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THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S: THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' CONSTRUCTION OF AN INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC, 1966-1998

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S: THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' CONSTRUCTION OF AN INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC, 1966-1998

This dissertation explores the World Council of Churches' (WCC) formulation of an institutional environmental ethic between 1966 and 1998. The WCC's attempts during these years to construct a cogent approach to environmental issues profoundly influenced environmental ethics in both ecclesial circles and in international civil society. I conclude in this dissertation that the WCC has much to offer North American environmental ethicists thinking because historically the WCC has attended to environmental issues as part of a larger social matrix of justice and peace concerns. Moreover, I contend that the devastating effects of modern environmental problems have affected the ways in which the WCC itself attends to social issues, thereby resulting in profound institutional changes within the WCC.

I contend that the WCC approaches environmental issues utilizing three distinct ethical postures: first, as an expert non-governmental organization laboring in the arena of "ethics" in an "international civil society"; second, as a Christian prophetic witness issuing messages of hope and warning to the world; and third, as an institutional advocate working in solidarity with people's movements throughout the world to advance justice, peace, and ecological issues.

Chapter one attends to methodology and establishes a map by which one may read and question the WCC's institutional work on environmental ethics. Here I utilize the work of James Gustafson in constructing an ethical map by which one may read the complex legacy of the WCC. Chapters two and three attend directly to the work of the WCC between 1966-1998 pertaining to environmental matters. Chapter four utilizes Gustafson's work on modes of ethical discourse. I argue here for a multifaceted understanding of the WCC's environmental ethics

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within the realm of civil society and ecclesial circles. Finally, chapter five engages in a reconstructive process of environmental ethics by engaging the WCC's ethical style and content. I contend that the WCC's commitment to humility, solidarity, and institutional risk exemplifies three significant qualities worthy of attention from Christian ethicists in North America.

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I wish to thank the World Council of Churches staff members and librarians for their assistance during my trip to Geneva, Switzerland in October-November 1999. A few deserve special mention for their time and energy: Pierre Beffa, Douglas Chial, Emilio Castro, Aruna Gnanadason, Eugenio Poma Añaguaya, Martin Robra, Konrad Raiser, and Bob Scott.

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin
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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1960s, the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC) has faced exploding social and ethical problems in the world. This dissertation aims to fill a lacuna in recent scholarship by exploring how the WCC has formulated an institutional environmental ethic between 1966 and 1998. The WCC's attempts during these years to formulate a cogent approach to environmental issues have profoundly influenced the conversation on these matters in both ecclesial circles and in international civil society. Thus, in my opinion, a systematic and serious investigation of the WCC's approach and action on these matters warrants the extended analysis offered in this dissertation.

I wish to demonstrate that the WCC's stance on environmental issues is both distinctive and vibrant in character. I argue, moreover, that the WCC has unique theological and institutional resources for advancing specific arguments pertaining to environmental issues that both churches and international civil society have and should take seriously. I also attempt to sketch areas where the WCC might revise current positions so as to strengthen its work related to environmental issues. In summary, I contend that the WCC addresses environmental issues utilizing three distinct postures: first, as an expert non-governmental organization (NGO) laboring in the arena of "ethics" in an "international civil society;" second, as a Christian prophetic witness issuing messages of hope and warning to the world; and third, as an institutional advocate working in solidarity with people's movements throughout the world to advance justice, peace, and creation issues. These three different voices, although clearly overlapping in some ways, demonstrate the multifaceted approach taken by the WCC and necessitated

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by the complexity involved in ecological analysis and the polyphonic character of ecumenical institutions.

I advance these arguments out of respect for the WCC and its work. I am convinced that this Christian institution takes seriously the grave ecological realities that we as human beings face today and also the profound changes in political and ecological management in recent years. Perhaps no other generation in the history of the world has faced the kinds of decisions—both individually and collectively—that could so change the ecological realities of the earth for generations to come. As Marquette University theologian Daniel Maguire has argued, "We denizens of this tender planet face an unprecedented mix of peril and promise. The end of the world lies in wait in our nuclear artifacts. The fearsome portents of dying forests, swillish waters, and poisoned air surrounds us, sources of life made agents of death...*Apocalyptic* is now the vernacular of increasing numbers of scientists and other hard-nosed empiricists."[1] Indeed, this dissertation takes for granted that we as a human species live in a unique age whereby our choices, actions, and cultural habits will alter the face of the earth for generations to come, an assumption that echoes frequently in both scholarly and popular writings on ecology and ethics.[2]

I. Audience and Method

I write this dissertation primarily for a North American scholarly audience in theological and religious studies and most definitely from a North American perspective.

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[1] Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993): 4.

[2] See here Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community: Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996).

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I am drawn to the work of the WCC because it attempts to engage the work of both scholars and people of living faiths on ecological issues while self-consciously acknowledging its roots as a worldwide Christian ecumenical fellowship. Indeed, the cacophony of Christian voices addressing ecological issues within the WCC interact in fascinating ways with people and communities across the globe, witnessing to the ecumenical character of the WCC and also to the reality of the earth as a single "oikoumene," or household.[3]

Many methodological and hermeneutical issues deserve attention here. I have wrestled with issues of methodology and hermeneutics in reading the WCC's documents so that the proper historical, institutional, sociological, political, and theological characteristics of the WCC are portrayed.[4] Not surprisingly, I have concluded that no one person could adequately sketch the WCC's position on any ethical subject given the size and dynamism of this institution. This dissertation, therefore, engages the WCC's work on environmental ethics from a North American, Protestant perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[5]

Several outstanding overviews of the WCC's work on social ethics exist as a working model of how one might approach the task of analyzing the WCC's work from a

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[3] The work of the WCC as an ecumenical group that stands in the whole "oikos" or household of the earth is a dynamic reading of this word that wrestles with the realities of church and world distinctions.

[4] The question of how to read WCC documents is especially vexing, given the complex historical, theological, and ethical context of each text. For interesting insights into the conflict of interpretations on the WCC as both an ecclesial entity and a participant in "civil society," see Konrad Raiser's work: "The United Nations and the WCC: Rights and Justice," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 278-283; and "Report of the General Secretary," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 105-115.

[5] Several WCC staff members reminded me at critical points of my unique and sometimes limited North American perspective on ecological matters. I am grateful for their criticisms and prodding on these issues.

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North American perspective. In 1956 Edward Duff, a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest, analyzed the WCC's social ethics according to its distinctive history, its nature and authority, its social philosophy, and its social policy.[6] Duff limited his study to the WCC's General Assembly reports and the public statements of the WCC's Central Committee so that the "official" character of the WCC's statement on social statements could be analyzed. Duff's work, however, also exposed perhaps the most important hermeneutical question regarding the WCC's work in social ethics: specifically, what is the nature and authority of the WCC to speak on any matter and how do the member churches of the WCC stand in relation to these social pronouncements?

This question revealed a tangled skein regarding the "official position" of the WCC or what exactly constitutes the WCC's social ethics as an institution. Duff's early analysis, written within ten years of the formation of the WCC, can be excused for ignoring the institutional dimensions of the WCC precisely because no institutional legacy had been impressed upon readers of WCC documents. By the late 1960s, however, the WCC's social ethics and political positions constituted a profound institutional legacy to be explored.

Indeed, following the WCC's momentous World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 at Geneva, Paul Ramsey, a United Methodist theological ethicist, dedicated an entire book to the WCC's institutional social ethics and leveled substantial criticisms at the WCC's work and approach.

> The purpose of the address of the church to the world, or of church sponsored congresses addressing the public, ought to be the broadening and deepening of public debate on urgent questions; it ought not to be to stop or narrow down this

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[6] Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956).

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> debate or polarize the debate that is going on by a finding in favor of a specific policy behind which we are seeking merely to mobilize opinion. At the same time, statements made with a view to opening a larger consideration of issues and possible particular actions ought not even to be formulated so as to leave the impression that Christians as such have insights that would supplant the office of political judgment and decision on the part of magistrate and citizens, bind or fault their consciences, or in the slightest degree ease their special responsibility for deciding in regard to matters beyond anything their faith or the churches can tell them.[7]

In effect, Ramsey urged the WCC as an institution to move away from specific public policy pronouncements or ethical positions and to return to more circumspect theological positions.

Ramsey's criticisms of the WCC's institutional social ethics were appropriate in many respects. Ramsey rightly pointed out inconsistencies both methodologically and historically in the WCC's approach to social ethics. Yet, in a book review of Ramsey's work, Edward Duff noted that Ramsey's criticisms lacked the necessary institutional or political history for understanding the WCC's work. Duff suggested that the WCC as an institution operated not as the Roman Catholic Church or individual Protestant churches act: rather, Duff ruminated that the WCC often moved in response to and in collaboration with specific policy procedures offered by individual governments and non-governmental actors. Such institutional actions by the WCC in the arena of social ethics placed the WCC in very different relationships with both governmental and non-governmental

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[7] Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church? A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1967): 119. Ramsey's suggestions were theologically and ethically more in line with the WCC's earlier understanding of "middle axioms" as an appropriate ethical apparatus. "Middle axioms" emerged within the early work of the WCC as a semi-technical term to reflect upon social issues in a way that neither became overly bifurcated from the world (e.g. "love is good") nor too specific in particular policy pronouncements (e.g. on how specific reparations might be made to Jews in Europe following World War II).

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actors in formulating cogent social and ethical policies. In effect, Duff's critique of Ramsey's work demonstrated the necessity of an institutional assessment of the WCC's social policies and a more differentiated understanding of the WCC's work and "authority."[8]

Reformed Protestant ethicist James Gustafson offered two separate assessments of the WCC's institutional social ethics and, with Ramsey, upbraided the WCC for its sloppy use of technical ethical terms and also its sweeping policy generalizations.[9] Yet Gustafson, concurring with Duff, recognized the uniqueness of the WCC's social ethics and its limited resources in formulating ethical positions. Gustafson concluded his first study in 1968 by stating that: "Suffice it to say, sadly, I doubt if the WCC has the structure and the resources to develop ecumenical social ethics under its institutional auspices at the present time."[10] Twenty years later Gustafson echoed these observations in a separate review: "Most Western moral philosophers and most Christian ethicists who concentrate on philosophical issues would find the [WCC's ethical work in the] Church and Society material to be grossly deficient in the technical aspects of ethics as a philosophical discipline."[11] In this later overview, however, Gustafson mitigated his criticisms of the WCC in order to account more carefully for its institutional legacy and tradition. Moreover, Gustafson noted the varieties of ethical discourse disseminated by

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[8] Edward Duff, "Moral Earnestness, Political Prudence and the Church," *Worldview* 11 (1968): 16-19. Duff also criticized Ramsey for forgetting William Temple's insight that the authority of the WCC's pronouncements was rooted in its own "inherent wisdom" as it attended to social issues of its day. (19)

[9] James Gustafson, "Book Review of *Who Speaks for the Church?*" *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 98-100.

[10] *Ibid.*, 100.

[11] Gustafson, "An Analysis of Church and Society Social Ethical Writings," *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 273.

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the WCC in its work.[12] Gustafson implored the WCC, however, to delineate more clearly between various forms of ethical discourse and to add more rigorous examinations both of ethical terms and public policy so that the WCC's own philosophical and theological assumptions could be more readily examined.[13]

Gustafson's work is highly esteemed in North American theological ethics: thus, his observations serve as a good starting place for this dissertation in examining the WCC's position on ecological matters from a North American perspective. I follow Gustafson by analyzing the WCC's moral discourse on environmental issues at different levels. That is, one should not interpret prophetic statements of the WCC on the same level as public-policy statements or as statements issued for immediate solidarity with marginalized peoples. Rather, in keeping with Gustafson's examples, I interpret the WCC's work holistically as part of the "institutional ecumenism" offered by the WCC. By "institutional ecumenism" I refer to the dynamic ecumenical methodology employed by the WCC to generate official statements, engage in consultations on various issues, work with ecclesial and non-ecclesial groups, and come to a working consensus on ethical matters. As the WCC's Central Committee Report once noted:

> WCC programmes are carried out by Units and Sub-units guided by commissions and working groups made up of committed persons. The programmes take place in various parts of the world through networks, study and action groups, etc. The intensity and specificity of the involvement in these varied programmes tend to create an atmosphere of isolation from each other and from the official church bodies. As a result the work of the Council is not always seen and experienced as

[12] James Gustafson, "An Analysis of Church and Society Social Ethical Writings." *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 272.

[13] *Ibid.*, 277.

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> a comprehensive whole, which in turn sometimes strains the relationship between the churches and the Council.[14]

As such, the comprehensive and institutional nature of the WCC's work make it virtually impossible for one person to interpret adequately the contours of the WCC's position on any social or ethical issue.

The highest authority within the WCC in our time is the General Assembly that meets every seven or eight years. The Central Committee, which meets annually, represents the next level of authority. Each of these bodies issues authoritative statements and constitutional guidelines for the operation of the WCC (as voted on by the members of each respective body). After these two main bodies, several voices determine the direction of the WCC's policies and institutional direction: the executive council; the general secretary; the concurrent presidents; special WCC issue committees; WCC-sponsored convocations and study groups; and individual scholars within the confines of the WCC. Thus, official General Assembly pronouncements, Central Committee statements, and the work of general secretaries establish a hierarchy of authority in reading WCC documents. Even this hierarchy, however, does not assist one in untangling the complexity of the WCC's work on given ethical issues. As one peruses the many WCC documents on environmental issues, it is obvious that conflicting and even contradictory elements exist even in "authoritative" WCC statements. In order to offer coherent accounts and critiques of the WCC's work I utilize a broadly historical approach to respect the multi-dimensional nature of the WCC's arguments. The WCC is not a static institutional entity; rather, the vitality of the WCC is evident in its many

[14] World Council of Churches, *Nairobi to Vancouver: 1975-1983. Report of the Central Committee to the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983): xviii.

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statements and its changing attitudes on various issues in the past. This approach sometimes blurs the boundaries of the WCC's "official position" on any one issue. Indeed, the WCC's "official position" may emerge only after years of debate and study. Thus, a historically sensitive approach affords a critical appreciation of the processes by which the WCC forms policies and ethical stances.[15]

In the end, the claims made in this dissertation are intentionally more circumspect than contemporary debates that rage about the proper trajectory of the ecumenical movement and the WCC as a whole. What I attempt to show is that the WCC's institutional history provides many helpful clues for addressing contemporary issues linked to present environmental problems. These parameters reflect the primary purpose of this dissertation: to explore and cull from the WCC as an ecumenical institution resources for a compelling and cogent North American Christian environmental ethic for the twenty-first century.[16]

II. State of Current Research on the WCC as an Institutional Actor in Environmental Ethics

This dissertation offers a distinctive analysis of environmental issues as addressed by the WCC in that I start with the WCC's complex institutional legacy. In looking at this

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[15] The majority of the work cited in the dissertation issues from WCC archival materials, the WCC's published works, and interviews with WCC staff members. The archival materials of the WCC, while abundant, are not always easily historically organized. A great deal of recent WCC archival material has not yet been catalogued by the WCC. Moreover, some materials already archived are obviously misfiled. In this dissertation I reference archival materials according to the WCC archival box or number assigned, assuming that the dates of a box are in accordance with its contents.

[16] For a good overview of the larger subject of "ecumenism" see: Michael Fahey, *Ecumenism: A Bibliographical Overview* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992).

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ecumenical organization I conclude that the WCC has much to offer North American Christians in thinking about environmental ethics because the WCC has historically attended to these issues as part of a larger matrix of social ills connected to issues of justice and peace concerns. At the same time, though, I contend that the devastating effects of modern environmental problems have affected the ways in which the WCC attends to such ethical issues, thereby resulting in profound institutional changes within the WCC. I know of no other work that addresses the WCC in this two-fold manner.

Ulrich Schmitthenner's *Der konziliare Prozeß. Gemeinsam für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung* and *Contributions of Churches and Civil Society to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* are perhaps the best introductory works to the WCC's contribution to environmental ethics in recent years.[17] In both works Schmitthenner focuses broadly on the WCC, European ecumenical organizations, and various NGOs in the articulation of justice, peace, and creation concerns. Thus, the purview of his works remains much wider than the intentions of this dissertation.

Schmitthenner's work surveys the WCC's work on several fronts. He provides a brief introduction to ecumenical social ethics, commencing with the Stockholm 1925 Life and Work ecumenical conference and detailing the progression of ecumenical social ethics through 1997. His work also broadly canvasses the WCC's work at various world

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[17] Ulrich Schmitthenner, *Der Konziliare Prozess: Gemeinsam für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung: Ein Kompendium* (Idstein: Meinhardt Text und Design, 1998); *Contributions of Churches and Civil Society to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: A Compendium (With CD-ROM)* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999). Schmitthenner's English work received support from the WCC's funds for ecumenical initiatives. The German and English works overlap extensively although there are important differences in these works on specific projects related to recent WCC work on a "theology of life."

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conferences pertaining to environmental issues—Rio de Janeiro 1992, Vienna 1993, Copenhagen 1995, and Beijing 1995. Moreover, Schmitthenner provides a rough map of the WCC's collaboration on such issues with other world ecumenical groups and NGOs. Schmitthenner's work deserves careful study because it offers a sweeping overview of recent WCC work as it pertains directly to environmental issues. Schmitthenner's work also evidences the broad intellectual exchange between the WCC and other "civil society" organizations on environmental issues. His account, perhaps more than any other, maps the rich interplay between the WCC, secular civil society organizations, individual thinkers, and regional social justice movements.

In my estimation, however, Schmitthenner's account conflates too readily the work of the WCC and other "civil society" organizations on environmental issues. Perhaps this issues from his expansive notion of "civil society:" "Civil society includes churches and church groups, human rights and environmental organisations, research groups, foundations, trade unions, civil rights groups, cooperatives and youth organisations...Most organisations in civil society have democratic structures."[18] Although broad consensus on environmental issues does indeed exist between various organizations in civil society, the specific methodologies and sources employed by the WCC and other NGOs in civil society differ greatly, yielding distinctive accounts of environmental problems and proposed solutions. As I will detail in chapter three, the WCC has at times hesitated using the term "civil society" precisely because such terminology glosses over fundamental differences in ethical methodologies and resulting

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[18] Schmitthenner, *Contributions of Churches and Civil Society to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: A Compendium (With CD-ROM)* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999): 18.

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actions. Thus, in my opinion, Schmitthenner's work fails to capture the distinctive contribution of the WCC to environmental ethics.

Another significant treatment of the WCC's commitment to environmental ethics is Geraldine Smyth's *A Way of Transformation: A Theological Evaluation of the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, World Council of Churches, 1983-1991.*[19] Smyth's work on the WCC stands as an important balance to my own North American account: her intimate knowledge of these issues from a European context and her direct involvement with the WCC's work supply valuable perspectives that I would otherwise miss.

Smyth attends primarily to the WCC's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) working process and its theological and epistemological ramifications. Specifically, Smyth offers the ecumenical symbols of life, creation, *koinonia*, *shalom*, and the preferential option for the poor as a way of cogently exploring the WCC's work on these issues. Smyth argues that the WCC's excessive focus on the "conciliar" or ecclesiological aspects of the JPIC process overshadow ecological concerns pertinent to all living creatures. Moreover, she concludes that the difficulties emerging from within the JPIC process are indicative of "the need for an integrative ecumenical model which can hermeneutically accommodate diversity in unity and enable such conflict to be creative and transformative."[20] Smyth offers such a model through a more robust Trinitarian theology of creation.

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[19] Geraldine S. Smyth, *A Way of Transformation: A Theological Evaluation of the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, World Council of Churches, 1983-1991* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995).

[20] *Ibid.*, xxi.

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Smyth's interests and work overlap my own—she maps the WCC's work using its institutional history and explores the theological and philosophical ramifications of the WCC's methodologies. In addition, she is concerned with the ethical dimensions of the WCC's work on ecological matters. Where we differ is on understanding the role that the WCC plays as an ecclesial and political organization and the lessons to be learned from its work. Smyth emphasizes the theological hermeneutics implicit in the WCC's work. According to her, the WCC's "conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation empowers the Christian story to break out in new symbol and narrative whereby Church and world will be transformed into New Creation."[21] My own interests are more tempered by the WCC's institutional successes and failures in the realm of social ethics and therefore my judgments may be somewhat more guarded than Smyth's. Indeed, this dissertation focuses more on the complexity of the WCC and its approach to social ethics as an institution and its contributions to ecological ethics as an institutional actor. Thus, my focus differs notably from Smyth's creative approach from the standpoint of theological hermeneutics.

Another seminal study on the WCC's approach to environmental ethics is Martin Robra's *Ökumenische Sozialethik*. Robra's book, much like Smyth's, focuses primarily on the changing paradigms in ecumenical social ethics from 1966 to the early 1990s. Robra draws heavily from Konrad Raiser's groundbreaking work *Ecumenism in*

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[21] *Ibid.*, xxii.

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Transition: a Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement? in assessing the recent changes in ecumenical social ethics of the WCC.[22]

Robra's work represents a scholarly advance on several fronts. His detailed history of social ethics in the WCC from 1966 through the early 1990s offers an invaluable interpretation of its struggles and conflicts on several different levels. Specifically, Robra details ethical disagreements in the WCC between Christian critical realists, Christian liberationist thinkers, and European Christian ethicists pertaining to methodology and approaches toward social ethics. Robra skillfully presents the complex history of ecumenical social ethics with clarity while also struggling to offer a genuinely constructive criticism of the WCC's social ethics in order to advance these areas of study. Robra draws on the work of Jürgen Habermas's "discourse ethics" in engaging the WCC's work in order to provide a coherent social ethic in the midst of the complex demands of peace, justice, and creation issues. Habermas's philosophical tools empower Robra to pursue dialectical tensions present in contemporary ecumenical social ethics and to elevate this conversation to a new level of understanding.[23]

My dissertation differs from Robra's in that I am not attempting to offer a systematic overview or criticism of the WCC's work in the arena of "ecumenical social ethics." Robra's work assumes more coherence in "ecumenical social ethics" than my

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[22] Martin Robra, *Ökumenische Sozialethik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994). Robra is in conversation throughout much of his work with Konrad Raiser, the present general secretary of the WCC. See Raiser's work *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991).

[23] *Ibid.*, 14. "Auf der Tagesordung steht eine Ethik für Mensch und Mitwelt, die soziale Gerechtigkeit und Bewahrung der Schöpfung nicht gegeneinander ausspielt." ["On the agenda is an ethic for humanity and society, whereby social justice and the protection of creation are not mutually played off." My translation]

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own understanding of the WCC's institutional work affords. Thus, my dissertation is more limited and focused in that I am not attempting to capture the pulse of "ecumenical social ethics." Rather, I aim to portray here the unique challenges environmental problems pose to the WCC and how the WCC as an ecumenical institution has reacted to specific situations and problems.

