spiritual steps or to which a people may feel existentially bound, into the guiding image of the earth as the home of all of humankind and of all other creatures. This is an image Pope Francis offers to all people in his encyclical, when he speaks of the earth as “our common home.”

⁴¹R. Her, “Schöpfungsethik. Buddhistische Perspektiven und die Umweltorganisation Tzu Chi von Dharma-Meisterin Cheng Yen,” in I. Ibrahim / S. Kochuthara / K. Vellguth, ed., *Mit der Schöpfung Leben atmen*, 151–160, at 156.