Joseph Bush's dissertation "Social Justice and the Natural Environment in the Study Program of the World Council of Churches: 1966-1990" offers important insights pertaining the WCC's work on environmental issues.[24] Specifically, Bush "examines the relationship between justice and environmental concerns as this relationship is variously expressed in the discussion of the World Council of Churches. Statements addressing the two areas of justice and the environment will be examined concerning their respective empirical, theological, and moral assumptions. These assumptions will be compared to find points of commonality and conflict."[25] Bush employs a "textual" approach to ecumenical social thought in the WCC by analyzing the written documents of the WCC primarily at the level of "study conferences" on the themes of justice and the environment.

Bush engages the WCC's work with a stratified ethical hermeneutic, offering a complex understanding of the WCC's empirical, theological, and moral assumptions. His forays into these areas are insightful and useful at many levels. Particularly enlightening is Bush's examination of the WCC's use of various modes of moral discourse and analysis in its study program. Bush's work, though, does not adequately present the

[24] Joseph Bush, Jr., "Social Justice and the Natural Environment in the Study Program of the World Council of Churches, 1966-1990" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Drew University, 1993).

[25] *Ibid.*,8.

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institutional nature of the WCC's response to environmental matters. Much of Bush's work centers on the "study documents" of the WCC as if such documents could be understood apart from the nuances of the continuing institutional realities within the WCC. Bush's approach has the advantage of isolating select "study documents" in order to examine specific ecological assumptions and approaches: such an approach certainly has value in that specific theological and ethical arguments receive lengthy consideration.

My dissertation differs from Bush's approach in as much as it focuses on the wider scope of the WCC as an institution and admits more readily the hermeneutical difficulties in reading documents within the WCC. Indeed I argue that by studying the WCC as an institution one understands more fully its work and emphasis in the arena of environmental ethics. Isolating particular documents within the WCC offers only limited insights into the WCC's larger vision and work pertaining to social ethics.

The work of Ronald Preston presents perhaps the weightiest critique of the WCC's work on environmental ethics at an institutional level. Preston argues that the WCC's social ethics often follows the lead of cultural trends, leaving long-standing projects abandoned or defunct. He cites specifically the case within the WCC whereby its institutional initiative on a "Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society" (operating roughly from 1975-1983) for social ethics was replaced by a much more ambiguous initiative on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation."[26] Preston's analysis of these

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[26] For a good overview of Preston's work and relationship to the WCC see the following works: Ronald Preston, editor, *Technology and Social Justice: An International Symposium on the Social and Economic Teaching of the World Council of Churches From Geneva 1966 to Uppsala 1968* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971); "Critics From Without and From Within." *The Ecumenical Review* 37 (1985): 121-126; "Convergence and Divergence in Social Theology." *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 194-203;

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ethical issues demands more attention. For Preston, the concern for "Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Societies" in the 1970s issued from the WCC's social ethics as rooted in theological realism, its populist or participatory concern for theological ethics, and the WCC's burgeoning liberationist understanding of a preferential option for the poor. Preston affirms that all of these ethical trajectories within the WCC were well grounded both theologically and institutionally.

In contrast, Preston contends that the WCC's embrace of the "integrity of creation" in its Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation initiative in the 1980s and 1990s reflected poorly articulated theological and institutional understandings of the WCC's ethical agenda. Preston notes that the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation initiative within the WCC often portrays "nature" as that separate realm where humans are not involved. Moreover, some WCC materials urged member churches to enter into "fellowship with nature," a suggestion that Preston decries as naive. Preston also charges that the WCC's preoccupation with theological word-games—its arguments over whether to talk about a "sustainable society" or the "integrity of creation"— focused its attention away from credible UN reports on actual issues pertaining to sustainable development and growing ecological challenges. Here, Preston argues, the WCC as an institution allowed theological rhetoric to interfere with the business of offering a realistic Christian social ethics pertaining to the environment.[27]

Preston's examination of the WCC's environmental work concludes with specific suggestions for future WCC work on "nature." Most importantly Preston calls for the

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"Humanity, Nature and the Integrity of Creation," *The Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989): 552-563; and *Confusions in Social Ethics: Problems for Geneva and Rome* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

[27] Preston, "Humanity, Nature and the Integrity of Creation," 555.

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WCC to inspect carefully its understanding of "nature" in order to draw clear lines of continuity and discontinuity with human persons: his concern here is to maintain a fundamental distinctiveness for the place of the human person. Moreover, Preston urges the WCC to embrace a more evolutionary oriented understanding of "nature" reflecting the sometimes harsh and brutal realities of ecological systems. Finally, Preston suggests that the WCC abandon its understanding of the "unity" in nature implied in its terminology the "integrity of creation." Again, Preston argues for a more evolutionary-oriented understanding of nature as competing forces always in flux. For Preston, this chaotic and non-unified flux of "nature" should be held in tension with the distinctive existential category of the "human person."[28] I take Preston's work seriously in this dissertation because he challenges the WCC's methodological and theological assumptions on "nature" at many points. His voice is an important corrective in understanding the WCC's work.

III. Overview of Dissertation

The thesis of this dissertation is two-fold. First, I argue that the WCC's complex institutional history has much to offer North American Christians in thinking through issues related to environmental concerns (as well as many other social concerns). At the same time, I contend that the crises of recent environmental issues have affected the very ways in which the WCC attends to such ethical issues, resulting in profound institutional changes within the WCC.

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[28] *Ibid.*, 555-560.

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Chapter one attends to methodology and how to interpret the work of the WCC pertaining to social ethics. One cannot understand fully the work of the WCC unless the institutional complexities and levels of ethical discourse are adequately charted. Thus, I focus chapter one on the work of James Gustafson and his work pertaining to Christian ethical methodology and environmental matters. There are many reasons for utilizing Gustafson's work as a hermeneutical lens through which one might read the WCC's work: first, he has offered salient and timely criticisms of the WCC's work on social ethics. Next, Gustafson has shaped the work of Christian ethics in North America in a profound manner. His care and precision in detailing Christian ethics have served as a model for both pupils and readers. Moreover, Gustafson has offered profound reflections on environmental issues in recent years and therefore deserves an extended hearing on these matters. Finally, I believe that much in Gustafson's work could be challenged by the insights of the WCC's institutional legacy: therefore, I begin the conversation with his work.

Drawing on Gustafson's work I establish a matrix or map by which one may read and question the WCC's work on environmental ethics. This map includes questions from theology, philosophy, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. I utilize this map in each chapter in order to direct my investigations and to evaluate the WCC's work on environmental issues.

Chapters two and three attend directly to the work of the WCC pertaining to environmental matters. In chapter two I sketch the WCC's most important statements and work on environmental issues between the years 1966 and 1991 and also draw out theological motifs that serve as important ethical resources for later chapters on

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environmental ethics. I argue here that the WCC articulated environmental questions in ways that often belied its own theological presumptions concerning the nature of social ethics. In this chapter I also provide an assessment of the WCC's environmental ethics by filtering the WCC's work through Gustafson's matrix as established in chapter one.

In chapter three I continue a historical assessment and overview by looking at the WCC's work on environmental issues between the years 1991 and 1998. This chapter serves two purposes. First, a general survey and historical understanding of the WCC's environmental work during this period is provided. Next, I introduce the reader to how the WCC has changed (both consciously and instinctively) its approach to social ethics in the face of overwhelming environmental concerns. I conclude this chapter once again by posing questions from Gustafson's matrix.

Chapter four attempts to break new ground in these conversations by utilizing Gustafson's work on the levels and varieties of ethical discourse as reviewed in chapter one. Specifically, I contend that one can map the WCC's institutional work on ecology at different ethical levels in accordance with its intended audience and purpose. Thus, I argue that the WCC's work as a prophet, expert, and religious advocate in the arena of environmental ethics constitute a more complete understanding of the WCC's institutional work and identity on these issues. I then reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of this multi-leveled ethical approach. I show that the WCC's engagement in various forms of ethical discourse affords both complexity and confusion as it has aligned its work simultaneously with "Christian social ethics," "international civil society," and more recently indigenous "people's movements."

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Finally, chapter five engages in a constructive process in the building up of environmental ethics as taken from the institutional work of the WCC. Here I repeat my argument that the WCC's approach to environmental problems is necessarily an issue-by-issue affair, reflecting an "ad hoc" sensibility toward ecological issues. As such, the WCC's work is a good example of ethical *bricolage* as defined by the religious ethicist Jeffrey Stout. I conclude my dissertation with the following question: what specific building blocks does the WCC as an institution provide for North American religious ethicists working on environmental ethics? I contend that the WCC's commitment to humility, solidarity, and institutional risk constitute three qualities worthy of attention from religious ethicists in North America.

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CHAPTER ONE

Theology, Ethics, and Environmental Issues: Reading the World Council of Churches through the Work of James Gustafson

> While a social analysis of the Church is not an exercise in Christian doctrine, it would be inadequate without some knowledge of doctrine and of the other disciplines involved. It is not his [the Christian ethicist's] goal to include every pertinent insight from all the disciplines; such completeness is impossible, and such eclecticism lacks unity of perspective and focus of interpretation. The point of view cannot be simply validated by the particular canons of sociology or systematic theology, history, or philosophy. It must stand finally on its own feet, and find its validity in whatever light it sheds upon the Christian community...A social analysis of the Church does not displace investigation from other points of view, or interpretation through other concepts. It seeks merely to make a contribution to our understanding of the community of Christians, with its continuity through history, and its identity across culture barriers and space.[1]

I. Introduction: Why Use the Work of James Gustafson?

As noted in the introduction, ethical methodology and hermeneutics are key concerns in reading the WCC's documents on environmental issues. That is, how does one assess the complex legacy of an international Christian organization such as the WCC on a specific subject as intricate as "environmental issues"? This chapter utilizes the work of James Gustafson in constructing an ethical lens through which I as a North American, Christian ethicist might read and interact with the WCC's work.

[1] Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church As a Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961): 4-5.

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I engage Gustafson in this chapter for several reasons. First, Gustafson has stood as a doyen of Protestant Christian ethics for an entire generation, formulating careful insights, penetrating criticisms, and instructive suggestions for Christian theologians and ethicists on both the methodology and practice of Christian ethics.[2] His expertise in the area of North American Christian ethics is highly respected for its thorough and interdisciplinary approach.[3]

Moreover, Gustafson imbibes deeply from the resources of the social sciences, offering salient insights into institutional ecclesial structures and probing these structures at an ethical and moral level. Thus, his insights are pertinent in addressing the ethical posture of an ecclesial institution such as the WCC. Indeed, Gustafson directly addresses the WCC's social ethics on at least two separate occasions.[4] His careful assessments of the WCC on both ethical methodology and on social issues—although limited in scope on each occasion—serve as examples of how one might approach the WCC's institutional work on environmental issues.

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[2] In his seminal work *Ethics After Babel*, Jeffrey Stout devotes an entire chapter to Gustafson and lauds his unflinching honesty and rigor in approaching theological ethics. *Ethics After Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988): 163-188.

[3] See here the work of Harlan Beckley, *Passion for Justice: Retrieving the Legacies of Walter Rauschenbusch, John A. Ryan, and Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992): 22-23. That Beckley does not defend his appropriation of Gustafson's ethical methodology is some indication of the stature and importance of Gustafson's work. Likewise, Audrey Chapman's work *Unprecedented Choices: Religious Ethics at the Frontiers of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) draws on Gustafson extensively and unapologetically in establishing a framework for engaging the broad field of the genetic sciences.(21-23)

[4] James Gustafson, "Book Review of *Who Speaks for the Church?*" *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 98-100; "An Analysis of [the WCC's] Church and Society Social Ethical Writings," *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 267-278.

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Other factors point to Gustafson as a good partner in this conversation concerning environmental issues. Gustafson has attempted to formulate a weighty and broad theocentric ethic that moves beyond "anthropocentrism" in Christian ethics. His careful accounts of these issues are helpful in assessing the fullness of the WCC's institutional efforts in this area. Gustafson's theocentric ethics places a high value on the whole of the cosmos and therefore is helpful in discerning the value of that which is non-human (or "other"). That which is "other" from humanity is deemed by Gustafson to have intrinsic value apart from its use for the human species—these "intrinsic values" and Gustafson's explication of such values are beneficial in sketching an environmental ethic.

Gustafson's work also proves valuable because he engages deontological and teleological approaches to ecological ethics before offering a modified pragmatism rooted in the Protestant Christian Reformed tradition. His question "what is God enabling and requiring us to do?" offers a distinctive framework for thinking about the complexities of environmental issues. Thus, Gustafson's ethical approach employs a "common-sense ontology" whereby he advances ethical interpretations grounded in theological and philosophical history in concert with the data of the natural and social sciences. This methodological approach is especially important in moving toward an understanding of environmental ethics—an area of study highly dependent upon interdisciplinary interpretations of scientific "facts" and reading this data within a theological or philosophical framework.

My purpose here is to distill from Gustafson's work a cogent framework for engaging and then evaluating the WCC's work on environmental ethics; thus, I focus upon important methodological considerations offered by Gustafson for investigating the ethical legacies of a person or institution. In order to offer a broad and measured account of Gustafson's work I first

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survey several of his important writings on ethical methodology from the 1960s and 1970s. I cull from Gustafson's work during this period the importance of including social scientific accounts of ecclesial institutions alongside traditional theological assessments. Moreover, his writings on the nature and complexity of moral conversation are helpful in offering a careful reading of an institution such as the WCC. I next explore Gustafson's contributions to theological ethics as found in *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* and more recent works from the 1980s and 1990s. Here I draw from Gustafson questions stemming from the natural sciences, philosophy, and anthropology in constructing a "theocentric" environmental ethic.

I conclude by offering my own matrix of prominent questions emerging from Gustafson's work by which one may engage and evaluate the work of the WCC on environmental issues. This framework offers four interrelated reference points pertaining to environmental issues.

First, I glean from Gustafson's corpus theological questions pertaining to the WCC's understanding of God, God's relations to the world, and the place of humans in the larger cosmos. Gustafson's theological work also probes the nature of ethical methodology and moral argumentation by individuals and institutions. I find his work in these areas important for assessing the varying theological strategies of the WCC on ecological matters. Second, I argue that Gustafson's emphasis on social scientific methodology provides an essential reference point in limning the WCC's historical and institutional characteristics. Gustafson's work in the social sciences raises questions about the moral community, power dynamics, and social location of the WCC as an institution working out of Geneva, Switzerland. The third reference point of this methodological framework centers on Gustafson's peregrinations in the natural sciences: here Gustafson's work offers pertinent queries about the WCC's understanding of "environmental ethics". Although Gustafson's work does not offer comprehensive investigations of ecology or

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environmental ethics as disciplines, his work engages serious scientific challenges in the advancement of responsible environmental ethics. Fourth, Gustafson's engagement with philosophical arguments on the place of humans in the world and of "intrinsic value" in assessing the worth of non-human species and life forms are helpful in evaluating the WCC's arguments along similar lines.

This constructed methodological framework, therefore, has four reference points that serve as loci for investigating the WCC's institutional stance on environmental ethics. These reference points in theology, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and philosophy do not represent a comprehensive, historical, or systematic overview of this prominent ethicist. Indeed, Gustafson's published work spans nearly fifty years; therefore, creative tensions, growth, and even contradictions emerge in his scholarly corpus. Rather, I chart in this chapter the contours of Gustafson's work on ethical methodology and how these boundaries have changed as Gustafson has engaged environmental issues in recent years at more substantive level.[5] The result is a methodological matrix for an examination of environmental issues within the WCC.[6]

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[5] For fuller assessments of Gustafson's work as a Christian ethicist after *Ethics from Theocentric Perspective*, see: Richard McCormick, "Gustafson's God: Who? What? Where? (ETC.)," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (1985): 53-70; Paul Ramsey, "A Letter to James Gustafson," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (1985): 71-100; Steven Toulmin, "Nature and Nature's God," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (1985): 37-52. See also the articles in Harlan Beckley and Charles Swezey, eds. *James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988). This edited volume includes excellent articles investigating Gustafson's ethical work and method: Robert Audi, "Theology, Science, and Ethics in Gustafson's Theocentric Vision," 159-186; Robert Bellah, "Gustafson as Critic of Culture," 143-158; Edward Farley, "Theocentric Ethics as a Genetic Argument," 39-62; Robert Johann, "An Ethics of Emergent Order," 95-118; Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" 13-38; Mary Midgley, "The Paradox of Humanism," 187-202; John Reeder, Jr., "The Dependence of Ethics," 119-142; John Howard Yoder, "Theological Revision and the Burden of Particular Identity," 63-94; and Gustafson's own "Response" and "Afterword," 203-224 and 241-254. Other important works on Gustafson's ethical framework include: Jens Glebe-Møller, "A Modern

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II. Gustafson's Early Ethical Methodology: An Overview of His Work in the 1960s and 1970s

Gustafson's earliest writings reflect a theological approach heavily steeped in the social sciences, especially sociology, in order to interpret ecclesial institutions as historical, earthly realities. His work *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* supplies valuable insights for approaching the institutional aspects of ecclesial bodies.[7] In this study, Gustafson leans heavily upon a "social analysis" of ecclesial structures while also acknowledging his theological background and training. The stated purpose of his study—to

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American Theology: James M. Gustafson's Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective," *Studia Theologica* 42 (1988): 89-112; William French, "Ecological Concern and the Anti-Foundationalist Debates: James Gustafson on Biosphere Constraints," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics, 1989*, ed. D. M. Yeager (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989): 113-130; Julian Hartt, "Concerning God and Man and His Well-Being: A Commentary, Inspired by Spinosa, on Gustafson's Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective," *Soundings* 73 (1990): 667-687; Harlan Beckley; "A Raft That Floats: Experience, Tradition, and Sciences in Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics," *Zygon* 30 (1995): 201-209; and William Rottschaefer, "Gustafson's Theocentrism and Scientific Naturalistic Philosophy: A Marriage Made in Heaven," *Zygon* 30 (1995): 211-220.

[6] A good example in theology of using such a "matrix" or a "map" is Robert Schreiter's chapter "Mapping a Local Theology" in *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985): 22-38. This chapter is also the beginning of an "argument" with the WCC on environmental matters. David Tracy's definition of "argument" within the genre of conversation is pertinent: "...argument is a vital moment within conversation that occasionally is needed if the conversation itself is to move forward." David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987): 23.

[7] Gustafson operates with a very specific working definition of "Church:" "...the Church is defined as *an historically continuous body of persons known as Christians*, whose common life is in part institutionalized in churches. The Church is a social entity, with temporal and spatial boundaries." (*Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* ,6). An interesting comparison study is the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1998). Gustafson's understanding of "the church" holds up surprisingly well given the passage of time and the number of historical and sociological studies informing the WCC's more recent work on ecclesiology.

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"understand as much of life in the Church as possible, and particularly its 'unity and 'continuity' (more precisely, its social and historical consistency) within a nondoctrinal framework"—offers the reader snapshots of carefully constructed claims concerning ecclesial institutions built on theological, philosophical, and sociological grounds.[8]

Several relevant insights for understanding and practicing theological ethics emerge from *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. First, the intersection of theology with the social sciences offers a broad picture of ecclesial institutions in that Gustafson identifies the pluriform values, priorities, and ends of ecclesial structures as they are rooted in the politics, histories, and sociological realities of a particular context. Moreover, Gustafson notes that ecclesial structures fulfill a variety of human needs and desires in society.[9] Churches integrate, define, identify, mend, and break both human societies and particular humans in these settings.[10] Moreover, ecclesial institutions express a need for institutional self-preservation whereby its "shared cognitive orientation" extends beyond its immediate life.

Gustafson also traces the political dynamics of ecclesial institutions such as the WCC. He notes that political processes take place via formal and informal patterns of interaction and that the "political" characteristics of a church tend to change given particular historical

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[8] *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, ix. Gustafson, therefore, explores the notion of "Church" from several methodological angles.

[9] Gustafson here draws on the work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Émile Durkheim in stressing ecclesial interpretations of common human needs. *Ibid.*, 16-17, footnote 1. Other formative intellectual figures for Gustafson's sociological and naturalistic approach in this work include George Herbert Mead, H. Richard Niebuhr, Josiah Royce, Ernst Troeltsch, and Max Weber.

[10] Gustafson acknowledges the importance of the work of Ernst Troeltsch's work at this point. (*Ibid.*, 21-28) Gustafson's use of Troeltsch is quite clear given Troeltsch's understanding of Christian churches as a "social" construction. See here Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992): 23-37.

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circumstances. Thus, there is an "ad hoc" quality to the patterns of life within churches. "Churches are like other political communities in their need to develop many *ad hoc* patterns of life through which they can exercise their functions. The actual patterns of church political life take new forms in the light of new purposes, the social situation in which the church exists, and other interacting factors."[11] Gustafson explicitly attends to the WCC as a "political" institution, noting the tensions between the ecumenical strains of the Faith and Order movement and Life and Work movements co-existing within the WCC. Moreover, Gustafson points to the WCC's intentional engagement of geographically diverse churches as a distinctive political feature of its ecclesiological composition.[12] This political aspect of the WCC's institutional life also extends to its functional use of language in delineating the boundaries of the WCC. That is, the WCC is an institutional community of language and interpretation whereby ecclesial bodies utilize specific language in shaping its political and social character: "The creed-forming process continues to have a social function...A recent example is the World Council of Churches' confession of 'Jesus Christ as God and Savior.' An alteration of this formula would change the social character of the Council. The present language excludes the membership of such groups as American

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[11] *Treasure in Earthen Vessels.*, 41. Or, as Gustafson says later: "The Church is a chameleon. It finds colors that fit it into various environments. It continues, yet changes; this is the value of its social nature. Yet it stands always under the order and judgment of God to whom it professes loyalty and in whom it believes." (112)

[12] *Ibid.*, 37. Gustafson only touches on the larger sociological and political issues at stake here in investigating the work of the WCC as an institution. The literature in this area is vast and varied. For a more thorough introduction to institutions as political agents of change see the "Introduction" in Roland Czada, Adrienne Héritier, and Hans Keman, eds., *Institutions and Political Choice: On the Limits of Rationality* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996): 11-24. See also the efforts of political scientist Robert Keohane on understanding the complex workings of institutions in international settings: "Power and Interdependence Revisited," *International Organization* 41 (1987): 723-753; *International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1989).

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Unitarians and Universalists. A language acceptable to them [Unitarians and Universalists] would probably exclude the Eastern Orthodox and other churches."[13]

Most striking about Gustafson's efforts in defining an institutional ecclesial community, though, is his recognition of the complexity of such a task. Gustafson recognizes that his approach to and interpretation of ecclesial institutions does not fit easily into strictly theological, historical, and social scientific concerns. Indeed, it is likely that practitioners in each of these specific disciplines would look askance at Gustafson's approach. Thus, Gustafson exercises humility in his study, asserting that: "The audacity of the social interpreter of the Church is obvious. He must be informed by concepts from several disciplines, yet it is possible that he does not qualify as a practitioner of any of them. But the risk is necessary."[14]

Gustafson describes theological components of ecclesial institutions cautiously. He claims that the only distinctive feature of an "ecclesial" community is its determinative object of faith—namely, the Christian God. In all other respects it stands as a fully "natural" institution—that is as a social, historical, and political community. Indeed, even the theologically oriented aspects of ecclesial institutions cannot function as final and decisive descriptions of such bodies. "The Church has political operations; how are we to understand these? The Church has historical continuity and inner social unity. How are these to be understood? If one answers only in terms meaningful to the properly initiated theologian, not much has been explained, and not much understood."[15] Thus, for Gustafson, working conceptions of church institutions as theological

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[13] *Treasure in Earthen Vessels.*, 53.

[14] *Ibid.*, 4-5.

[15] *Ibid.*, 7. Gustafson notes that his method runs directly counter to exclusively theological interpretations of ecclesial institutions. It is not always clear, however, which methodological vantage point is most determinative for Gustafson's reading. At times the theological ramifications of ecclesial institutions appear

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realities and "natural" communities are both important in probing the work and results of an institution such as the WCC.

In another of his major works *Christ and the Moral Life* Gustafson moves more explicitly toward ethical analysis and identifies three assumptions logically prior to the ethical query "what ought I to do?" These assumptions include: coherent criterion for the selection of ethical principles or values; the historically contingent and developmental nature of human decisions and human subjectivity; and the difficulties in identifying a hierarchy of value, values, goods, or the good for a particular system. Gustafson argues throughout this work that these assumptions determine the content and form of particular approaches to ethics. He therefore rejects in *Christ and the Moral Life* the notion that there is one universal form or method for Christian ethics: rather, in facing specific problems Christian ethicists employ unique and divergent techniques to engage ethical assumptions given the historical context and specific problems.[16]

Gustafson also engages the ethical question "Does Jesus Christ make any difference to the Christian's life?" in *Christ and the Moral Life.*[17] He notes that investigations into such questions are usually ambiguous—indeed, in a striking passage Gustafson claims, "Christians are in no position to claim moral superiority over other men, or to make a case for the Christian faith

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most important. Gustafson, however, clearly emphasizes the historical, concrete social realities of churches and makes empirical observations about these institutions. Thus, much of Gustafson's work grounds itself in empirical descriptions about ecclesial institutions. For an interesting theological challenge to Gustafson's methodology see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Milbank challenges the autonomy of the social sciences as a discipline independent from a theological (or cosmological) narrative and would therefore question Gustafson's practice of engaging social scientific disciplines alongside Christian theological accounts to interpret ecclesial realities.

[16] James Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968): 1-3.

[17] *Ibid.*, 238.

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on the grounds of verifiable evidence of its contribution to the moral well-being of the human community."[18] Gustafson again argues here that the distinctiveness of the Christian community is its object of belief—the Christian God.[19] Thus, the ethical uniqueness of Christian institutions may be found in its communal understandings and practice of love, charity, and forgiveness in light of its beliefs in Jesus Christ. Still, however, Gustafson adds that such institutions remain historical, political entities whose tangible outward actions are reducible to a sociological understanding alongside other similar institutions. Again, such reflections are important in evaluating the WCC's explicitly "environmental ethics" alongside specifically non-Christian accounts of similar matters.

Gustafson's next book *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* adds important qualifications to his earlier work in that he expands his understanding of communities of "moral discourse" and how these communities might be studied, analyzed, and critiqued. A vital addition to his earlier work is an extended discussion of power within institutional settings and the ramifications of such dynamics.

> The subtlety of Christian ethics of cultural responsibility lies in its acceptance of the relativities of a social order and technology precisely *as relative*. Power exists—physical energy, economic, military and political power, the capacity to order the course of events within limitations in various realms of life including the personal. Accept the conditions, yes. But all power exists by the power of God; all power is responsible to God; all power is potentially an expression of the divine purpose. Social and personal power, in whatever its rationalized forms, is not in

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[18] *Ibid.*, 239.

[19] There is some reductionism in Gustafson's concept of "belief" here—certainly, an empirical study would show a variety of manifestations of "belief" and therefore some difference between beliefs held by different persons and different communities. I take Gustafson's point to be that empirical evidence regarding the distinctive or superior ethical nature of such beliefs cannot be secured. For a probing discussion of difficulties in talking about theology and religious belief see Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988): 9-17.

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> itself good or ultimate. It is something to which Christians must be relatively related while they are absolutely related to God...[20]

Gustafson here stresses the relativity of both individual and institutional power configurations and by extension urges the reader to grasp the historically contingent character of ethical actions manifested by Christians and ecclesial institutions.

In *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* Gustafson also turns more specifically toward theological considerations of eschatology and observes that Christian communities rely on a sense of "hope" for moral decision-making. "Christian action is action in hope. It partakes of a 'cosmic optimism,' not in the sense that the expectations of a historical society of righteousness are to be realized, but in the knowledge that finally the destiny, context, and end of Christian action is in the hands of God. Frustration and bafflement by the complexities of a social or process of social change are not overwhelming."[21] Interestingly, Gustafson here hints that ecclesial institutions may better be able to offer particular guidance to individual persons and institutions regarding ethical choices because of their grounding in an eschatological hope. Moreover, Gustafson contends that church institutions embody two distinctive realities in pluralistic societies—the presence of the living God through Christ and also a vibrant social witness over and against society at-large. These realities establish within ecclesial institutions the

[20] *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970): 31-32. This work in some ways to be a passing phase in Gustafson's thought: the church here seems to be a realm of distinctive speech, action, and belief whereby a uniquely different ethic is performed. The "natural" elements of church action are downplayed throughout this work.

[21] *Ibid.*, 40.

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virtues of freedom, humility, love, and attest that such institutions as a truly "responsible" order within modern pluralistic societal structures.[22]

Gustafson also offers in this work a comprehensive view of what a community of moral discourse does and should look like. He offers several criteria. "By a community of moral discourse I mean *a gathering of people with the explicit intention to survey and critically discuss their personal and social responsibilities in the light of moral convictions about which there is some consensus and to which there is some loyalty*."[23] Ecclesial institutions function as communities of moral discourse by inheriting and expounding upon a specific moral tradition or traditions; examining fundamental convictions about qualitative distinctions between various ethical positions; and utilizing specific moral language within the ecclesial community itself in making such distinctions.[24] Gustafson also refines the notion of "discourse" within ecclesial institutions to describe the voluntary, participatory, and interactive nature of such moral conversations over long periods of time. Indeed, if an ecclesial institution is to have a healthy basis for moral practices it must embody these traits.[25] Clearly these ideas are helpful in discerning the nature of moral conversation and action in a complex ecumenical institution such as the WCC.

Gustafson expands these clarifications in his next book, *Christian Ethics and the Community*. Here Gustafson forwards careful distinctions between "theological ethics" and

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[22] *Ibid.*, 60-61.

[23] *Ibid.*, 84. Gustafson buttresses his largely sociological interpretation of church institutions by the following claims: "...any ideas or beliefs, whether they be religious, political, economic, or whatever, become culturally and socially effective through the social organizations and the social forms that they seize upon or grow into."(*Ibid.*, 139)

[24] *Ibid.*, 86-89.

[25] *Ibid.*, 90-94.

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"Christian morality."[26] Ethics, he claims, is a careful assessment of situations, causes, and consequences considered in a reflective mode and informed by questions concerning human nature and the context of obligation. Morality, by contrast, refers more directly to the practical tasks of human conduct, addressing questions such as "what ought I do in this place and time?"[27] In addition, Gustafson notes that "there have been, and legitimately can be, four different base points for Christian moral discourse, and that no matter which point a writer selects to start from, he moves into considerations that are dominant in the other three if he seeks to develop a very complete Christian ethics."[28] These four base points, according to Gustafson, include the expressive-evocative level, the moral level, the ethical level, and the post-ethical level. Although Gustafson does not define these terms extensively here, these four "base points" continue to inform his thinking on ethical methodology in the future.

Finally, in his chapter "Christian Humanism and the Human Mind" Gustafson offers a glimpse of future trajectories he will follow in stressing the evolutionary character of the human species and the plurality of values accompanying such changes. Gustafson argues that ethical valuation and differentiation has become more difficult despite the overwhelming amount of scientific data available. Indeed, the complexity of such information presents individuals and communities with interdependent and competing values when attempting to act ethically in

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[26] *Christian Ethics and the Community* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971).

[27] *Ibid.*, 85. Both in this work and in later writings Gustafson does not hold carefully, in my judgment, this distinction between theological ethics and Christian morality. Still, the point made here is important: ethics involves an assessment of situations, causes, and consequences in a more contemplative or academic setting while morality demands more immediate action, pressing a person or institution to face real situations and consequences.

[28] *Ibid.*, 102.

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particular circumstances.[29] This idea of the multidimensionality of values or competing values within an ethical framework is seminal to Gustafson's understanding of the complexity of ethical choices for individuals or institutions in modern life.

During this time, Gustafson also addresses ethical methodology in relationship to the empirical sciences. Especially interesting is Gustafson's explication of "The Relationship of Empirical Science to Moral Thought" in his book *Theology and Christian Ethics*.[30] Gustafson maintains here that ethical thought benefits from a vigorous engagement with the social sciences in at least four significant ways. Social sciences provide ethical communities with a more complete historical understanding of the "essence" or "nature" of persons and institutions; a fuller understanding of sociological and political circumstances; an opportunity to predict circumstances or outcomes; and avenues for the development of moral norms issuing out of empirical sciences. Gustafson disabuses those who would use the social sciences in a positivistic manner, and yet he offers a carefully articulated appeal to the use of empirical "facts" in order to present a more realistic picture of human life in communities.[31]

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[29] *Ibid.*, 187-204. Interestingly, in this same book Gustafson weds these claims to the experiential, palpable character of theological hope in his chapter "The Conditions for Hope: Reflections on Human Experience," 205-216. "Only when the object of hope [e.g., democracy, labor rights, etc.] is delineated with enough specificity to make possible the inference of certain achievable moral intentions can it give relatively clear direction to moral action. A general attitude of hope, with its big theological basis and big theological object, is of limited significance; in fact, it is vacuous when particular moral decisions and actions are required."(205)

[30] *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974).

[31] See also here James M. Gustafson, "The Relationship of Empirical Science to Moral Thought," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 26 (1971): 122-137. For further explication of this theme of using empirical studies in theological ethics see Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

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Gustafson's work *Can Ethics Be Christian?* focuses attention on the descriptive elements inherent in delineating moral activity and on how this relates to persons within communities. Perhaps the most significant claim made by Gustafson in this work attends to the question posed in his title:

> "Can ethics be Christian....I have attempted to make a more modest claim, namely, that insofar as Christian symbols and concepts have a special claim on the religious community, they are used to disclose significance. That significance is preeminently religious and theological, but it is also in many instances moral. The religious significance impregnates the moral and may make a difference to the discernment of the moral. In this limited sense, then, the enterprise of ethical reflection may be distinctly Christian."[32]

Gustafson, therefore, again distances himself again from any talk concerning the "distinctiveness" of Christian ethics and instead reiterates his earlier stance that ethics depends primarily upon broader categories encompassing all humanity. "An intelligible account of experience that issues in 'almost universal' and 'almost absolute' principles and values can be given, but the conditions of knowledge do not exist on which universality and absoluteness can be claimed without qualification."[33]

Gustafson's Perè Marquette Theology Lecture delivered in 1975 attends to the relationship between a natural law concept of ethics and more particularistic, revelation-centered ethics. Here Gustafson asserts that theological ethics are often clothed in a more general language of "moral philosophy" for the sake of reaching a wider and broader audience.

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[32] *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975): 144.

[33] *Ibid.*, 158. "Is it conceivable that members of the Christian community would act under any circumstances in a way that could not be justified by principles on which presumably all rational persons could agree? Is it conceivable that a 'moral' act by a Christian can be justified by only a 'religious' reason...I believe that such occasions would be extremely rare, and for reasons that are theological in character. Since God's purposes are believed to be for the well-being of man and creation, on most occasions the reasons that justify any moral act would justify the moral acts of Christians."(166)

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Gustafson does not disapprove of such an approach: "To do so is not necessarily an act of deception, either of oneself or of others. Frequently the failure to develop the theological grounds for one's work in medical ethics stems from lack of interest in those grounds on the part of the participants in the discussions of clinical moral issues."[34] Gustafson here affirms an approach whereby theologians utilize the more generalized language of "moral philosophy" so as to communicate more freely with non-theologians on pertinent ethical issues. It is clear that such latitude in arguing ethical issues is appropriate given Gustafson's conception of theology and the role of the theological ethicist: "Theology is reflection on human experience with reference to a particular dimension of the human experience denoted 'religious.'...I reserve the word 'religious' for that dimension of experience (in which not all persons consciously share) that senses a relationship to an ultimate power that sustains and stands over against humans and the world."[35]

Gustafson clearly sees a dynamic interplay, then, between natural law constructions of ethics and revelation-centered ethics. Indeed, he argues that both natural law ethics and revelation-based ethics both attempt to determine the qualities and characteristics of "God" or an "ultimate power" and what interactions such an "ultimate power" might have with the world. Indeed, although ethical sources of knowledge are important for Gustafson, so too is an examination of the performance of a moral agent in both fulfilling moral acts and outlining the values and principles governing specific moral behaviors in a normative manner.[36] Here

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[34] *The Contributions of Theology to Medical Ethics. The 1975 Perè Marquette Theology Lecture* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1975): 1-2.

[35] *Ibid.*, 4-5.

[36] *Ibid.*, 13. Again, Gustafson argues that theological ethicists differ from moral philosophers neither in the form of thought or argumentation nor in the substance of arguments. Rather, the theological ethicists'

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Gustafson asserts that Christian theological ethics can contribute quite specifically to non-theological fields (such as medical ethics) in outlining and specifying claims made and defended about God (or an ultimate power), how humans interact with such an ordering power, and what moral inferences might emerge from these theological and anthropological claims.[37] Moreover, Gustafson notes that specific theological claims contribute specific reference points from which one may make moral claims and ethical decisions: "Theology contributes to medical ethics by providing a moral point of view. It provides a theological answer to the question, 'Why be moral?'"[38]

Gustafson's work *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* offers a commanding overview and summary of various approaches to Christian ethics. Indeed, this work serves as a good summary of Gustafson's work on ethical methodology during the 1960s and 1970s. Gustafson proffers here two broad theses that move toward defining a comprehensive theological ethic. First, he contends that coherence within the organizing perspective, analogy, or principle of a theological ethic must unfold such that four "base points" of ethical inquiry relate coherently to one another. These base points include: an understanding and interpretation of God and God's relations to the world and especially human beings; an interpretation of human experience, its meaning, and the historical life of communities in the world; an understanding of persons as moral agents and their acts in freedom and the limits of

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thought is "qualified by his experience of and belief in the reality of God. Thus, his analysis of the necessary conditions for moral activity to occur will move to the theological margins of moral experience, and to the theological grounds of all experience. His indication of normative moral principles and values will be, in some manner, justified by his theology." (14-15)

[37] *Ibid.*, 15. Gustafson cites three conceptual contributions of theology to medical ethics: God's intention for the well-being of creation; God's preserving and sustaining of creation; and the finitude and sinfulness of human creatures over and against this ordering power of God.

[38] *Ibid.*, 25.

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such freedom; and finally, an explication of how persons ought to make moral choices and develop human character. Next, Gustafson states that a rigorous theological ethic offers careful judgments concerning the weight of sources informing Christian ethics. Specifically, how does an ethicist weigh the input of the Christian Scriptures, the Christian tradition, philosophical insights and principles, scientific information and data, and human experience broadly construed? These two theses are crucial in understanding and appropriating Gustafson's ethical methodology for this dissertation.[39]

III. Gustafson's Work on Ecology and Theocentric Ethics in the 1980s and 1990s

Gustafson's *magnum opus* is his two-volume *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective.*[40] In these volumes Gustafson devotes substantial attention to matters relating to ecological ethics including: the proper place of humans in the cosmos;[41] the character of God in relationship to the

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[39] *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospectives for Rapproachment*, 139-141. Although Gustafson argues for a comprehensive theological ethic he has no desire to establish a "fundamental theology." Such an intellectual attempt, according to Gustafson, would give a false sense of historical and conceptual security. Instead, Gustafson fully accepts "finitude" as an essential mark of human beings and theological activity. As such, the character of theological convictions changes and evolves. Moreover, it is important to note that Gustafson's conception of the audience of theological ethics is not the broad "public" as with other scholars in the same field. Indeed, Gustafson argues that theological ethics may persuade some, dialogue with others, and yet will fail to converse with many people.

[40] James M Gustafson, *Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 and 1984). I cannot do justice to the rich, detailed, and subtle nature of this complex work. For an incisive overview and critique of his own work see James Gustafson, "Response," and "Afterword" in *James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments*, editors Harlan Beckley and Charles Swezey (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988): 203-224; 241-254.

[41] See especially *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* 1:88-98; 1:115-128; 1:222-224; 1:281-306; and 2:279-302.

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present world;[42] a careful definition of "nature" and the "natural order;"[43] notions of "intrinsic" value and the value of life;[44] conceptions of human stewardship for the world;[45] participation of humans with other species and the Other;[46] and prospects for hope in surveying ecological matters and the future of the earth.[47] Gustafson filters these discussions through a particular understanding of the "theocentric" character of ethics as grounded both in Christian Reformed understandings of the sovereignty of God and in Stoic philosophical interpretations of ethics.[48]

Gustafson stresses again in *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* that the first question for theological ethics is not "what should I do" but rather the descriptive question "what is going on" in particular historical circumstances.[49] This familiar starting point for Gustafson, though, is merged with an emphasis on the changing and evolutionary character of the world and human beings. Indeed, Gustafson's ethical thought here takes an interesting turn: while he attaches great weight and emphasis to the complete sovereignty of God (as found in much of the Christian Reformation tradition), he undercuts any special divine concern for humanity and human ethical agency by claiming that God is not solely concerned with human well-being and survival. Throughout *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* Gustafson distances his own position from an

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[42] *Ibid.*, 1:129-136; 1:235-251; and 2:319-322.

[43] *Ibid.*, 1:105-106; 1:209-211; 2:7, 2:54-58; and 2:70-71.

[44] *Ibid.*, 1:76; 2:40-41; 2:58; and 2:76-77.

[45] *Ibid.*, 1:101; 2:41; and 2:286-290.

[46] *Ibid.*, 1:129-136; 1:281-325; and 2:279-316.

[47] *Ibid.*, 1:41-42; 1:55; 2:44; and 2:108-109.

[48] Gustafson's stress on Stoic understandings of "responsibility" is complex and varied. For a fuller account of Stoicism and the wide historical understanding associated with Stoic ethics see Marcia Colish's two-volume work on *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985).

[49] Gustafson couples his stress on the historical nature of character-based ethics with a basic "conviction" that Christian theology is a direct reflection on human experience.

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understanding of a specific divine "purpose" or *telos* in the universe toward which humans might orient their actions and purposes. Rather, Gustafson affirms a more evolutionary understanding of the world whereby change is inevitable, but this change has no specific direction or end.[50]

Gustafson's concern throughout this two-volume work is to offer a broadly-oriented "theocentric" ethic. He offers a good working model of theocentric ethics in a chapter directly related to environmental concerns entitled "Population and Nutrition."[51] Here Gustafson tackles these extraordinarily intricate issues and the impacts of each problem as related to environmental matters as a whole. He commences with a theological or religious question: what is God's relationship to the world and particularly to human beings and how might such relations impact thinking about population and nutrition issues? Gustafson minces no words here: "... for large numbers of persons to be subjected to intense suffering and untimely death as a result of powers that bear down upon them, powers insufficient to sustain even their basic biological needs, powers beyond their control and sometimes beyond any human control, is something too easily glossed over both in Christian theology and piety."[52]

Gustafson's exploration of population concerns serves as a microcosm of his attitudes toward both theodicy and toward environmental ethics; he concludes that population concerns should neither be dismissed nor explained away by theological rhetoric which might abstract or

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[50] *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 1:264, 268-273. Gordon Kaufman charges that Gustafson here embraces ecological naturalism while attempting to retain the traditional language of Reformed Christianity in "God." "What can the introduction of the notion of God—conceived in this complete dehumanized and depersonalized way—do for Gustafson that the notion of nature cannot do as well? Is God here any other or more than the structure of natural powers, processes, and events that has brought us into being and within which we live, that is, anything more than what is generally called 'nature'?" (Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" 27).

[51] *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2:219-250.

[52] *Ibid.*, 2:221.

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minimize human suffering. "To presume too facilely in the face of such events that God is for man and cares for each individual, or that while God's will is inscrutable we know that God's chief end is the salvation of man, is religiously seductive and morally numbing. To focus on human disordering is a proper step, but to question whether the divine order cares for, not to mention guarantees, the well-being of man is also legitimate."[53] Gustafson ultimately concludes that there will be places and times where tragic occurrences will upset the delicate balance of population and nutrition equilibriums. In such cases the victims are classically "tragic:" that is, deaths, illness, and destruction will occur for some no matter what is done to aid and abet these victims.

Gustafson argues forcefully throughout *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* that the idea of "ecological ethics" is an oversimplification of larger and almost hopelessly complex physical realities and social structures. As such, a full-scale investigation of a single "environmental issue" is virtually impossible as no one person or institution could possibly explore the physical, social, economic, philosophical, and theological ramifications and its interconnection to other issues. Not surprisingly, therefore, Gustafson balks at offering an ecological ethic from a "theocentric perspective" and instead offers snapshots of ecological issues as framed by particular historical and theological considerations.[54]

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[53] *Ibid.*, 2:221.

[54] A good example of Gustafson's reticence to assign moral blame or to oversimplify moral arguments is evident in a passing observation about corporate business interests and population concerns. "For many persons, and for very vocal segments of the Christian churches in the world, the patterns of international economic relations are deemed to be the most crucial of all in causing poverty, malnutrition, and starvation in parts of the world. The choice of economic institutions is understandable; they have great power to pursue their self-interest; they are subject to collective decisions made by responsible persons and thus can be held morally culpable; they are highly visible in the world and thus make good targets for moral blame. But the tendency toward simplified causal analysis and therefore toward simplified moral responsibility

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Gustafson's most recent ethical work has focused more directly on theological and philosophical considerations of environmental ethics. In his work *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* Gustafson again argues that while humans are intentional and vibrant participants in the order of creation, humanity is not the apex of creation.[55] For Gustafson it is God who is the center and focus of the cosmos: all creaturely life, therefore, should participate in the order of "good" creation and sense the divine ordering of the universe such that the proper feelings of humility, responsibility, and affection are elicited toward this supreme being.[56]

Three distinct ideas for ecological ethics emerge here: the participatory dimension of human activity in and as nature; the multidimensionality of value in human action; and the unavoidable ambiguities that moral actors face in attending to ecological issues. For Gustafson, each of these premises leads one to conclude the following: while God is the ultimate power of the universe, there is no clear overarching *telos* from which humans might discern a "natural" ordering so as to make unambiguous moral choices.[57]

The first premise hinges on the claim of humans and nature as participatory actors and subjects within the order of nature. Gustafson comes to this conclusion after surveying the various "ideal types" categorizing human action as it relates to nature including dominion,

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distorts interpretation in many cases. The outcomes of international economic relations are a mixture of costs and benefits and thus their status is more ambiguous than some Christians assume. For persons and groups who need a personification of evil in the world overly simple causal analysis serves a purpose." (*Ibid.*, 2: 222-223)

[55] James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: the Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994).

[56] Again, one could question Gustafson's usage of traditional theological language at this point.

[57] *Ibid.*, 72.

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stewardship, subordination, and participation. The despotic "dominion" position regards humans as the controller and manipulator of nature for purely utilitarian (or whimsical) ends. As one moves through the typology toward the "participator" type, humans become increasingly sensitive to their interdependence within nature and the ways in which they shape nature. For Gustafson the participator type most clearly evinces the proper sense of gratitude, humility, accountability, and dependence when interacting with nature and God.[58]

Gustafson notes that if humans are active participants in nature, this will inevitably lead to conflicts over axiological claims concerning "nature" itself.[59] Given the welter of current ethical stances regarding humans confronting nature (however "nature" is defined) how should one act? Gustafson here draws again from his mentor H. Richard Niebuhr to show the historical complexity of every moral action and actor: moral actors will always utilize descriptive claims reflecting their own particular value (or values). Thus, value is always "multi-dimensional." This multidimensionality of value inevitably promotes a deep ambiguity when moral actors attempt to make cogent decisions in interacting with nature. "The multidimensionality of value, or values...casts us into ambiguities of choices that are unavoidable. We may be able to define limits beyond which our interventions [in nature] ought not to go, though agreement on these is difficult because different persons or groups value different things in relation to themselves or to the natural world."[60] Thus, even the description of an environmental "crisis" depends largely upon one's own comportment toward nature and one's assessment of the current situation.

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[58] For a complete description of his typology, see *Ibid.*, 79-99.

[59] Axiology (or "value theory") attends to the nature of value and what objects have value and why such objects are valuable. See the entry "Value Theory" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 830-831.

[60] *A Sense of the Divine*, 68.

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Practically speaking, this presses Gustafson into a "common sense ontology" when speaking about the environment and ethics.[61] That is, Gustafson claims that humans are generally concerned about nature and its creatures because all humans have a sense of the divine that triggers an innate piety and reverence for creation. When addressing specific environmental issues such as population growth, Gustafson will argue that the suffering of one human elicits from others a "sense of obligation to persons and communities that are in such straits."[62] From this "common sense" piety one is able to begin making intentional choices in specific situations.

In most situations this "common sense" piety will not provide a single value or moral principle whereby an intentional agent can formulate permanent decisions. Nevertheless, by drawing on this innate sense of the divine, humans are able to commence asking arduous questions regarding God and nature: "What is God enabling and requiring humans being to be and to do in the circumstances in which there is imbalance between nutrition and human population in various parts of the world? How are they to relate themselves and all things in a manner appropriate to their relations to God?"[63]

Gustafson's recent position on ecological issues, therefore, is murky precisely because individual persons offer only tentative descriptions and ethical suggestions at best.[64] Indeed, theocentric ethics might best be described as a classically "tragic" posture: Gustafson rejects a

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[61] Edward Farley dubs this position "commonsense ontology" because of its appeal to non-technical language and its assumed coherence and self-evidence. Edward Farley, "Theocentric Ethics as a Genetic Argument." in *James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments*, ed. by Harlan R. Beckley and Charles M. Swezey (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988): 39-62

[62] *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective:* 2: 219.

[63] *Ibid.*, 2: 249.

[64] Gustafson certainly seems to embrace a more constructive account of the place of Christian ethics in his earlier works. See especially here *Christ and the Moral Life*.

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common notion of "equilibrium" in the cosmos as sentimentality and instead asserts that a certain degree of inherent conflict characterizes life itself. Every intentional choice, no matter how carefully informed, will always involve conflicting claims and values: thus, when humans make specific choices, other forms of life will be reduced in their capacity to flourish. "I don't think life is a zero-sum game. There are some things that grow, but I am firmly convinced that our choices are tragic choices in many instances. To optimally satisfy the interests of certain groups is costly to other groups. These decisions and choices are very hard."[65]

Gustafson's position on environmental issues might best be described by his watchwords for humanity: humility, gratitude, accountability, and dependence on our sense of the divine.[66] If we as human actors properly comport ourselves to this sense—however we are able to discern this—we will approximate more fully the good intended by God.

> We are to relate all things to each other in ways that concur with their relations to God, again, insofar as this can be discerned. But God will be God. As intentional participants we have responsibility, and the destiny of the natural environment and our parts in it is heavily in our hands, but the ultimate destiny of all that exists is beyond our human control.[67]

Gustafson's work on environmental ethics placed alongside recent academic articles on the realities and complexity of moral and ethical dialogue provide helpful methodological

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[65] "Ethical Issues in the Human Future," in *How Humans Adapt: A Biocultural Odyssey*, ed. Donald J. Ortner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983): 515.

[66] See also here James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abindgon Press, 1992). I find Nash's approach similar in that he—like Gustafson—makes very guarded claims about the place of theology and ethics in offering "distinctive" approaches to environmental issues. See also here James A. Nash, "Human Rights and the Environment: New Challenge for Ethics," *Theology and Public Policy* 4 (1992): 42-57; and "Biotic Rights and Human Ecological Responsibilities," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1993): 137-162.

[67] *A Sense of the Divine*, 149.

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guideposts for examining the WCC as an "environmental actor."[68] Gustafson identifies four levels of moral discourse including ethical, prophetic, narrative, and policy oriented approaches. Gustafson sketches here a broad hermeneutic for interpreting moral arguments and argues that an exhaustive understanding of the levels of moral discourse facilitates such interpretation.

Gustafson identifies the first level of moral discourse as the "ethical" form rooted in a critical assessment of reality. Here the ethicist engages in comparison, measurement, and interpretation of data from relevant fields, selecting those materials which she understands most helpful in laying out cogent arguments on a subject matter. This level of discourse orients itself more to the "facts" of a situation, although Gustafson readily acknowledges that this is also an interpretative phase as well.[69]

At the "prophetic" level of discourse Gustafson notes, "Factual matters become charged with moral indignation through the similes and metaphors used."[70] Prophetic discourse pursues different questions: rather than addressing the suitability or morality of an argument, it becomes more personalized in the sense of "what is the meaning and significance of these proposed actions or situations?" Thus, utopian forms of prophetic discourse arouse in readers the hopes and vision of a profound alteration in societal practices at some level. Gustafson offers the example of Joseph Fletcher's work, *The Ethics of Genetic Control: Ending Reproductive Roulette.* Implicit in this title is the possibility that somehow the imbroglio of genetic issues related to reproductive matters might be "ended." As Gustafson notes, this utopian hope offers a tangible incentive to work toward the bettering of human societies in general. Gustafson assigns

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[68] *Intersections: Science, Theology, and Ethics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1996): 35-55.

[69] *Ibid.*, 37-41.

[70] *Ibid.*, 44.

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clear value to prophetic discourse in that moral indignation is related at an experiential level. The scope of prophetic inquiry is larger than the more limited ethical level of discourse: indeed, the ken of prophetic discourse extends beyond immediate ethical discourse to more profound issues affecting the whole of humanity.[71]

Gustafson identifies "narrative discourse" as a third level of moral discourse. The move to narrative discourse in ethics signifies the recommendation of authors to use specifically religious ethical language in conversations regarding ethics. Gustafson here cites the work of Stanley Hauerwas as a salient example of how narrative theological ethics might be approached. The central themes of Hauerwas' "narrative discourse" include the canon of a religious community, the moral ethos and character of those shaped within this community, and the distinctive language and performance (e.g. liturgy) in shaping persons formed in such communities.[72] According to Gustafson, narrative discourse provides grounding in traditional theological language and concepts and at the same time provides a specific kind of formation for people within such discourse. Yet, narrative discourse often lacks a formal "argument" whereby interlocutors from outside this language community might readily assess and interact with it on an extended basis.[73]

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[71] *Ibid.*, 47.

[72] *Ibid.*, 49. See here Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

[73] Gustafson acknowledges the value of narrative discourse (or "post-liberal theology") in Christian ethics but also offers challenging criticisms regarding its scope and its historical assumptions. See here Gustafson's article "Just What Is 'Postliberal' Theology?" *The Christian Century* 116 (1999): 353-355. "'Postliberal' Christian thought and religious life might be simply an avoidance of the questions, not answers to them, that a Troeltschian 'liberal' Christianity asked." (355)

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Finally, moral conversations often move toward a form of "policy discourse" usually engaging a multidisciplinary approach, combining the resources of ethical discourse, sociology, political science, economics, etc. Gustafson stresses that policy discourse most often arises from within institutions asking questions concerning the possibilities, interests, institutional economics, and arrangements necessary for the discourse to become reality. Moreover, policy discourse is more generalized than ethical discourse, relying on the collaborative efforts of persons in institutions or communities to provide vision for future trajectories on moral matters.[74] Here policy discourse has the advantage of moving persons of differing religious or cultural backgrounds toward similar outcomes and results on specific moral issues.

Gustafson's work in the 1980s and 1990s on theological ethics and ethical methodology was shaped largely by his engagement with both the natural sciences and environmental issues. His conclusions regarding evolution, nature, and the changing order of the world vis-à-vis both historical human communities and the ways in which these communities interact with the "natural world" are much more intricate than his work on ethical methodology from the 1960s and 1970s.

IV. Ethical Conversations and Engagements: Gustafson's Work as a Resource for Assessing Ecological Issues in the World Council of Churches

Gustafson's work covers such a wide range of disciplines and ethical territory that many difficulties arise in distilling his corpus into a methodological matrix whereby one can measure and evaluate an institution such as the WCC against his work. What I offer in this section, therefore, is not a comprehensive overview of Gustafson's methodological approach but rather a

[74] *Intersections: Science, Theology, and Ethics*, 52-55.

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selective matrix drawing from Gustafson's ethical insights to construct a map by which I might assess the WCC's work on environmental ethics.[75]

I divide Gustafson's work on ethical methodology into four distinct but interrelated sections pertaining to environmental concerns.[76] These sections include investigations into concerns stemming from theology, philosophy, the social sciences, and the natural sciences in constructing an ethical method relevant to environmental matters.

In the theological realm it is appropriate to address the WCC's understanding of God and God's relations to the world. Specifically, how has the WCC attended to ecological problems given its own commitment to a Christian, Trinitarian account of divine activity and interaction with the world? In addition, does the WCC move beyond an anthropocentric caricature of divine action and if so, what sources and symbols enable it to do this. In the arena of theological anthropology it is appropriate to ask what place the human creature assumes in the practice of environmental ethics. Does the human person practice "stewardship" for the earth or does the WCC employ other metaphors in sketching such actions?

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[75] I also draw extensively from the work of Holmes Rolston III in organizing Gustafson's work. Rolston teaches philosophy at Colorado State University and has emerged as a major voice in theological and philosophical conversation in environmental ethics. His work includes careful explication of most major terms associated with environmental ethics (e.g., duty, intrinsic value, natural history, evolution, sentient life, etc.). Rolston's major works on environmental ethics include: *Philosophy Gone Wild: Essays in Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1986); *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); *Biology, Ethics, and the Origins of Life* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 1995); *Genes, Genesis, and God: Values and Their Origins in Natural and Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[76] I recognize Gustafson's own self-organizing principles with regard to ethical methodology, especially his "base points" for Christian ethics and his call for an organizing metaphor. The grid I offer is an attempt to tailor Gustafson's work toward the purposes of this dissertation. See here *Ethics from a Theocentric* Perspective 2: 143-144.

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The primary philosophical questions Gustafson poses pertain to issues of "value" and how persons or institutions construct a hierarchy of value or values within an ecological setting. Gustafson's philosophical interests spark the following queries: does the WCC admit that a multidimensionality of values is present in every ecological habitat? Does the WCC embrace the possibility that genuine moral dilemmas in such ecological habitats may exist? Does the WCC admit that philosophical principles for value ordering are contingently ordered and therefore of limited use in assisting humans in ranking ecological values? Moreover, what criteria does the WCC employ in moving toward a non-anthropocentric understanding of the human person and human action? How does the WCC rank the worth and "value" of that which is non-human? Such questions are crucial aspects of this methodology in pressing the WCC to fuller accounts of its positions.

Gustafson's interactions with the social sciences also elicit questions here: does the WCC accurately sketch the historical and institutional realities of environmental issues in its work? Does the WCC offer a self-critique in terms of the power dynamics of institutional realities attending to ecological matters? Moreover, does the WCC see itself as a community of moral discourse situated historically, economically, and within present power structures? If so, how? What kinds of social scientific frameworks does the WCC employ in order to interpret the WCC and how does this influence their assessments?

Finally, Gustafson's ethical methodology demands that questions from the natural sciences be entertained. Perhaps the most pertinent question is how the natural sciences inform Christian ethics and its understanding of the world as whole. Does the WCC as an institution carefully engage the natural sciences such that its understanding of the world and its processes grows and becomes more complex? Does the WCC have a careful and

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variegated understanding of evolution and the commitments that such a scientific methodology entails? Does the WCC take seriously the interdependence of all life and the ways in which these processes play out in an evolutionary manner? Can the WCC present notions of ecological "cause and effect" such that its criticisms concerning ecological damage are carefully and accurately presented? These questions posed by Gustafson in interrelated fields provide a good starting point for examining the WCC on ecological matters.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview and distillation of Gustafson's work on ethical methodology that will assist in reading the work of the WCC on environmental issues in a coherent manner. While not providing a systematic overview of the environmental issues as addressed by the WCC, I believe that such a matrix affords the reader a manageable evaluation of the work of the WCC.

In chapters two and three I will engage the WCC's work in a historical manner. Chapter two covers the WCC's environmental work between the years 1966 and 1991 while chapter three attends to the years 1991 to 1998. At the end of each chapter I employ the ethical matrix constructed from the work of Gustafson in questioning the WCC as an institutional actor involved in environmental issues.

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CHAPTER TWO

Justice, Peace and Creation: The Historical Context of Environmental Issues in the World Council of Churches, 1966 to 1991

> ...the churches, in solidarity with all people of good will, are called to make manifest God's justice for humanity and creation, and to struggle for the transformation of the powers that hold both in bondage. We are painfully aware that we are party to these destructive powers. Yet, we are summoned to witness to the victory of Christ and the freedom from every form of death that he has won for us and the whole creation. That victory invites our active hope for a new day and a new order of things, when all creation is integrated, and every creature lives in joyful community with every other creature.[1]

On April 26, 1986, a massive radioactive dust cloud erupted from the nuclear cooling plants in Chernobyl, Ukraine. Scientific teams estimated 100 to 150 million curies of radiation were released into the atmosphere before emergency workers quelled the reactor fires. The radioactive dust drifted hundreds of miles registering radioactivity in Ukraine, Belorussia, Poland, Sweden, and eventually Russia. Many cities within the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Russia were directly contaminated by the Chernobyl accident forcing the evacuation and relocation of nearly 200,000 people in these regions.[2] Clearly, the Chernobyl accident profoundly altered the eco-systems of both surrounding and

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[1] International Consultation on the Integrity of Creation, Granvollen, Norway, 1988, in Ulrich Schmitthenner, ed. *Contributions of Churches and Civil Society to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: A Compendium* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999), CD-ROM under "Granvollen Statements."

[2] CD ROM under "Chernobyl'," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2000.*

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distant regions and affected the ways in which scientists would approach nuclear energy and its operations in the future.

Profound religious implications emerged from the Chernobyl accident as well. Indeed, the Chernobyl accident manifested the threat of a global environmental disaster so often foretold by prophetic voices within religious communities in the 1970s and early 1980s. The WCC was a dynamic player in these prophetic warnings, presaging the apocalyptic horrors that such a nuclear accident would wreak. With the Chernobyl incident, these prophetic utterances became a frightening reality: after Chernobyl, the question for international ecumenical organizations such as the WCC was no longer how to prophesy about such environmental possibilities but rather how to proceed in formulating a concrete environmental ethic in the wake of such realities.[3]

The Chernobyl disaster provided a good example of how the WCC would struggle between 1966 and 1991 with the profound difficulties associated with the theoretical and concrete realities of environmental issues. This chapter supplies a map of the WCC's work between 1966 and 1991 in order to examine its emerging assumptions and strategies with regard to environmental issues. Indeed, the WCC's work on environmental matters has a long and variegated institutional and theological history. This historical map is necessary as it supplies the reader with an understanding of the progressive development and multiple detours regarding environmental thinking in the WCC. Moreover, such a history sketches the institutional commitments and inextricable

[3] The Chernobyl disaster is obviously in the background of the WCC's work at the "Inter-Orthodox Consultation" in 1987. See here the World Council of Churches, "Inter-Orthodox Consultation. Sofia, Bulgaria, October 24-November 2, 1987 [Sponsored by JPIC]," JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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links that the WCC has intentionally forged between justice, peace, and ecological issues.[4]

What follows, therefore, is a sketch of the WCC's institutional efforts regarding environmental issues between 1966 and 1991, not a full historical overview. Many scholars have charted the dramatic changes in the WCC's social ethics during this period, highlighting the WCC's expansion from a strict "vertical ecumenism" rooted in ecumenical confessional statements to a "horizontal ecumenism" grounded in social justice concerns.[5] These forays into new ecumenical emphases resulted in profound shifts in the WCC's institutional programs, eventually culminating in the formation of vibrant

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[4] The WCC often employs the language of "creation issues" to speak of environmental or ecological ethics in a non-technical manner. Some scholars offer distinctions between the terms "ecology," "environment," "earth," or "creation" in detailing specific ethical visions. Larry Rasmussen, for instance, insists on speaking of the "crisis of the earth" as a more accurate description than "environmental crisis." *Earth Community: Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996). For the purposes of this work, I will utilize the terms "creation issues," "environmental issues" and "ecological issues" interchangeably. Likewise, I will use "environmental ethics" and "ecological ethics" synonymously although clearly there is debate on the appropriate usage of such terms. For a good discussion of "environmental ethics" see Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988): 160-191. See also Andrew Brennan's overview of "Environmental Ethics" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (New York: Routledge, 1998): 333-336.

[5] For the best overviews, see Geraldine S. Smyth, *A Way of Transformation: A Theological Evaluation of the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, World Council of Churches, 1983-1991* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995); Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, trans. by Tony Coates (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1991); John C. Bennett, "Breakthrough in Ecumenical Social Ethics: The Legacy of the Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State (1937)," *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 132-146; and Ans Joachim van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995).

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and sometimes controversial social programs.[6] This chapter provides an overview of those meetings, consultations, and institutional developments within the WCC between the years 1966 to 1991 that profoundly affected the WCC's trajectories on issues pertaining to ecology.

In this chapter I chart the historical contours of the WCC's environmental ethic starting with the Geneva 1966 World Conference on Church and Society. Subsequently, I explore the environmental efforts of the WCC during the years demarcated by the WCC's General Assemblies: Uppsala 1968 to Nairobi 1975, Nairobi 1975 to Vancouver 1983, and Vancouver 1983 to Canberra 1991. In the final section I offer specific assessments and published critiques of the WCC's work during this period, utilizing the matrix established in the previous chapter. Thus, pertinent questions from theology, the social sciences, philosophy, and the natural sciences are introduced to test and probe the WCC's institutional environmental work during this period.

In the conclusion I propose that the WCC's institutionalization of particular theological themes from 1966 through 1991 demands closer attention when speaking of the WCC's "environmental ethic" (or even of its "social ethic") during this period. I argue here that during these years the WCC institutionalized particular theological themes including the redefining of ecumenism to include the whole "oikos," or household of the earth; the reality of Christians facing neighbors as an "other" in both dialogue and solidarity; and finally the attempt to practice theology and social ethics embracing a fuller understanding of the work of the Spirit. These theological themes and emphases, I

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[6] See Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*. Raiser argues persuasively for the notion of a "paradigm shift," highlighting both the continuity within ecumenical method and the profound changes that have occurred over the past fifty years in the WCC's institutional direction and emphasis.

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contend, greatly shaped the WCC's institutional work on environmental matters from 1966 to 1991.[7]

I. From the "Responsible Society" to the World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva 1966

The earliest institutional actions of the WCC manifested its commitments to both confessional theology and to a theologically astute social ethic. Indeed the earliest work of the WCC adopted the language of theological ethics moving toward a "responsible society:" this phrase represented the WCC's emphasis on both personal and collective responsible action within the confines of modern society. The WCC's Amsterdam 1948 General Assembly asserted that: "Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour. Any tendencies in state and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and his

[7] An interesting question here is the exact nature of "ecumenical theology" or "ecumenism." In her recent work *Method in Ecumenical Theology: The Lessons So Far,* Gillian Rosemary Evans notes that ecumenical theology necessarily includes collaboration under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the absolute respect for the ecclesial being of other communities, and the non-adversarial or non-polemical attitudes of ecumenical methodology. *Method in Ecumenical Theology: The Lessons So Far* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 23-24. Evans' work represents a vibrant explication of the "faith and order" methodology in ecumenical circles but does not address the "life and work" aspects of 20th century ecumenical thought. Evans' criterion for "ecumenical theology" is that theological discussion emerges from churches together in an intentional, deliberate manner in order to proclaim anew their faith in Jesus Christ. Although these parameters certainly aid formal theological discussions and dialogue of ecumenism within an intra-Christian environment, they hardly map the boundaries of the WCC's dynamic institutional ecumenism in the latter part of the 20th century. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will utilize the term "institutional ecumenism" for the WCC's actual institutional commitments in formulating insights and taking concrete positions on issues of social ethics.

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work of salvation."[8] Moreover, the Amsterdam Assembly contended that such a society entailed: "the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and for the people whose welfare is affected by it."[9] Such a conception of society highlighted both the proactive capabilities of individual persons and the limited role accorded to the modern nation-state.[10]

By the mid 1950s WCC theologians and working groups challenged this notion of a "responsible society." Indeed, the WCC's commitments to a "responsible society" were now seen as inadequate in the face of enduring wars and regional violence, issues of postcolonial economic development, and an emerging consciousness condemning racism throughout the world.[11] The WCC's institutional trajectory was altered greatly by its own institutional study of "Rapid Social Change" from 1955 to 1960, which surveyed postcolonialism, industrialization, urban developments, rural and village life, and the impact of Western civilization on the world. These WCC surveys engaged international, regional, and local consultants in attempts to amass a wide variety of voices in the

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[8] World Council of Churches, *The Amsterdam Assembly Series: Man's Disorder and God's Design* (New York: Harper & Brothers, n.d.): 77.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Ans Joachim van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought*, 58-63. See also Darril Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). Hudson's insightful work provides an important overview of both the early work of the pre-WCC ecumenical movement and subsequent WCC work (1938-1967) on social issues.

[11] Ans Joachim van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought*, 23-26. Other important surveys of the WCC's early social ethics include: Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956); and Charles C. West, "The Obsolescence of History," *The Ecumenical Review* 17 (1965): 1-17.

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process of understanding contemporary realities in social ethics.[12] Perhaps the most striking aspect of these studies was its reliance on an inductive methodology—that is, research conducted at local levels providing detailed descriptions of problems confronting specific geographical areas.

Equipped with these detailed institutional studies, the WCC's Geneva 1966 World Conference on Church and Society addressed for the first time the specific interplay between the multifaceted social issues of justice, peace, and environmental concerns.[13] The preparatory papers and conference proceedings for this convocation entertained a remarkable array of arguments from persons of diverse faiths, technical specialties, and geographical regions.[14] Indeed, many consider the Geneva 1966 World Conference a

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[12] For details of the "Study on Rapid Social Change" see Paul Abrecht, *The Churches and Rapid Social Change* (New York: Doubleday, 1961); and Egbert de Vries, *Man in Rapid Social Change* (London: SCM Press, 1961).

[13] Ronald Preston argues that the Geneva 1966 conference constituted a major shift in ecumenical ethics because efforts were made to continue earlier accounts of social ethics, especially those of the Oxford 1937 conference while also incorporating important new influences including: a truly global representation on development issues; the high visibility and participation of the Orthodox Churches; the Roman Catholic participation in and critical role in formatting the conference; and the strong presence of laity at the conference. Ronald H. Preston, ed., *Technology and Social Justice: An International Symposium on the Social and Economic Teaching of the World Council of Churches From Geneva 1966 to Uppsala 1968* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971): 15-17. For other reactions to the Geneva 1966 World Conference see Paul Abrecht, "Report: Responses to the World Conference on Church and Society 1966," *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 445-463.

[14] The four preparatory volumes for the Geneva 1966 World Conference were: John C. Bennett, *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World: An Ecumenical Theological Inquiry* (London and New York: SCM and Association Press, 1966); Z. K. Matthews, *Responsible Government in a Revolutionary Age* (London: SCM Press, 1966); Denys Munby, *Economic Growth in World Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1966); and Egbert de Vries, *Man in Community: Christian Concern for the Human in Changing Society* (London: SCM Press, 1966). The Geneva 1966 World Conference proceedings are found in: World Council of

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watershed moment in WCC history. First, the participation of persons from other living religious faiths and ideologies opened the way toward a fuller understanding of pluralism and religious anthropology.[15] The desperate social and political situations in specific regional contexts also sparked vigorous debates about the nature of revolutionary movements and Christian participation in such movements. Moreover, the vague notions of a "responsible society" that the WCC had previously forwarded were challenged at Geneva by more specific recommendations delineating the historical and geographical content of both "justice" and "peace."

> As Christians, we are committed to working for the transformation of society. In the past, we have usually done this through quiet efforts at social renewal, working in and through the established institutions according to their rules. Today, a significant number of those who are dedicated to the service of Christ and their neighbour assume a more radical or revolutionary position.... At the present moment, it is important for us to recognize that this radical position has a solid foundation in Christian tradition and should have its right place in the life of the Church and in the ongoing discussion of social responsibility.[16]

Churches, *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolution of Our Time. World Conference on Church and Society. Geneva, July 12-26, 1966* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967).

[15] See here J. H. Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion: The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality Between 1967 and 1979* (Utrech-Leiden: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1994).

[16] World Council of Churches, *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolution of Our Time. World Conference on Church and Society. Geneva, July 12-26, 1966*, 49. For a critical assessment of the Geneva 1966 World Conference see Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church? A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1967). Ramsey contended that ecumenical social ethics at Geneva 1966 amounted to little more than facile attempts at incomplete public policy pronouncements. Moreover, he maintained that the conference represented "only itself; it could not speak *for* the church or *for* the churches."(30) More sympathetic (and detailed) interpretations of the Geneva 1966 World Conference are found in Ronald H. Preston, ed., *Technology and Social Justice: An International Symposium on the Social and Economic Teaching of the World Council of Churches From Geneva 1966 to Uppsala 1968.* See here Preston's own contribution to this volume, "A Breakthrough in Ecumenical Social Ethics" which responded to Ramsey's concerns and sketched the working process of the

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These advances at Geneva in the area of social ethics continued in subsequent years. In 1968 the WCC's consultation on "Theological Issues of Church and Society" at Zagorsk, USSR, worked specifically to outline the meaning of "inductive" and "deductive" ethics, terms that had emerged in the WCC's quest for a cogent methodology for social ethics. Briefly, the Zagorsk consultation concluded that deductive methods offered broad and generalized approaches to historical problems based on insights or concepts gleaned from biblical sources and natural law. Inductive methods, in comparison, attempted to explicate God's action for a specific historical context. The Zagorsk consultation noted that these differing approaches afforded ecumenical social ethics a dialectical process by which it might address social problems of the day.

> Cannot our theological understanding be both confronted with, and transmitted through, the analysis of the human sciences as well as our contemporary experience of human reality? Such a method of dialectical interaction would aim at both obedience to the Word of God and relevance to the concrete problems actually faced by men today.[17]

This ethical methodology revealed the internal institutional struggles of WCC working groups in their attempts to embrace more historically concrete and inductive methodologies.[18]

1966 Geneva ecumenical conference. (15-40) For other important responses to Ramsey see, D. L. Munby, "Book Review of *Who Speaks for the Church*," *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 97-98 and James M. Gustafson, "Book Review of *Who Speaks for the Church?*" *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 98-100. Other critical evaluations of the Geneva 1966 conference are found in Trutz Rendtorff and Heinz E. Tödt, *Theologie der Revolution: Analysen und Materialen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).

[17] As quoted in Ans Joachim van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought*, 33.

[18] A thorough study of this period is found in Karl-Heinz Dejung, *Die ökumenische Bewegung im Entwicklungskonflikt, 1910-1968* (Stuttgart and Munich: Ernst Klett Verlag and Kösel-Verlag, 1973).

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II. Encountering New Neighbors: The WCC from the Uppsala 1968 General Assembly to the Nairobi 1975 General Assembly

The official report of the WCC's Uppsala 1968 General Assembly largely embraced the burgeoning ethical trajectories of the Geneva 1966 World Convocation.[19] In subsequent years, the WCC struggled to delineate what social issues were most urgent as it embraced "inductive methodology" or "horizontal ecumenism."[20] Three prominent issues surfaced between the WCC's General Assemblies of Uppsala 1968 and Nairobi 1975 that significantly altered the trajectory of the WCC's thinking in the realm of social and environmental ethics: the realities of racism, the necessity of dialogue with persons of non-Christian faiths and ideologies, and the gravity of economic and developmental issues throughout the world.

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[19] Careful assessments of the WCC's General Assembly at Uppsala 1968 include: Robert McAfee Brown, "Uppsala: An Informal Report," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 5 (1968): 633-660; Harold Fey, *Life New Style. How the Hope for a New Style of Life for Humanity Was Advanced by the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Meeting in Uppsala, Sweden, July 4-20, 1968* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1968); Norman Goodall, ed., *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Uppsala July 4-20, 1968* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968); Thomas Hopko, "Uppsala 1968," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 12 (1968): 125-141; and M. M. Thomas, "Uppsala 1968 and the Contemporary Theological Situation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 41-50.

[20] Again, "horizontal ecumenism" marked a shift of ecumenical social ethics whereby less emphasis was placed upon confessional unity among churches and more weight was placed upon concrete acts of solidarity with Christians and non-Christians. See here Hendrikus Berkhof, "Re-Opening the Dialogue With the 'Horizontalists,'" *The Ecumenical Review* 21 (1969): 289-298. For the tensions that the "horizontal ecumenism" caused in the WCC as an institution see Vasil T. Istavridis, "The Ecumenicity of Orthodoxy," *The Ecumenical Review* 29 (1977): 182-195; Paul A. Stauffer, "The Meaning of Humanization: An Emerging Understanding of Man in World Council of Churches Discussions, 1965-1970" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1972).

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In 1969 the WCC's Central Committee met at Canterbury, England, and established the WCC's Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism.[21] The Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism soon became the most visible and controversial working program within the WCC as token monetary grants were offered to various Christian and non-Christian humanitarian groups throughout the world.[22] The creation of this working program marked an important theoretical shift for the WCC's social ethics. Broadly speaking, previous ecumenical social action had stressed "responsible" participation in a range of social and civic entities. Thus, the WCC often released press statements regarding the "sinfulness" of specific social structures or practices. Concrete action, however, to reform such societal structures was often done quietly or not at all. The Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism focused both on the societal dimensions of

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[21] World Council of Churches, "An Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism," *The Ecumenical Review* 21 (1969): 348-352.

[22] The institutional presence of the PCR within the WCC sparked many controversies concerning violence and its uses in the Christian tradition. Many of the PCR grants were distributed to "revolutionary groups" in politically turbulent countries. These grants were initiated by the Executive Committee of the WCC at its meeting held in Arnoldshain, Germany in September 1970. The WCC's Central Committee meeting in Addis Ababa in January 1971 upheld the PCR grants by the Executive Committee (although the Executive Committee did receive an informal rebuke for its impetuous actions). See Anon., "Survey of Press Comments: Reactions to the Fourth Assembly [Uppsala, 1968]," *The Ecumenical Review* 21 (1969): 32-54; Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, "Committed to Fellowship: A Letter to the Churches [Utrecht, Netherlands, August 1972]," *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (1972): 474-478; World Council of Churches, Programme to Combat Racism, "Programme to Combat Racism: 1970-1973. A Background Paper Presented to the Central Committee, August 1973 [Geneva]," *The Ecumenical Review* 25 (1973): 513-519; Elisabeth Adler, *A Small Beginning: An Assessment of the First Five Years of the Programme to Combat Racism* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974); World Council of Churches, "Special Fund Grant to the Patriotic Front," *The Ecumenical Review* 30 (1978): 380-382; Ans Joachim van der Bent, "Logs in Our Eyes: The Struggle of the Ecumenical Movement Against Racism," *The Ecumenical Review* 32 (1980): 166-178.

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structural sin and on the possibilities of concrete social liberation for persons caught in those structures.

The WCC's "liberationist" social ethic represented a theological advance on many fronts. The shift away from the language of "responsibility" enabled the WCC to attend critically to specific institutions and societal structures by delineating actions and statements appropriate to concrete historical and political situations. This focus on an inductive approach—on specific, local action and expertise—moved the WCC away from intentionally vague "middle axioms" or "responsible societies" which intended to offer general guidance, but not specific historical ethical instructions. Moreover, the WCC's liberationist paradigm concentrated the WCC's attention on the complexity of "non-theological factors" in ecumenical institutions especially the political and economic realities of a given situation. These moves shaped the WCC's vision in critical ways and served as a precursor to the environmental ethics proposed by the WCC's later ethical work during the 1980s and 1990s.[23]

The WCC's ethical vision also expanded during this period as a result of its official "Dialogue with People of Other Living Faiths and Ideologies." The notion of "dialogue" signified an active commitment by the WCC to recognize the work of God

[23] "The Programme to Combat Racism has sparked off vivid controversies. Yet over three years now we can see that, provided people study the evidence open-mindedly and are prepared to listen to one another, such controversy may serve rather than hinder the common commitment. Further, we are increasingly realizing just how bound many of us are to particular traditions and particular cultures which stand in the way of genuine openness to our neighbour." (World Council of Churches, Programme to Combat Racism, "Programme to Combat Racism: 1970-1973. A Background Paper Presented to the Central Committee, August 1973 [Geneva]," 475). The Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism, although controversial, solidified important ethical assumptions in the WCC's work: the intelligibility of human "rights," the notion of "solidarity" with one's neighbors, and the active resistance of institutionalized racist structures.

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outside of the Christian churches and Christian communities.[24] Indeed, the dialogues facilitated by the WCC during this time moved toward affirming the work of God through the Holy Spirit in non-Christian settings.

The rationale for such dialogue had roots in two ethical assumptions. Again, the WCC had concluded since the mid-1960s that Christian ecumenism entailed not only the fellowship of churches, but also the solidarity of humans standing beside other humans.[25] Solidarity demanded participation and interaction with all people—not just with Christians—and therefore required the WCC to establish closer working relationships with non-Christian peoples throughout the world.[26] Moreover, the concept of dialogue

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[24] As the official WCC report states: "The concern deals with *people*, not with religions or ideologies as systems. It is not discussion *about*, but dialogue *with* the partners. It recognizes that there are responses other than Christian to the mystery of human existence. It is more open to others but not less committed to Christ. It is less aggressive and more humble. These new approaches reflect theological virtues, not opportunistic attitudes." David Johnson, *Uppsala to Nairobi* (New York and Geneva: Friendship Press and World Council of Churches, 1975): 98-99.

[25] For an overview of the WCC's early consultations of the Dialogue with People of Other Living Faiths and Ideologies, see: Carl Hallencreutz, *New Approaches to Men of Other Faiths—1938-1968—A Theological Discussion* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970); Stanley Samartha, "The World Council of Churches and Men of Other Faiths and Ideologies," *The Ecumenical Review* 22 (1970): 190-198; Stanley Samartha, *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths. Papers Presented at a Consultation Held at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, March 1970* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971); Stanley Samartha, "Dialogue: Significant Issues in the Continuing Debate," *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (1972): 325-340; World Council of Churches, *Dialogue in Community: Statement and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977); World Council of Churches, *Guidelines on Dialogue With People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979); and J. H. Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion: The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality Between 1967 and 1979.*

[26] For a good definition of "solidarity" in the WCC's thinking, see World Council of Churches, "Report of the General Secretary to the Central Committee: Enugu, Nigeria, January 1965," *The Ecumenical Review* 17 (1965): 165-171. It is interesting that the notion of solidarity developed at such an early stage in the

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had deep roots in the theological understanding of the work the Holy Spirit throughout all of creation. Ecumenical theologians thus concluded that dialogue was a necessary component in understanding the work of the Holy Spirit outside the confines of the Christian churches.[27]

All of these issues significantly shaped the WCC's institutional reordering in 1972 toward a vision more closely aligned with "horizontal ecumenism." The WCC's General Secretary Eugene Carson Blake (1966 through 1972) noted that the divisions

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WCC's history—that is, before the popularization of liberation theologies and notions of "praxis." This notion of "solidarity" certainly received some shape and form from the WCC's interactions with the Roman Catholic Church and "The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*) of Vatican II. "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.... That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history." *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. by Austin Flannery (Northport, New York/Dublin, Ireland: Costello Publishing Company/Dominican Publications: 1996): 163.

[27] See here Georges Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World—The Economy of the Holy Spirit," *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 118-128. Significant tension between WCC staff members, WCC member churches, and individual theological ethicists emerged concerning these changes in WCC theological and ethical priorities. For detail on these tensions, see the conversations from the Faith and Order meetings on "The Unity of the Churches and the Unity of Mankind" at Louvain, Belgium in August 1971. At Louvain, many opposition views to the WCC's turn to "solidarity" and "secular anthropology" were voiced clearly. John Meyendorff's invective concerning the influence of "secular" anthropology upon the WCC as an institution proved largely unhelpful because of his overgeneralizations concerning the "thin" theological character of the WCC's work. Meyendorff did provide incisive comments concerning the need for the WCC to move away from associating ecumenical unity with secular political power and social change. Meyendorff urged the WCC to focus Christian unity grounded in specifically Christian practices and ideas. José Míguez Bonino's perspectives at Louvain on social ethics summarized many non-European voices on these issues. The increasing prominence of Central and South American, African, Asian, and Oceanic voices within the WCC became a trademark of ecumenical conversations during this period. See here John Meyendorff, "Unity of the Church—Unity of Mankind," *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (1972): 30-46; and José Míguez Bonino, "Comments on 'Unity of the Church—Unity of Mankind' [by John Meyendorff]," *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (1972): 47-50.

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between various WCC working units (e.g. Faith and Order, Church and Society) had constituted a *de facto* division in the mission of the WCC:

> During the years since the Uppsala Assembly when we have been struggling with the new structure of the World Council of Churches, there was one conviction that became finally decisive to those who were directly involved in the restructuring of Faith and Order, namely that the work of the World Council of Churches is essentially one interdependent work. This conviction resulted in the Structure Committee refusing (in the new structure) to continue any programme *divisions*. The new parts became programme *units*. There was a further tendency to move away from an emphasis on separate discrete departments or secretariats toward more flexible ad hoc sub-units of programme. Furthermore, it became very clear that horizontal co-ordination within the new programme units had clearly to be complemented by horizontal co-ordination of the work between and among the programme units.[28]

Blake clarified that the shifting anthropological and ethical vision of the WCC was not simply a result of "humanistic secularism" or bureaucratic manipulation: rather, the restructuring of the WCC reflected a concrete commitment to solidarity with oppressed peoples, especially in promoting a holistic vision of justice and peace.[29]

The WCC's struggles with racism and pluralism during the early 1970s were compounded by the emerging complexities of economic development and environmental degradation. Theologians such as Ernst Lange challenged the WCC to examine impending economic and environmental disasters as an ecumenical issue: "What we experience is a Christian world and mankind faced with a threat to their very existence...What we experience is the choice confronting the Christian world and mankind, the choice between seeing the future as man's responsibility, the responsibility

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[28] Eugene Carson Blake, "General Secretary's Louvain Address," *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (1972): 26.

[29] The Central Committee Meeting at Utrecht, Netherlands in August 1972 defined the WCC's institutional structure by delineating three program units: Faith and Witness; Justice and Service; and Education and Communication.

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of all men, and acting accordingly, or else perishing."[30] Within the institutional confines of the WCC, interdisciplinary work slowly evolved to address these complex issues of economic, political, and environmental concerns. As early as 1968, the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church jointly published a seminal paper on "World Development. The Challenge to the Churches" on the interrelationship of these matters.[31] Moreover, the WCC approved the formation of a Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development Programme to attend to these matters specifically within the WCC.

Environmental issues only gradually emerged as a central concern in these WCC conversations. In 1972, the United Nations sponsored a Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm generating vigorous debate on ecological issues. The WCC forwarded its comments on issues of population, renewable resources, pollution, and other environmental concerns to the United Nations in an attempt to contribute constructively to this process. Usually, however, ecological concerns in the WCC arose only when wedded to specific abuses of human rights.[32] For instance, the WCC's Church

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[30] Ernst Lange, "The Malaise in the Ecumenical Movement: Notes on the Present Situation," *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 3.

[31] *World Development. The Challenge to the Churches. The Conference on World Cooperation for Development, Beirut, Lebanon, April 21-27, 1968. Sponsored by the Exploratory Committee on Society Development and Peace. The Official Report Ot the WCC and the Pontifical Commision Justice and Peace* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968). This document commenced the official beginning of the Committee on Society, Development and Peace (known as SODEPAX)—an official working committee sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. During the 1970s, SODEPAX addressed the overlapping issues of justice, peace, and creation concerns in the context of economic development in the poorest countries of the world.

[32] Lukas Vischer, "The Activities of the Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches 1965-1969," *The Ecumenical Review* 22 (1970): 36-69. A good summary of the WCC's position on these matters is found in Ernest A. Payne, "Violence, Non-Violence and Human

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and Society Consultations at Cardiff, Wales, in September 1972 addressed issues of "Global Environment: Limits to Growth and Distributive Justice" as well as "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice." Indeed, it is clear from these consultation proceedings that issues pertaining to peace and human rights took precedence over matters of environmental degradation.[33]

The WCC's Church and Society meetings in 1974 at Bucharest and in 1975 at Mexico City attended more extensively to environmental concerns in response to a heightened awareness of the capabilities of science and technologies in altering "natural" environments. At Bucharest the WCC introduced the term "sustainable development" to speak of economic development with an environmentally conscious turn. Although "sustainable" was still not fully defined here, it would become an important contribution to future ecumenical and international political consultations.[34]

The efforts of Philip Potter, the WCC General Secretary during this time (1972 through 1984), also contributed significantly to this emerging shift toward environmental

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Rights," *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 222-236. "The Christian must try to minimize, not maximize, violence, but in the actual situations today in South Africa and South America, the only hope of doing this would seem to be to stand beside the oppressed and the exploited and to encourage them in their efforts for greater justice, to restrain them from excesses that would damage their cause and at the same time to give no respite to those in power." (236)

[33] For a good critique and summary of the WCC's early environmental work see: Charles Birch, "Three Facts, Eight Fallacies and Three Axioms About Population and Environment," *The Ecumenical Review* 25 (1973): 29-40.

[34] For more information on the Bucharest meeting, see: "Science and Technology for Human Development: The Ambiguous Future and the Christian Hope. Report of the 1974 World Conference in Bucharest," *Anticipation* 19 (1974): n.p.; and André Dumas, "The Ecological Crisis and the Doctrine of Creation," *The Ecumenical Review* 27 (1975): 24-35. For the importance of these meetings on later WCC environmental thinking see: World Council of Churches, "The Wholeness of Creation in Ecumenical Perspective: A Documentary Survey," n.d., JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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consciousness. By moving from a notion of ecumenism as a specifically confessional, ecclesial term toward an ecumenism concerned with sustainable life on the whole earth—the "oikoumene"—Potter framed the environmental crisis in a specifically theological and social context. To quote Potter at some length:

> During these thirty years our understanding of the ecumenical movement has been widened and deepened. In the first twenty years of the life of the [WCC] Council we had a clear mandate to promote the unity of the Church through renewal of the churches in mission and service to the world. In more recent years, two aspects of ecumenism have come to the fore. *Oikoumene* has acquired its original meaning of the whole inhabited earth which belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1). The whole life of humankind comes under God's rule and therefore the concern of the churches. We are bound to work for the unity of humankind and this means being engaged in the struggle for a just society in which barriers of class, race and sex are broken down, the divisions of peoples and nations are reconciled in peace, and the environment is made sustainable for the wellbeing of all.[35]

All of these ethical trajectories in the WCC culminated during the mid-1970s at the WCC's Sixth General Assembly at Nairobi in 1975. The Nairobi Assembly marked a pivotal moment in environmental thinking as the WCC embarked upon a new interdisciplinary program oriented toward a "Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society."

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[35] Philip A. Potter, "The Churches and the World Council after Thirty Years," *The Ecumenical Review* 31 (1979): 133-145, 135. Potter's work points toward the first Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Dar-es-Salaam in 1976 and their declaration of an "epistemological break" with Westernized theologies in order to break European domination in theological thinking. Key here was EATWOT's insistence that theological "knowing" included a subjective experience arising from involvement with the poor, participation and assimilation of local cultures, inductive methodologies, and participation in the sufferings of "others." See here Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., *The Emergent Gospel: Theology From the Underside of History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976).

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III. Solidarity and Sustainability: The WCC's Environmental Work From the Nairobi 1975 General Assembly to Vancouver 1983 General Assembly

The WCC's analysis of environmental issues became both more complex and more central to the WCC's institutional social ethics after its General Assembly at Nairobi 1975. The Nairobi Assembly forged working links between issues of ecological degradation, human rights violations, economic development, and the postcolonial political upheavals of the early 1970s.[36] After the Nairobi Assembly, racism, religious pluralism, and developmental issues remained the focal points for the WCC in its various consultations and working committees. Each of these issues, though, intensified in scope and magnitude throughout the world, prompting the WCC to realign its approach to these issues through a more holistic paradigm. Specifically, three institutional attitudes materialized as the WCC grappled with these issues. First, liberationist paradigms fully replaced the paradigm of a "responsible society" within the WCC's social ethics. Next, the interconnectedness of "life" surfaced as an important category for ecumenical thinking within the WCC's new program for Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Societies. And finally, skepticism concerning the powers of science and technology as a

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[36] For careful discussions of the Nairobi Assembly see: David E. Jenkins, "Nairobi and the Truly Ecumenical: Contribution to a Discussion About the Subsequent Tasks of the WCC," *The Ecumenical Review* 28 (1976): 276-285; J. Victor Koilpillai, "WCC Central Committee Formulates Programme Emphases," *The Ecumenical Review* 28 (1976): 466-471; Antonio Matabosch, *Liberación Humana y Unión De Las Iglesias. El Consejo Ecuménico Etre Upsala y Nairobi, 1968-1975* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristianidad, 1975); David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi Final Report: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi 1975* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1976); J. H. Jackson, *Nairobi: A Joke, A Junket, or a Journey?* (Nashville, Tennessee: Townsend Press, 1977); and Ernest Lefever, *Amsterdam to Nairobi: The World Council of Churches and the Third World* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, Georgetown University, 1979).

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"corrective" to all social problems emerged within the WCC. These shifts marked the nascent movements of the WCC's turn toward a radically different approach toward environmental ethics.

The liberationist paradigm that rose to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s expanded and matured during these years. A salient example of this maturation process is found in the WCC's Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies: by 1977 the WCC had generated sophisticated guidelines for such dialogue.[37] These guidelines were predicated upon a specific anthropological premise:

> We understand our calling as Christians to be that of participating fully in the mission of God (*missio Dei)* with the courage of conviction to enable us to be adventurous and take risks. To this end we would humbly share with all our fellow human beings in a compelling pilgrimage. We are specifically disciples of Christ, but we refuse to limit Him to the dimensions of our human understanding.[38]

This refusal to limit the work of God to the Christian church reflected the WCC's liberationist conviction that God worked throughout the world and could be known by all persons working toward justice and peace. These advances also reflected a deeper understanding of "translation" and "syncretism" in the process of inter-religious dialogue.

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[37] For WCC's work on "dialogue" during this period see: F. von Hammerstein, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Six Years of Christian-Jewish Consultation. The Quest for World Community: Jewish and Christian Perspectives* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975); Stanley J. Samartha, *Towards World Community: Resources and Responsibilities for Living Together. Paper Presented to the Multi-Lateral Dialogue, Colombo, Sri Lanka, April 1974* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975); Gerard Vallée, *Mouvement Oecuménique et Religions Non-Chrétiennes* (Tournai: Desclée, 1975); World Council of Churches, *Christians Meeting Muslims: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977); and Stanley J. Samartha, "The Kingdom of God in a Religiously Plural World," *The Ecumenical Review* 32 (1980): 152-165.

[38] World Council of Churches, *Dialogue in Community: Statement and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977*, 16.

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As the WCC's Chiang Mai 1977 consultation defined these issues, "translation" is a continuing process exercised in good faith while "syncretism" is a more deliberate melding of two or more religions into one faith practice. The differences here were significant: by mitigating the stigma of "syncretism" in inter-religious dialogue, the WCC effectively opened its horizons to solidarity with all peoples willing to commence in respectful interaction.[39]

The WCC's initiative for Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Societies (hereafter JPSS) offered an important advance for ecumenical social ethics in its attempt to address the linkages between the issues of justice, peace, and creation. The social ideal of "justice," at least since the late 1960s, had become the primary concern within the WCC's social ethics. The JPSS program offered a unique approach to the concerns of the 1970s: although justice still headlined the WCC's social ethics, maturing notions of "participation" and "sustainability" reflected other major concerns of the WCC. Moreover, the JPSS program forwarded the liberationist notion of "praxis" in order to understand these issues in a concrete, direct manner: "We are not starting from an ideal vision but from human reality: unjust, unparticipatory, unsustainable societies."[40] Thus,

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[39] Dialogue here is predicated upon the WCC's understanding of loving one's neighbor as oneself. "In giving our witness we recognize that in most circumstances today the spirit of dialogue is necessary. For this reason we do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as we enter dialogue with our commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness." World Council of Churches, *Dialogue in Community: Statement and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977*, 261.

[40] Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society Advisory Committee, "Towards a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society: Summary of Presentations and Notes on Discussions at the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee. December 11-14, 1977," JPSS Box 1977-1981, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. For a good overview of the complexities of the dialectic of praxis and

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the JPSS program, like the Programme to Combat Racism, asserted that Christians could not remain "neutral" in the struggle for just societies. For the WCC, the realities of healthy societies emerged both from the active struggle of Christians and non-Christians committed to this vision and as a gift from God's Spirit in the midst of historical ambiguity.

The rationale for the JPSS program issued from the WCC's critical analysis of both modern society and its own methodological assumptions. "Justice," as defined by liberation theologies, had become an important standard in analyzing economic and social issues of the time. The notion of "sustainability" arose from contemporary scientific and historical accounts of the expanding influence of science and technology in and on the world processes. Therefore, the WCC had shifted from encouraging "developmental progress" to questioning the limits of such progress: for the first time the WCC addressed seriously the tensions between local and global interests regarding environmental consequences resulting from economic development.[41] Finally, in emphasizing the idea of "participatory" political structures, the WCC grappled with the legacies of postcolonial power structures in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. "Participatory" meant an active, institutional effort by the WCC to support democratic processes by which subjugated peoples—both Christian and non-Christian—could fully engage in the processes of social, economic, and political governance.

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theory, see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987): 206-220.

[41] World Council of Churches. Central Committee, "Search for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society: Elements of a WCC Programme Emphasis." Document No. 24, JPSS Box 1977-1981, World Council of Churches Archives, Switzerland.

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The JPSS program provoked substantial criticism concerning the WCC's ecumenical and ethical direction. In an attempt to clarify its aims, the JPSS Advisory Committee issued a lengthy statement:

> It should be underlined from the outset that we [JPSS] are not concerned with elaborating and explaining a blueprint for an ideal society which would be just, participatory and sustainable. Rather, we are starting from the present, historical reality of our societies of which the churches are an integral part, and which are characterized in many cases by structures of injustice, lack of participation, and the threat of unsustainability. This reality is being experienced differently in various parts of the world, and thus the responses of people differ and sometimes contradict each other. Within this reality, we see a search and a struggle taking place for more justice, for broader participation of the people, and for a sustainable use of the world's resources.[42]

The WCC, therefore, commenced with concrete "historical reality" in order to engage in a process of struggle as it reviewed specific political structures and unjust conditions. Yet, the JPSS program also aimed for a justice rooted in the eschatological promise of the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God. Here, drawing on the work of Jürgen Moltmann and others, the JPSS spoke of Christian hope as a "concrete utopia."[43] Thus, justice became a messianic category pointing toward the trajectory of a new reality while also focusing upon present historical struggles.[44]

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[42] Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society Advisory Committee, "Draft Report of the Advisory Committee on 'The Search for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society,'" JPSS Box 1977-1981, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[43] See here Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* trans. by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[44] Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society Advisory Committee, "Draft Report of the Advisory Committee on 'The Search for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.'"

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The JPSS program for social ethics faced formidable criticism even within the WCC's institutional confines. André Dumas argued that justice—not participation or sustainable society—provided the most coherent biblical foundation for such a program.

> Our enquiry has been as to whether the term 'just society' could provide the focus for the forthcoming WCC conference. The answer is 'yes', provided we are able to work persistently with the rich semantic field of 'justice' as employed in the Bible; provided we are able to bring out clearly the fact that each must participate in the reciprocal creation of justice; and provided we understand the 'sustainability' of the world, not as an illusory eschatology, but more simply as meaning that man breathes in harmony both with the history he makes and with the nature he dominates, cultivates and contemplates.[45]

Dumas' attempts to steer the JPSS program away from an "illusory eschatology" would later be repeated by the WCC's Executive Committee in its response to the JPSS working group's official report. The WCC's Executive Committee questioned several features of the JPSS's mission and direction for social ethics. To some committee members the ideas of "sustainability" and "participation" reflected decidedly western sensibilities and concealed working assumptions regarding economic development.[46] Perhaps the most prescient criticism of the JPSS program issued from John Bluck's article where he observed that the ideas of "justice" and "development" were too often separated from the notion of a "sustainable" society. Bluck called for a sophisticated institutional mechanism

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[45] André Dumas, "A Society Which Creates Justice: Three Themes But One Development," *The Ecumenical Review* 30 (1978): 219. For a good overview hinting at directions for the WCC to take on environmental ethics see: André Dumas, "Evolution in the Social Ethics of the Ecumenical Council Since Geneva 1966," *The New Concilium* 65 (1971): 108-129.

[46] World Council of Churches, Executive Committee. Interim Response to the Report of the JPSS Advisory Committee. Document No. 13 in Box Entitled "Toward a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society," World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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within the WCC for integrating these issues and exploring multiple options in treating the complexity of these issues.[47]

The most important international WCC conference linking developmental and ecological issues in the 1970s was the Church and Society meeting held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (hereafter MIT) in 1979. This meeting addressed specific issues of science and faith in an industrialized world, emphasizing the general mood of pessimism in scholarly circles regarding the viability of sustainable living on the planet earth. The MIT conference was co-sponsored by two WCC working units, the Church and Society unit and the Churches' Commission for Participation in Development: "The co-operation, however, never functioned, mainly because of tensions between the two different approaches..."[48] Such tensions manifested themselves in the WCC's official report from the MIT conference. Ole Jensen criticized the MIT conference on several points: he noted the social ethics forwarded by the WCC at this conference had accepted a hurried and sloppy working style couched in unintelligible ecumenical jargon. Moreover, he concluded that the MIT conference mirrored a "fix-it" mentality deeply entrenched in Western cultures. Unlike the more careful, inductive

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[47] John Bluck, "The Just and, Er, Participatory and S.. S.. Sustainable Society," *One World* (1978): 10-11. For good overviews of the JPSS program see: Carl F. Reuss, "Towards More Justice," *The Ecumenical Review* 31 (1979): 163-168 and Joséph Aaron Keys, Jr., "The Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society: the Development of the Concept in Ecumenical Dialogue" (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont School of Theology, 1982). See also N. A. Zabolotsky, "Towards a 'Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society'," JPSS Box 1977-1981, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, for other background information.

[48] World Council of Churches, History of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action: Lessons Learned, Insights Gained. Document No. 8 [Unit III Commission Meeting. Nairobi, Kenya. 13-19, January 1997], World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, 7.

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methodologies offered by the Geneva 1966 World Convocation, the MIT conference offered more sweeping generalizations about environmental issues that betrayed a lack of careful analysis.[49]

During the late 1970s, though, individual WCC program units offered valuable analyses of ecological concerns within the larger framework of the WCC's social ethics. The Churches' Commission for Participation in Development spearheaded major studies on *Churches and Transnational Corporations* and *The Church and the Poor* as well as establishing an Advisory Group on Economic Matters in 1978. This advisory group stressed the need for new paradigms in political and economic matters, centering on the necessity for historically sensitive approaches to economic thought and action. Other units, such as the WCC's Cyprus consultation on political ethics in 1981 reflected changing attitudes in the WCC on the notion of "participation." This consultation focused on three main ideas: politics in the total context of a society, the legitimacy of existing political regimes and their decision-making structures, and the political aspirations of the general populace in a society. Practically speaking, the WCC focused their social ethics here more on the "local" concerns of a particular community and its people so as to contextualize justice, participation, and sustainability within the competing demands of specific realities.

The WCC's environmental work between 1975 and 1983 emerged, therefore, primarily from its struggle to utilize liberationist models of justice in specific historical contexts. As such, economic (sustainability) and political (participatory) concerns set the

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[49] Roger Shinn, *Faith and Science in An Unjust World. Volume II: Plenary Presentations* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980): 22.

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agenda for the WCC's social ethic during this period. The WCC's JPSS program provided focus and momentum for such efforts. By 1983, however, new ecological realities underscored the fact that the WCC's institutional efforts lacked a clearly articulated understanding of and strategy for attending to ecological concerns. Thus, when the WCC's Vancouver General Assembly convened in 1983, environmental issues emerged alongside economic and political issues as an institutional ecumenical focus.

IV. Facing Threats to Life: The WCC's Environmental Work from the Vancouver 1983 General Assembly to the Canberra 1991 General Assembly

The Vancouver General Assembly in 1983 predicated its theme "Jesus Christ—Life of the World" on the reality that people everywhere faced structures of death and sin so grave that the very future of the earth was in doubt. The Vancouver Assembly offered a dramatic assessment of various threats to "life:"

> This engagement together in Vancouver underlines how critical this moment is in the life of the world, like the turning of a page of history. We hear the cries of millions who face a daily struggle for survival, who are crushed by military power or the propaganda of the powerful. We see the camps of refugees and the tears of all who suffer inhuman loss. We sense the fear of rich groups and nations and the hopelessness of many in the world rich in things who live in great emptiness of spirit. There is a great divide between North and South, between East and West. Our world—God's world has to choose between 'life and death, blessing and curse'.[50]

This proclamation of "life" sparked a new dynamic within the WCC's social ethics. While the WCC still retained its emphasis on the liberationist model of justice, its

[50] David Gill, *Gathered for Life: Official Report. VI Assembly. World Council of Churches. Vancouver, Canada. 24 July- 10 August, 1983.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Geneva: William B. Eerdmans/ World Council of Churches, 1983): 1-2.

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purview expanded dramatically to include issues not directly related to concrete human struggles for justice and peace.[51]

These assessments eventually culminated in the Vancouver Assembly urging the WCC "to engage member churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation" as a programmatic theme within the WCC.[52] This program, which soon became known as the JPIC process, became the shibboleth for the WCC's related efforts on issues of justice, peace, and creation.

This notion of a "conciliar process" within the WCC had roots in the Nairobi 1975 General Assembly's ecclesiological clarifications of visible unity within the ecumenical movement as "conciliar unity or fellowship."

> The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit....They are one in their common commitment to confess the gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world. To this end, each church aims at maintaining sustained and sustaining relationships with her sister churches, expressed in conciliar gatherings whenever required for the fulfillment of their common calling.[53]

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[51] See here Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 2.

[52] David Gill, *Gathered for Life: Official Report. VI Assembly. World Council of Churches. Vancouver, Canada. 24 July- 10 August, 1983*, 255. This notion of a "conciliar process" or "fellowship" echoed Dietrich Bonhoeffer's call in 1934 at Fanøe, Denmark for a worldwide Ecumenical Peace Council that might denounce war and proclaim the peace of Christ. Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 2-3.

[53] David M. Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi Final Report: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi 1975* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1976): 60. I can only hint here at the complexity surrounding these debates on "conciliarity." For a discussion of the importance of "conciliarity" as a model for the WCC see: Ulrich Duchrow, *Conflict Over the Ecumenical Movement: Confessing Christ Today in the Universal Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981). For an

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The WCC was not alone in calling for such a council that would establish ethical concerns as issues around which churches might unite. Both the German Democratic Republic churches and the Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches had formulated, prior to Vancouver 1983, proposals expressing similar hopes for a process that would lead toward an authoritative ecumenical council.[54]

It is important to note here that the WCC attempted to fuse ecclesiological initiatives with environmental concerns in its institutional approach to ecological issues. As D. Preman Niles noted, the JPIC process was a move whereby the WCC "should enable the churches to own and affirm in their particular contexts what the ecumenical movement as a whole has done and is doing. It should provide the churches with a theological ground work of references...for articulating and implementing their particular faith commitments to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation."[55] Moreover, as Ulrich Duchrow and others noted, ethical questions related to the JPIC process could indeed

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investigation of Roman Catholic responses to "conciliarity" see: John McDonnell, *The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985). Gerladine Smyth offers the best overview of the differences between "conciliar fellowship," "conciliar process," "koinonia," and "covenant" as the terminology at work within the WCC at this time. Smyth contends here that "too much was made of the echo between conciliar process and conciliar fellowship, resulting in the fact that the suspicion of conciliar fellowship as a model of unity also generated distrusting responses to the idea of conciliar process, which had been intended mainly as a modus operandi." Geraldine Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 4.

[54] D. Preman Niles, "Covenanting for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: An Ecumenical Survey," *The Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 470-484.

[55] As quoted by Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 2.

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have significance as church uniting or dividing issues: thus, ecclesiology and social ethics were intimately joined here.[56]

The JPIC process emerged slowly within the institutional apparatus of the WCC. Many questions emerged as to the exact nature of this "process": what exactly did the "integrity of creation" entail? Minor consultations and conferences between 1984 and 1986 on JPIC concerns pressed this question to its logical end.[57] Feminist theologians offered new or revised methodologies for critiquing an ecumenism of "domination" over and against an ecumenism of "solidarity." Orthodox theologians pressed for more sacramental models of society in envisioning an organic understanding of the interrelationship of all aspects of "nature." African, Asian, and Latin American theologians assessed the term "integrity of creation" carefully, ruminating on the conceptual difficulties of placing justice and peace concerns alongside ecological problems as if any such a process could be dealt with abstractly and without concern for real people.

The First International JPIC Consultation hosted by the WCC at Glion, France, in November 1986 addressed many of these concerns. The Glion Consultation served as a defining moment for delimiting the "integrity of creation" within the WCC as differing trajectories of thought emerged regarding environmental issues. One trajectory affirmed

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[56] Smyth refers to Duchrow's paper presented at the WCC's Executive Committee, Kinshasa, 1986 as a relevant example of this. Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 41.

[57] Conferences pertaining specifically to JPIC concerns included: a workshop on JPIC concerns held in Geneva, May 20-22, 1984; the WCC Central Committee meeting, Geneva, July 9-18, 1984; the Church and Society/Philippines Council of Churches consultation in Manila on "New Technology, Work and the Environment," January 1986; the "JPIC Preparatory Meeting" held in Geneva, March 1986; and a Church and Society/ Faith and Order workshop on the "Integrity of Creation" in York, England, May 1986.

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the basic direction of the WCC's approach to environmental matters in the JPIC initiative. These representatives argued that the JPIC initiative had emerged as the WCC's institutional response to unique and unprecedented "threats to life." David Gosling's paper at Glion provided two seminal insights from this perspective. First, Gosling ventured into the arena of the value of "non-humans" in the world. "The...'integrity of creation', is intended to lead to mutual commitment or covenant related to the confession of Christ as the life of the whole world—not just the Christian bits of it, not just even the human parts of it, because non-human life has value, and the non-living environment must be preserved if only for the sake of the long-term survival of human life."[58] Gosling spelled out specifically what had previously been only implied or merely mentioned in passing in WCC consultations: that all of God's creation has intrinsic value apart from its utility or its value in human eyes. Next, Gosling charted previous WCC responses to environmental ethics before Vancouver 1983 and concluded that prior to 1983 the "environmental question was pursued primarily through special conferences: it was not central to the WCC's concerns at any given time..."[59] Indeed, according to Gosling, even the revolutionary JPSS program rarely mentioned "non-human" creation. As such, the WCC's new focus on the "integrity of creation" was warranted given contemporary ecological realities.

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[58] David Gosling, "Unit I Contribution to JPIC," Church and Society, JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. See also here Gosling's important paper "Towards a Credible Ecumenical Theology of Nature," *The Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986): 322-31. Here he asserted that a credible ecumenical social ethics must include a critical review of theological and philosophical arguments, attention to the advances of science, indigenous visions of creation spirituality/religion, and a performative evaluation of the churches witness on these matters (drawing from George Lindbeck's cultural linguistic model).

[59] David Gosling, "Unit I Contribution tc JPIC," 1.

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Another trajectory within the WCC's Glion International JPIC Consultation in 1986 focused on explicating the meanings of "justice" and "peace" as issues inextricably bound to the "integrity of creation." For example, Douglas John Hall's stimulating presentation on "The Theology of the Cross and Covenanting for World Peace" offered seven theses for churches to contemplate while embracing God's work on justice, peace, and environmental issues in the world. Moreover, Peter Lodberg's article on "Confessing Church" argued for a more active social witness from the WCC on ethical matters: indeed, in his estimation the JPIC process was a matter of "confession" for the churches, a time for taking sides and naming oppressors in a world of injustice. T.K. Oommen, arguing from an Asian perspective, maintained that justice—not peace or the integrity of creation—should serve as the primary concern for the WCC's acts of solidarity with oppressed peoples. Likewise, the Bolivian Methodist Bishop Eugenio Poma Añaguaya contended that liberationist paradigms best interpreted the trajectories of the JPIC initiative for the WCC: the poor and the suffering should be primary interpreters of this process, while those in positions of power should stand in solidarity and support of these interpretations.[60]

Finally, other theologians argued at the WCC's Glion International JPIC Consultation that the JPIC initiative reflected the inability of the WCC to act upon

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[60] Peter Lodberg, "Confessing Church," Church and Society, JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; T. K. Oommen, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: An Asian Perspective," Church and Society, JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Eugenio Poma Añaguaya, "Consultation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation," Church and Society: JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. I am grateful to Bishop Poma Añaguaya for his personal reflections on this council. "Interview With Author," Geneva, Switzerland, World Council of Churches, November 1999.

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previous institutional decisions and revealed a deeper incoherence in the social ethics of the WCC. John Howard Yoder's presentation on the "Positions/Actions on JPIC Issues in the Christian Community: The Historic Peace Churches" noted that recent insights of the WCC on peace and justice issues failed to recognize the witness of long-standing traditions within the "historic peace churches." Yoder pressed the WCC to recognize both the Christian tradition and its own institutional legacy for guidance on matters of social ethics: for instance, Yoder called attention to the WCC's commitment to the effectiveness of nonviolence as a paradigm for thinking about social ethics as outlined in the Central Committee meetings of 1973.[61] Yoder noted that the WCC's "new insights" for social ethics presented within the JPIC initiative were unimpressive because the WCC had failed to explicate and live out the full meaning of its earlier pronouncements on such issues. Thus, according to Yoder, the WCC's JPIC initiative served only to confuse the WCC's institutional social ethics, offering complicated ecumenical jargon instead of carefully formulated understandings of previous WCC declarations on social ethics.[62]

After the Glion Consultation, the WCC sponsored regional and local consultations on JPIC issues in order to hear the voices of indigenous peoples on these issues. These

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[61] World Council of Churches, Sub-unit on Church and Society, "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice," *The Ecumenical Review* 25 (1973): 430-446.

[62] Douglas John Hall, "The Theology of the Cross and Covenanting for World Peace." Church and Society, JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Ninan Koshy, "A Note on the World Council of Churches and the Issue of Peace," Church and Society/JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; and John Howard Yoder, "Positions/Actions on JPIC Issues in the Christian Community. The Historic Peace Churches," Church and Society/JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, 9-10. Yoder's arguments here tend to overlook the detailed attention given to issues of peace between 1973 and 1986. Nevertheless, his conclusions are still helpful in critiquing the WCC on these matters.

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consultations afforded more serious reflection on environmental concerns within the JPIC movement because indigenous representatives often offered the most prophetic voices in speaking of the interrelationship of justice, peace, and creation issues. For example, the "Pacific Women's Regional JPIC Consultation—Caring for God's Creation" held in Tonga, September 1987 marked a concerted effort to pursue social ethics in such a way that ecological issues received as much attention as justice and peace issues. Other groups, such as the African Contribution to the JPIC process, highlighted distinctive regional contributions to ecological efforts. For instance, Joe Seremane's persuasive presentation, "Why 'Liberation' Is Not Enough" evinced a distinctively African contribution to the WCC's environmental thinking: "We have to realise that liberation will be meaningless if it means we inherit a country that is infested with toxic nuclear waste deposits, polluted streams, rivers and water sources, denuded and eroded agricultural land, perpetuation of dictatorship (majority or minority), political oppression, [and] economic exploitation..."[63]

Likewise, articles such as "Stressing the IC in JPIC" evidence the space given to indigenous peoples meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, at a JPIC meeting. Here it is obvious that the WCC intentionally engaged environmental issues on indigenous terms, specifically the indigenous belief that humans are servants and stewards of the land and

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[63] World Council of Churches, "An African Contribution to the JPIC Process," JPIC Consultation—Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, 22-25 October 1989, JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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not owners of the earth.[64] Similar WCC conversations held in conjunction with the Australian Council of Churches attempted to understand Aboriginal peoples as holders of long-held wisdom regarding creation issues.[65] Here again the WCC interfaced directly with non-European understandings of ecology and the ethical place of humankind in the larger sphere of the cosmos. These JPIC consultations gave rise to a new consciousness within the WCC regarding the interconnectedness of social ethics.[66] For instance, at a consultation entitled "Toward a Theology of Peace," several WCC staff members and consultants formulated "Twelve Commands for the [JPIC] Conciliar Process." These recommendations reflected the WCC's working methodology for social ethics and revealed the extent to which environmental issues had emerged as significant talking points within the WCC.[67]

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[64] Anon., "Stressing the IC in JPIC," *Forum: Newsletter of the Programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, March 1988, JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[65] Anon., "Land and Christ's Grace in Australia," *Forum: Newsletter of the Programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, March 1988, JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[66] For a fuller description of the various JPIC consultations see Smyth, *A Way of Transformation*, 62-77. Smyth emphasizes the disparate approaches of various institutional trajectories within the WCC at this time, e.g., the differences between Faith and Order versus Church and Society methodologies. Here I think she overplays the differences between the "ontologically-based synthesis" of Faith and Order and the Church and Society's emphasis upon "historical actuality of the suffering of people and of a threatened earth." (74) Many in the Faith and Order consultations rightly pressed for more conceptual clarity of the "integrity of creation."

[67] The most important JPIC "commands" included taking seriously the demands of the individual and collective realities of justice, peace and creation; commencing with the experience of people at local and indigenous levels; searching for concrete and practical steps toward mediation and problem-solving; linking local and global problems through reflection and action; engaging the Christian Scriptures with

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The Orthodox member churches of the WCC also made significant contributions in defining the content of the JPIC program during this time and, in many respects, offered the most theologically articulate vision of the "integrity of creation." The JPIC Orthodox Consultation held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1987 represented a good example of these contributions in defining ecological issues. The Sofia Consultation briefly outlined Orthodox theological approaches to environmental matters emphazing the abundant life of the Trinitarian God, humans beings (or "man") as a microcosm of this Trinitarian life, and the notion of "synergia"—that is, human participation in the divine life—were theological points to be taken more seriously by the JPIC initiative. The Orthodox conception of "nature" at the Sofia consultation placed the whole cosmos within the context of the "drama" of the Trinitarian God, sketching the proper place for both nature and humanity as participants in the life of the Trinitarian God. Such thinking had direct ramifications for ecological issues.

> The value of creation is seen not only in the fact that it is intrinsically good, but also in the fact that it is appointed by God to be the home for living beings. The value of the natural creation is revealed in the fact that it was made for God...to be the context for God's Incarnation and mankind's deification, and as such, the beginning of the actualization of the Kingdom of God. We may say that the cosmos provides the stage upon which mankind moves from creation to deification. Ultimately, however, the whole of the creation is destined to become a transfigured world, since the salvation of humankind necessarily involves the salvation of its natural home, the cosmos.[68]

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reverence and care; respecting other living faiths in dialogue; drawing on courage to address JPIC issues; and seeing the JPIC process as a conversion process toward the love and care of God in God's interactions with the world. Anon., "Twelve Commands for the Conciliar Process," *Forum: Newsletter of the Programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, March 1988, JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[68] World Council of Churches, Inter-Orthodox Consultation. Sofia, Bulgaria, October 24-November 2, 1987 [Sponsored by JPIC], JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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The JPIC consultation at Minsk, USSR, in 1989 on "Orthodox Perspectives on Justice and Peace" confirmed these trajectories. Orthodox statements here on interconnecting "spirals" linking justice, peace, and creation were vital for the WCC in understanding the ways in which Christians could work "synergetically" with the Holy Spirit in an eschatological transfiguration of creation through acts of justice and peace.[69]

The WCC's attention to women's issues in the late 1980s also encouraged new currents of thinking along ecological lines. The most obvious example of this was the WCC's Workshop on the Integrity of Creation facilitated by the Sub-Unit on Women in Church and Society. The parallels drawn between the treatment of women and nature were startling: "Both land and women may be virgin i.e. untouched by man. They may both be raped. They are prized if fertile, despised as worthless if they are barren or infertile. Men claim ownership of both and seek to master and control them."[70] This interconnection of justice issues pertaining to women and ecological issues brought about striking ethical insights. Women are "keepers of the house" or the "oikos" in the "traditional" sense of managing the household and as those most closely connected to environmental concerns. Thus, any disorder of the "oikos" affects women most directly. As such, women's voices are to be heard, recognized, and heeded. Following its own recommendations, this consultation concluded with specific recommendations for the

[69] Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights From Orthodoxy* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990).

[70] Underlining in original. World Council of Churches, Sub-Unit on Women in Church and Society, "Experiencing Oneness, Caring for All: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Creation, Consultation on the Integrity of Creation, Norway, February 24-March 4, 1988," JPIC Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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JPIC program for consultations on deforestation in third world countries drawing on the experiences of third world women themselves.

These local consultations culminated in an International Consultation on the Integrity of Creation held in Granvollen, Norway, in 1988. The stated purpose of this international consultation focused on articulating a more cogent theological position on creation and the place of non-human life in theological thinking: "To be sure, it includes ecological and environmental issues, but goes beyond them. Its central thrust aims at a caring attitude towards nature....It tries to bring together the issues of justice, peace, and the environment by stressing the fact that there is an integrity or unity that is given in God's creation."[71] The Granvollen consultation marked new territory for the WCC in many respects. First, this consultation was both international and inter-religious in scope: although the main body of participants were from a Christian background, the consultation also received input from the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh representatives in addition to leaders from indigenous religions around the world. Moreover, the Granvollen consultation demonstrated specific efforts to speak in the realm of public policy. For instance, Gro Harlem Brundtland, moderator of the UN's "Brundtland" World Commission on Environment and Development, highlighted the conference speakers. Brundtland's contributions at this consultation stressed the WCC's

[71] World Council of Churches, Sub-unit on Church and Society, *Integrity of Creation—An Ecumenical Discussion Granvollen, Norway (February 25-March 3, 1988)* (Geneva: World Council of Churches/Church and Society, 1989):1. Gerhard Liedke, "Die ökumenische Konsultation zu 'Integrity of Creation': Granvollen/Norwegen, 25 Februar bis 3 März 1988," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 37 (1988): 363-366.

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desire for such conferences to embrace an institutional ecumenical agenda that included a vibrant, political social ethics.

The Granvollen Consultation also underscored the WCC's institutional move to be more expansive and inductive in its methodology regarding "social ethics." That is, the WCC intentionally elevated indigenous and marginalized voices in an effort to diversify its understanding of ecological issues: "My name is Anna. I am from the Marshall Islands. My people have traditionally treasured our lands and lagoons—sources of our food....Now, however, we are troubled. Many of our young people see no future in life. Our land no longer feeds us. The more we eat of its fruit and the fish in our lagoons the sicker we become. What has happened to my people? What has happened to our land?"[72] This inductive methodology advocated an approach rooted in listening to the stories of displaced people, repentance, and finally solidarity with those who stood at the "bottom" of social structures.

Finally, Granvollen articulated an environmental ethic whereby all living beings have intrinsic worth and subjective human valuation is not all that renders creation "good." Rather, creation stands as "valuable" in its own intention and function. "This applies to all the beings, animate and inanimate, made by God and not only (or even especially) to humanity. The world of sea and forest, desert and fertile field, with its myriad creatures became, after all, the very context of the incarnation of the word."[73]

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[72] World C[illegible]il of Churches, Sub-unit on Church and Society, *Integrity of Creation—An Ecumenical Discu[illegible] [illegible]nvollen, Norway (February 25-March 3, 1988)*, 2.

[73] *Ib[illegible]*, 17.

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The Granvollen International Consultation paved the way for expanded conversations about a world "convocation" on JPIC issues: this convocation was eventually held in March 1990 at Seoul. Assessments of the Seoul Convocation were mixed, with some denouncing it as a failure in terms of securing truly ecumenical statements on JPIC issues.[74] The Seoul Convocation gathered churches and participants from the WCC member churches, Roman Catholic participants, and people of other living faiths in order to produce a statement of common ethical action for future JPIC initiatives. The WCC was plagued by several difficulties at the Seoul Convocation. First, the chasm between Southern and Northern ethical positions on the place of environmental matters in social ethics remained a point of contention. Broadly speaking, Southern representatives highlighted the need for justice and economic development before environmental concerns could be specifically addressed. Northern delegates often started with more ecologically oriented proposals. Moreover, disparities in the ethical visions of WCC member churches surfaced, as did the confusions regarding terminology and the place of confessional Christian ethics in such environmental conversations.[75]

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[74] See here Margot Kässmann, "The Process leading to Seoul and Canberra: Points of Strength and Weakness" in D. Preman Niles, ed., *Between the Flood and the Rainbow* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), 8-16. Kässmann's criticisms of the Seoul Convocation reflect the practical and theoretical difficulties inherent within these efforts.

[75] The labyrinthine historical intricacies of the JPIC process are not the primary concern here. Historical overviews of the Seoul 1990 World Convocation include: Smyth, *A Way of Transformation* and Geraldine Smyth and Jesse Mugambi and Peter Scherle, *Liberating Communion: The Conciliar Process for Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation: WCC Concerns and Contributions 1983-1991*, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. Difficulties in assessing the JPIC process arise from its deliberate "holistic" and multi-institutional approach. Thus, although the JPIC process issued largely from WCC institutional efforts, one must also attend to the significant contributions made by non-

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The Seoul Convocation greatly tempered the WCC's attempt to collaborate on environmental work within confessional ecumenical circles: sharp theological and methodological differences among Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants made it clear that work on environmental issues would have to follow the institutional assumptions and directives of the WCC. Thus, rather than attempting to secure an ecumenical agreement on "creation concerns," the WCC now institutionally pursued more specific and concrete ethical issues such as monitoring the United Nation's work on global warming.[76] These failures, in my opinion, mark the beginning of a more

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WCC Christian consultations and Christian regional groups throughout this process. See also here: Jerry D. McCoy, "A Promise Partially Fulfilled: The JPIC Convocation in Seoul," *Mid-Stream* 29 (1990): 407-417; Elisabeth Raiser, "Zur Weltversammlung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung in Seoul," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 34 (1990): 242-47; Ben Webb, "The Church, The Environment, and Justice: Which Way From Seoul," *CTNS Bulletin* 10 (1990): 10-13; Erich Geldbach, "Canberra und der Konziliare Prozess," *Una Sancta* 46 (1991): 125-36; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "An Ethics for Sustainability," *The Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991): 120-130; Leonard D. Hulley, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Some Ethical Comments," *Missionalia* 19 (1991): 131-143; Emmanuel Kandusi, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: A Perspective From Third World Theologians," *Scriptura* 39 (1991): 52-57; D. F. Olivier, "Ecology and Mission: Notes on the History of the JPIC Process and Its Relevance to Theology." *Missionalia* 19 (1991): 20-32; John S. Pobee. "Decision Making With Regard to Social Issues," *The Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991): 411-419; Andreas Rössler, "'Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben bei Albert Schweitzer und 'Gottes Liebe zur Ganzen Schöpfung' im Konziliaren Prozess," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 40 (1991): 143-154; and Yacob Tesfai, "The World Council of Churches' Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation—Seoul," *Africa Theological Journal* 20 (1991): 17-27.

[76] Smyth puts this in sharp relief: "By 1987 [in the WCC], it was becoming clearer that the points of connection between fundamental issues of Church unity, movements for justice, peace and the integrity of creation could not be facilely based on assumptions of continuity between theology and ethics. Awareness of instances of ecclesial complicity with the powers of this world and of failures in witness left no room for complacency." (Smyth, *A Way of Transformation,* 58.)

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circumspect and careful analysis of environmental issues within the WCC as an institution.[77]

In many senses, the Seoul Convocation also marked an epistemological shift in the WCC's institutional approach to environmental issues. D. Preman Niles, a frequent contributor to the JPIC process, commented that the JPIC process was more a process by which the desires of grassroots populations flourished in dialogue with the aid of the WCC, not a program implemented by the WCC.

> It matters little for those at the local, particular level that the terms 'conciliar process' and 'process of covenanting', which they use to speak of their commitment, are being challenged and even abandoned at the higher levels of ecclesiastical and ecumenical debate. At the local level, these terms are being used to attest both to the seriousness of the mutual commitments being made and to the communities of commitment that are being built.

Niles emphasized that the WCC had to abandon the notion of social ethics as a "conciliar" or ecclesiological process. Such processes were doomed to failure. Rather than formulating social ethics as the WCC had in the past—either through "middle axioms" or even through the promotion of liberationist paradigms—the WCC as an institution now should embrace a more localized or indigenous understanding of "place" within theological discourse. Many Southern participants hailed the Seoul Convocation

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[77] The final document produced by the Seoul Convocation fell far short of what had originally been envisaged by its drafters. Instead of publishing concrete proposals for participants to act upon, the Seoul Convocation offered ten "affirmations" whereby issues of justice, peace, and creation could be evaluated. For excellent reflections on the Seoul Convocation and its difficulties see: Martin Robra, "Ecumenical Social Thought and Action in the Nineties: Theology of Life—Justice, Peace, Creation [Combined Notes for Addresses at University of Birmingham and Westminster College, Oxford University, 1998]," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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as a move forward by the WCC on social ethics. Indeed, many non-Northern Atlantic participants hailed these moves toward "local theologies" and local embodiments of social ethics that moved away from the "master story" of previous WCC ethical efforts.

These influences of the JPIC initiative and the Seoul Convocation profoundly influenced the Canberra General Assembly in 1991. In nearly all of the major presentations made at Canberra 1991, the marks of the JPIC process were visible. Yet, at Canberra, as at the Seoul 1990 Convocation, the profound differences in attitudes toward ecological and social ethics among WCC member churches and participants surfaced again.

The presentations at the Canberra General Assembly in 1991 centered on the salient ecological themes of "life" and the movement of the Holy Spirit. These emphases, drawn directly from the JPIC conversations, were ubiquitous. Perhaps the most remarkable presentation was "Come Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation" by Chung Hyun Kyung. Kyung drew connections between the movement of the Holy Spirit and more regional understandings of "spirits" in Korean philosophical and theological traditions. For Kyung the nexus between the Holy Spirit and Korean spirits was the common desire in both traditions for justice and reconciliation: "These *Han*-ridden spirits in our people's history have been agents through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken in her compassion and wisdom for life. Without hearing the cries of these spirits we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit."[78] Indeed, many accused Kyung of syncretism as she offered

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[78] Michael Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report. Seventh Assembly (Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991)* (Geneva and Grand Rapids, Michigan: World Council of Churches and William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 39. For conceptual background on these ideas see Chung Hyun Kyung, "Han-Pu-Ri': Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," *The Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988): 27-36.

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a comparison of North East Asian concepts of *ki* (life-energy) and *Kwan In* (a goddess of compassion and wisdom) with the Holy Spirit.[79] This integration of indigenous theological resources for sketching the work of the Holy Spirit in the world greatly disturbed a number of delegates and observers at the Canberra assembly.

In another major address at the Canberra 1991 General Assembly, Parthenios, the patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, offered a theologically vibrant model for the action of the Holy Spirit in terms consonant with JPIC concerns.

> "Our witness is one of mission and dialogue. All tongues, nations, races, sexes, all kindreds, tribes and peoples *are God's*. They should be free. We must strive for their freedom. This is our ministry in the Holy Spirit, always and everywhere. Our dialogue with other religions and ideologies has the same basis. Our goal is the unity of the world. Such unity is not alien to the work of the Holy Spirit and the church. The Spirit blows where he wills, and we have no right, nor is it an act of love, to restrict his movement and his breathing, to bind him with fetters and barbed wire.[80]

What is interesting about these reports and the reactions to such reports is the intentional stance integrating "life" through the work of the Spirit in these accounts. Although Kyung and Parthenios pursued radically different theological paths, both presentations reflected indirectly the significance of ecological issues within the WCC's institutional work.

V. Assessments: The WCC's Institutional Environmental Ethics from 1966 to 1991

In this section, I offer an assessment of the WCC's environmental ethics between 1966 and 1991 using the matrix established in chapter one. Thus, I introduce theological, social scientific, philosophical, and natural scientific questions to the WCC's institutional

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[79] *Ibid.*,43-46.

[80] *Ibid.*,36.

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legacy to make general assessments. Again, such an appraisal is not a comprehensive critique of the WCC's work from each of these distinctive voices; rather, what follows is hopefully suggestive for further research and investigation in formulating a Christian institutional commitment to environmental ethics.

Several commentators have noted the WCC's difficulties in establishing clear theological guidelines for examining environmental matters. Ans van der Bent, the late WCC librarian and ecumenical research officer, averred that the "1990 Seoul convocation and the WCC assembly in Canberra the next year made it clear that a sound theology of ecology still has to be elaborated in the ecumenical movement. Sometimes the argument for ecology is based on a theme related to the doctrine of creation, sometimes on Christology or the gospel, including the doctrine of redemption, sometimes on eschatology."[81] Likewise, Mark Ellingsen's recent work on ecclesial ethics noted that no continuous theological commitment had held the WCC's position on ecological ethics together historically.[82] I agree with van der Bent and Ellingsen in part: between 1966 and 1991 the WCC did not systematically address environmental problems theologically nor did it consistently embrace a coherent theological methodology. Such a criticism begs two important questions, however. Was a systematic theological commitment to environmental issues possible or even desirable? Moreover, did the WCC make

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[81] Ans Joachim van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought*, 75.

[82] Mark Ellingsen, *The Cutting Edge: How Churches Speak on Social Issues* (Geneva: Published for the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France by World Council of Churches Publications and Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1993). See especially his "Appendix" for a helpful overview of the theological orientation of the WCC's position on environmental concerns.

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institutional commitments based on particular theological assumptions such that its stance on ecological matters crystallized in particular patterns between 1966 and 1991?

Ronald Preston's article entitled "Humanity, Nature and the Integrity of Creation" questioned the WCC's ecological efforts during this period from theological, philosophical, and perspectives grounded in the natural sciences. Preston briefly traced the historical genesis of the WCC's Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation initiative and concluded that it succeeded logically from the WCC's earlier emphasis on a Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society program. Nevertheless, as Preston noted, the fruits of the JPSS program were never reaped fully:

> There is a tendency in the WCC to leave studies unfinished or to neglect them....Also it takes some five years for initiatives from Geneva to permeate a world constituency. In the case of the JPSS study it was just doing so when it was scrapped in favour of JPIC and when much still needed to be done on [the notion of] Participatory. Whatever the merit of the change there is very little information on how it came about. In the record of the Vancouver Assembly there is only one significant reference to it.[83]

For Preston, the WCC's concern for "Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Societies" issued from the WCC's theological emphasis on theological realism, a populist or participatory concern for theological ethics, and the burgeoning sensibilities of liberationist motifs of a preferential option for the poor. Indeed, he affirmed that all of these trajectories within the WCC were theologically and historically well grounded.

Preston's examination of the WCC's theological assumptions in the JPIC initiative ended with specific suggestions and criticisms for future WCC work on "nature." Most importantly Preston called for a more careful inspection of the category

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[83] Ronald Preston, "Humanity, Nature and the Integrity of Creation," *The Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989): 552, footnote 2.

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of "nature" in order to sketch careful lines of continuity and discontinuity with human persons: his concern here was to maintain a fundamental distinctiveness for the reality of the human person as created in the "image of God." Moreover, Preston urged that the WCC reexamine its conceptual understandings of "nature": Preston specifically argued that the WCC should embrace a more evolutionary world-view limning the harsh realities of "ecology" as an antidote to romantic tendencies regarding "wilderness." In his opinion, the WCC had imposed a theologically naïve world-view onto reality by speaking of an "integrity of nature:" Preston argued that the WCC should portray "nature" as both a creative and destructive force always in flux.[84]

Other authors charged the WCC with irresponsible use of both theology and the social sciences during this same time. As noted in the "Introduction" to this dissertation, the North American Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey charged the WCC with failure to recognize its distinctive Christian mission and obligation in formulating a cogent Christian ethics following the Geneva World Conference on Church and Society in 1966. Throughout his work, Ramsey charged the WCC with adopting specific ideological social frameworks and championing these causes rather than remaining more neutral and offering the "middle axioms" traditionally associated with the WCC. The WCC, according to Ramsey, should have refrained from forwarding specific policy proposals at the 1966 Geneva Conference and instead should have focused its attention on the

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[84] Ronald Preston, "Humanity, Nature and the Integrity of Creation," 555-560. Preston noted that the WCC seemed to reify "nature" as a realm in which humans were not involved. Moreover, some WCC materials urged member churches to enter "fellowship with nature," a suggestion that Preston decried as simplistic. More serious, though, were Preston's charges that the WCC virtually ignored the detailed UN reports on sustainable development and growing ecological challenges—in his estimation the WCC's primary interaction at a global level on these issues should engage the UN on a point-by-point evaluation.

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construction of more generalized moral principles by which secular ethicists and policy-maker's could be guided. Thus, Ramsey's approach to environmental matters was much more circumspect, urging the WCC to advance ecological arguments at the level of ethical or policy arguments.[85]

James Gustafson's book review of *Who Speaks for the Church?* sided with Ramsey on two major points that deserve mention here. First, Gustafson argued that Ramsey was essentially correct in arguing that the WCC exercised an irresponsible theological and social scientific methodology throughout the Geneva 1966 Convocation. Yet Gustafson also noted that the alternative to such a meeting—a worldwide ecumenical conference spanning several years—would prove unrealistic because of time and expense factors. Moreover, Gustafson asserted that a more explicit theological basis was necessary for the WCC's social ethics. Despite the WCC's considerable efforts and contribution to social ethics, Gustafson concluded: "Suffice it to say, sadly, I doubt if the WCC has the structure and the resources to develop ecumenical social ethics under its institutional auspices at the present time."[86] Gustafson's critique here, although calling for a better grounding of the WCC's work in theological conversation, provides a broader perspective in viewing the WCC's work as a whole.

Ernest Lefever's book *Nairobi to Vancouver: The World Council of Churches and the World, 1975-1987* also accented many of the shortcomings within the WCC's social scientific methodology during this period. Lefever, a conservative political commentator

[85] Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church? A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1967).

[86] James M. Gustafson, "Book Review of *Who Speaks for the Church?*," *The Ecumenical Review* 20 (1968): 100.

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from the United States, contended that the WCC offered simplistic assessments of complex international political problems by relying primarily on Marxism as a social scientific grid of interpretation. Lefever excoriated the WCC for its superficial analysis and its historical inconsistency on issues of social ethics. For example, Lefever noted that the WCC's refusal to describe human rights violations within the Nicaraguan Sandinista movement as a "threats to life" pointed to the inability of the WCC to consistently apply its own understanding of social ethics to different circumstances.

Clearly, Lefever's work issued from a cold war mentality grounded in the stalemate between the Soviet Union and the United States.[87] Lefever's work, however, offers concrete and detailed observations about the WCC's ethical commitments during this period. His suggestive comments regarding the WCC's ideological dependence upon liberation theologies have merit in that they underscore the WCC's failures to move beyond prophetic denunciation of specific political and social structures toward more careful ethical interaction with such realities.[88]

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[87] For a European perspective on the political ramifications of the WCC's work see: Margit Maier, "Political Positions of the World Council of Churches: Their Changes in the Light of the Assemblies of Uppsala, Nairobi and Vancouver, 1968-1983" (Ph.D. thesis, Universität Wien, Austria, 1991).

[88] Ernest W. Lefever, *Nairobi to Vancouver: The World Council of Churches and the World, 1975-1987* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987). Lefever also offered a cogent overview of the hermeneutical problems attendant on reading WCC documents: "Occasionally I had to infer what the specific advice was, or to whom it was directed, because the statements [of the WCC] were often vague and haphazard, lacking a clear connection between the ostensible premises and the explicit advice. Most of the pronouncements contained little historical background either in moral theology or in the concrete international problem being addressed. In this respect WCC statements were far inferior to papal encyclicals and to pronouncements and reports of the U.S. Catholic bishops, which are more carefully researched and crafted. WCC statements were also far less adequate than the best secular academic or journalistic analyses of the same issues." (12) Lefever, however, missed the extraordinary international nature of the WCC's work at this time. That is, one should probably expect a more polished and carefully

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Jane Cary Peck and Jeanne Gallo voiced concerns about the WCC's JPIC project from a social scientific and theological viewpoint as well. Specifically, these authors observed that women's perspectives, especially those women from the poorest sectors, should supply a necessary hermeneutical corrective for thinking about creation issues. "Thus we are arguing that unless JPIC is addressed from the perspective of the poorest (women), the whole question of justice and peace for *all* creation will be skewed because it will leave out a major sector of society and fail to address *why* women are in the situation they are in. Making women's perceptions central (in keeping with a preferential option for the poor and the epistemological privilege of the poor), the approach to the issues of JPIC begins to shift."[89] Peck and Gallo's comments drew attention to several realities. Perhaps most importantly, Peck and Gallo highlighted the need for specific feminist reflection upon ecological issues as a starting point within the WCC. Failure to move in such a direction would unwittingly underwrite specific cultural assumptions regarding what environmental ethics should entail.

José Míguez Bonino's frequent contributions to the WCC's institutional work also emphasized the need for more comprehensive social scientific critiques in determining the direction of its social ethics.[90] Míguez Bonino suggested that a careful hermeneutic of

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articulated ethical assessment from secular academic, national church offices, or even journalists. The WCC by its very nature is more international and more "ad hoc" in its ethical commitments.

[89] "JPIC—A Critique From a Feminist Perspective," *Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989): 576.

[90] José Míguez Bonino, "The Concern for a Vital and Coherent Theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989): 160-172. "Since the early Faith and Order studies on non-theological factors and on institutionalism, there has not been (as far as I can remember) a study on the WCC itself from a sociological point of view. All the while, there have been important developments in the field of the sociology of religion which would be valuable for the Council's self-understanding and action. On the

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the WCC's work on social issues would include a reevaluation of the WCC's institutional nature from the perspective of both sociology and Christian theology:

> What kind of institution is the WCC? There seems to exist a certain tension which someone characterized as between an 'ecclesiastical United Nations' and a 'dynamic frontier movement'. The WCC seems to be, necessarily, at the same time a 'space' where the different ecclesial parties get together to celebrate, discuss, cooperate, and an avant-garde movement which affects the churches through challenge, pioneering action, risky theological formulations. It is difficult to think that either aspect could be eliminated. But we must recognize that this tension becomes at times unnecessarily irritating for lack of mutual understanding and communication.[91]

Míguez Bonino's ponderings on the WCC as both an "ecclesiastical United Nations" and a "dynamic frontier movement" seem appropriate especially given the institutional development of the WCC between 1966 and 1991.[92]

My own assessment of the WCC's ecological efforts from 1966 to 1991 affirms the critiques of these authors; however, I also attempt in this dissertation to place the

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other hand, many of the programmes and statements of the WCC presuppose certain analyses and understandings of reality (social, political, economic), the methodological of which is not explicit." (172)

[91] *Ibid.* See also here José Míguez Bonino, "Social Doctrine As Locus for Ecumenical Encounter," *The Ecumenical Review* 42 (1991): 392-400. Other overviews of the WCC's social ethics that include aspects of the social scientific methodology include: Peter Lodberg, "Confessing Church," International Consultation, Glion, 1986. Church and Society/JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; D. Preman Niles, *Answers to Questions That Are Often Asked About the JPIC Process or the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment (Covenant) for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: A Conversation With Dr. Preman Niles* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987); Ninan Koshy, "The World Council of Churches and Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation," *JPIC Resource Materials* 1.4 (1987).

[92] D. Preman Niles, "How Ecumenical Must the Ecumenical Movement Be? The Challenge of JPIC to the Ecumenical Movement," *The Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991): 451-58. Other pertinent articles include: Hans Vorster, "Konziliarität, Bundesschluss und Uberlebenskrise: Eine theologische Würdigung des konziliaren Prozesses nach Seoul und Canberra," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 88 (1991): 526-548.

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WCC's work in a larger historical and institutional frame of reference. I wish to highlight here three important theological concepts emerging in the WCC from 1966 through 1991 that are helpful in the understanding the WCC's institutional commitments to environmental issues.

First, in the late 1960s the WCC began addressing the ethical ramifications entailed by a "closed world system." This included a shift in the very concept of traditional "ecumenism" itself, moving away from "ecumenism" as unity in the Christian confession alone and toward Philip Potter's notion of "ecumenism" as "oikoumene," or the fellowship of all inhabitants of the planet earth. These reflections were significant in that the WCC began focusing on the interaction of "neighbors" within a closed world. Specifically, what was the ethical importance of non-Christian neighbors for the WCC? And, as the WCC addressed these non-Christian "neighbors" in respectful dialogue, what could they learn about these peoples as true and "other" voices to be taken seriously? These conversations, as detailed in this chapter, sparked a new understanding within the WCC of the possibility of facing the "other" in an ethical and dialogical stance. The WCC began to envision itself as a "space" for such conversation whereby voices within the ecumenical tradition of the WCC could engage other voices in the "oikoumene:" such interactions would greatly influence the WCC's understanding and conceptualization of environmental affairs in years to come.

Second, the concept of "solidarity" issued directly from the WCC's understanding of the world as a closed system of "oikoumene." Solidarity entailed standing beside one's neighbor in the "oikumene" in support, love, and truth. Moreover, as the WCC emphasized the importance of inductive methodologies—starting with concrete,

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particular historical situations—the reality of standing in solidarity with one's neighbors became a more tenable reality in a complex world. The WCC's institutional response to the crisis in Zimbabwe in the 1970s and early 1980s illustrates this understanding of solidarity: here the WCC contributed financial aid directly to revolutionary groups in order to stand side-by-side with those who were working toward justice for the poorest of the land.[93]

Third, the WCC's emphasis on the work of the Spirit over and beyond ecclesial institutions became an important ethical reality for the WCC during these years. The WCC came to understand that the Spirit's work in creating situations of justice and peace also extended to environmental work. Thus, issues of clean water, deforestation, and species extinction were understood in the larger theological and ethical context of power issues, economic issues, human rights issues, gender issues, etc. By envisioning the work of the Spirit as the omnipresent "life-force" of the world, the WCC attempted to link its understanding of "ecology" to its expanded understanding of "ecumenism" and "solidarity."

In the years to come, the WCC would struggle with these institutional ecological commitments, especially as the WCC faced financial and institutional challenges in Geneva. Indeed, in chapter three I maintain that ecological issues radically altered the

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[93] Of course there were many difficulties in the WCC's financial aid to the Patriotic Front in the former Rhodesia. In chapters four and five I address more directly the ethical difficulties and risk of the WCC's participation in "solidarity" in specific historical contexts. For a more complete survey of this specific instance of "solidarity" see the following: J. Victor Koilpillai, "Notes on the Central Committee, 1979," *The Ecumenical Review* 31 (1979): 200-204; Bo Wirmark, "Violence, Non-Violence and International Solidarity," *The Ecumenical Review* 32 (1980): 4-15; and World Council of Churches, "Special Fund Grant to the Patriotic Front," *The Ecumenical Review* 30 (1978): 380-382.

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WCC's institutional self-understanding between 1991 and 1998 as it became attuned to a "Theology of Life" providing "space" for social ethics to emerge. During these years the WCC struggled to fuse its emerging theological advances in ecumenism with burgeoning environmental problems throughout the world.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Earth as a Global Commons: The World Council of Churches and Its Environmental Efforts from 1991 to 1998

> "There is nothing specifically Christian about a longing for justice and peace; is there a specifically Christian way of seeking them?"[1]

> "Confessing Christ as the life of the world and Christian resistance to the powers of death are not two separate activities but one and the same activity. To confess Christ as the life of the world is also to say a clear and unequivocal 'no' to the powers of death and to translate that 'no' into concrete acts of resistance."[2]

> "The atmosphere is a global commons. It envelops the Earth, nurturing and protecting life. It is part of God's creation. It is to be shared by everyone, today and in the future. Economic and political powers can not [sic] be allowed to impair the health of the atmosphere nor claim possession of it. "[3]

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I charted the dynamic contours of the WCC's institutional ecumenical response to environmental issues from 1966 through 1991. I concluded that the WCC's refusal to bifurcate matters pertaining to justice, peace, and creation questions

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[1] Lesslie Newbigin, "Whose Justice?" *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 308

[2] D. Preman Niles, "How Ecumenical Must the Ecumenical Movement Be? The Challenge of JPIC to the Ecumenical Movement," *The Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991): 452.

[3] World Council of Churches [David Hallman [dhallman@uccan.org], "The Earth's Atmosphere: Responsible Caring and Equitable Sharing for a Global Commons. A Justice Statement Regarding Climate Change From The World Council of Churches (WCC). Prepared in Anticipation of the 6th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP6) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to Be Held in The Hague, The Netherlands, November 2000." E-mail message to Daniel McFee, November 2000.

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was an important characteristic of its environmental ethics. Moreover, I noted that three important theological resources emerged in the WCC's institutional ecumenism for addressing ecological matters: the work of the Spirit in all of creation, the concept of the subjectivity and irreducibility of the "other" in religious dialogue, and expanded definition of ecumenism itself as an engagement with the "oikoumene," or the global household of all living creatures on the planet earth.

From 1991 to 1998, the WCC enlarged its focus and attention in the arena of environmental issues, often contributing unique insights in the formulation of environmental ethics. As I noted in the previous chapter, the WCC's work on environmental matters from 1966 through 1991 often received a lower priority than matters involving issues of specifically human justice and peace efforts. This chapter addresses more directly specific environmental issues in part because of the WCC's perception that ecological crises throughout the globe constituted an immediate "threat to life" for the inhabited earth (the *oikoumene*). Indeed, the WCC repeatedly argued or simply assumed during this time that the 1990s constituted a "unique moment" in the history of the human race and the earth in this regard.[4]

In this chapter, I sketch the WCC's efforts on environmental issues during the 1990s. Again, I understand the WCC's work on these issues to be part of its legacy of

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[4] Bill McKibben provides a good explanation of why environmental issues require interpreting recent history as a "unique age." See his work: *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989). McKibben examines recent global warming arguments and contends that scientific evidence suggests that human activities have damaged the ozone layer irreversibly. This damage, McKibben argues, places the human race (and the planet earth) in a unique situation whereby previous arguments about ecological issues must be rethought and reconsidered.

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"institutional ecumenism."[5] I include here its institutional work on: the value and contributions of indigenous peoples, the notion of "civil society" and "people's movements," its construction and implementation of a "theology of life," climate change issues, environmental economics and issues of globalization within the UN, the ecological transgressions of transnational corporations, population and development issues, and women's issues. Each one of these issues fits together to constitute a broad, if necessarily incomplete, mosaic of "ecological issues." I also offer an assessment of the WCC's work during this period utilizing the matrix established in chapter one: thus, I engage questions from theology, philosophy, the social sciences, and the natural sciences in order to evaluate the WCC's work during this time.

II. The WCC's "Theology of Life"

The "Ten Affirmations" proffered by the Seoul 1990 World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation became the focal point of a renewed attempt at comprehensive environmental statements by the WCC.[6] Indeed, although the Seoul 1990 World Convocation reflected profound ecclesiological ambiguities, this

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[5] For the institutional character of the WCC in the 1990s see especially: World Council of Churches, Unit III Justice, Peace and Creation, "Discerning the Way Together" (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993); Konrad Raiser, "Report of the General Secretary [Geneva, 12-20 September 1996]," *The Ecumenical Review* 49 (1997): 85-93; Author interview with Aruna Gnanadason, WCC Staff Executive, November 1999, Geneva, Switzerland; Author interview with Bob Scott, WCC Staff Executive, November 1999, Geneva, Switzerland.

[6] Again, I can only provide sketches here, not a complete history. Important historical reflections on the WCC's work during the early 1990s include: Larry Rasmussen and Joseph Bush, "Breakdown or Breakthrough?" *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 284-290.

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convocation provided a structured theological and ethical agenda for the WCC's staff to pursue. Environmental ethics played a central role in this revised institutional focus: indeed, the Ten Affirmations empowered the WCC to think in dynamic ways about its commitments to ecological matters. Thus, in 1993, the WCC embarked upon perhaps its most ambitious ecological project to date, namely the "Theology of Life" initiative. This initiative focused directly on the ethical complexities of listening to marginalized persons struggling with concrete justice, peace, and environmental issues while attempting to integrate such reflections fruitfully and critically with global environmental policies. This tension between local and global environmental struggles characterized much of the WCC's work in the 1990s on these matters.

The WCC's "Theology of Life" initiative emerged from the WCC's attempts to wrestle with dire ecological realities of the early 1990s. Events as diverse as the nuclear accident at Chernobyl to apocalyptic predictions concerning acid rain and global warming cast a dark shadow over environmental forecasts. Moreover, ecological disasters were no longer just a prediction: they had materialized as reality.[7] In January 1994, the WCC's Central Committee meeting in Johannesburg approved a program for a "Theology of Life" under the auspices of the WCC's Justice, Peace and Creation unit. The focus of this program was two-fold. First, the "Theology of Life" initiative centered on establishing local, practical commitments for solidarity with marginalized peoples wrestling with specific life-threatening issues. At a global level, the "Theology of Life" initiative approached ethical issues historically, theologically, and dialogically. Historically, this initiative embarked upon compiling a comprehensive history of the

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[7] For a good overview of the "Theology of Life" see: Martin Robra, "Theology of Life—Justice, Peace, Creation," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 28-37.

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WCC's ecumenical social thought and action such that future ecumenical ethical decisions might have a firmer grasp of past institutional difficulties. Theologically, the initiative encouraged an inductive methodology whereby participants in regional consultations discussed and analyzed the 1990 Seoul Affirmations in order to process these in specific contexts. Finally, WCC staff members consulted regional Theology of Life meetings to hear the concerns of specific marginalized peoples. This complex working apparatus affirmed the WCC's commitment to approaching ethical issues at the global and local levels.[8]

The Theology of Life initiative sparked creative ecological activities within the WCC. Geraldine Smyth, Peter Scherle, and Jesse Mugambi collaborated on historical overviews of the WCC's social ethics stressing the institutional aspects of the WCC as an ethical actor. These histories provided valuable reflections and criticisms of the WCC as an international ecumenical organization facing "postmodern" environmental challenges. "The insistence on a master story [in ecumenical social ethics] only covers up conflicting perspectives and hides the attempt to dominate and to exclude experiences not fitting into the prevailing framework. Experiencing the fragmentation of societies and destruction caused by the accelerating process of globalization, the life sustaining value of the diversity of life forms as well as of cultures and contexts is more and more seen."[9] Smyth,

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[8] World Council of Churches, Programme Unit III, *Affirming Life: Theology of Life. An Invitation to Participate* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995): 1.

[9] "History of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action: Lessons Learned, Insights Gained. Document No. 8 [Unit III Commission Meeting. Nairobi, Kenya, 13-19, January 1997]," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. The more complete version of this history of social ethics is found in "Liberating Communion: The Conciliar Process for Justice Peace and the Integrity of

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Scherle, and Mugambi pressed the WCC to understand its ethical work as specific institutional endeavors related to particular historical events and problems. These historical perspectives aided the WCC by offering extended criticisms and assessments of its work.

The Theology of Life consultations supplied valuable local reflections on ethical matters contributing a complexity and richness to the WCC's understanding of environmental issues.[10] These consultations often focused directly on the understanding of the WCC's Seoul Affirmations as these related to environmental issues: thus, in both Guatemala City and in the Pacific Islands consultation participants studied the WCC's affirmation pertaining to creation issues.[11] The Creation Forum held in Guatemala City, May 1996, offered a case study of how specific environmental sensibilities emerged from these consultations. First, this consultation focused on specifically indigenous Mayan concepts of nature and ecology thereby providing a rich backdrop for the participants to begin thinking about a "theology of life." Moreover, the WCC's consultation addressed environmental issues—specifically issues of deforestation, pollution, and land usage—in view of larger "threats to life" in Guatemala. Thus, the consultation operated with a keen

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Creation: WCC Concerns and Contributions 1983-1991," Theology of Life Binder, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, 1998. Scherle's contribution to this project is particularly outstanding: "All in One Boat? The History of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action—A Case Study of the WCC," Theology of Life Binder, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, 1996.

[10] Ulrich Schmitthenner provides a valuable explication of the Seoul Conovcation's Ten Affirmations and their relevance for the WCC's "Theologie des Lebens" program. See his: *Der Konziliare Prozess: Gemeinsam für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung: Ein Kompendium* (Idstein: Meinhardt Text und Design, 1998): 231-234.

[11] Specifically, the Seoul Affirmations studied were Affirmation 7 ("we affirm the creation as beloved of God") and Affirmation 8 ("we affirm that the earth is the Lord's").

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understanding of Guatemala's history of civil war, genocide against indigenous peoples, and widespread ecological destruction in specific regions.[12]

Finally, the WCC's Theology of Life initiative facilitated an expanded understanding of the WCC's role in and conceptualization of social ethics. At an ecological level, the Theology of Life stressed providing healthy "space" within the "oikoumene" for reflection, growth, and the flourishing of life. Such notions supplemented older notions of ecumenical "dialogues" as vehicles through which social change might occur. Indeed, through the Theology of Life initiative the WCC often provided the "space" for marginalized peoples to gather and discuss ethical issues without any overriding WCC guidance. By providing this "space" for social ethics to emerge, the WCC reconfigured its understanding of how environmental ethics might be practiced at an institutional level.[13]

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[12] The Theology of Life initiative intentionally placed indigenous peoples and concerns at the center of these conversations. For the WCC's work in Guatemala see: World Council of Churches, "War Wrecking Central American Ecology," *JPIC Forum* (January 1989): 5; "La Creación como Amada Por Dios: Teología De La Vida: Estudio de Caso en Guatemala [Creation Forum, Guatemala City, May 1996]," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 10 (1996): 14-17.

[13] See here Samuel Kobia (Executive Director Unit III Justice, Peace and Creation), "Theology of Life: Justice, Peace, Creation," First Meeting of Case Study Coordinators: Chavannes De Bogis, Vaud, Switzerland, 1994, Theology of Life, Box #1, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. Kobia's summary offers good reflections on what the Theology of Life and this understanding of "space" entailed methodologically and hermeneutically for the WCC.

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II. The WCC, Civil Society, and People's Movements

The WCC's attempt to provide "space" for social ethics took concrete form in its work with indigenous and marginalized peoples during the 1990s. The WCC's Theology of Life team visit to Australia in November 1993 offered a good example of this work. Here the WCC engaged in dialogue, listening, and concrete solidarity with the Aboriginal and Islander peoples in the Pacific Region as these peoples struggled for land rights legislation and the rectification of specific environmental problems. The WCC team engaged in advocacy work with the Australian government on behalf of Aboriginal peoples for full recognition of the "Native Title" whereby indigenous peoples might have participation in and some control over the processes affecting land ownership and distribution. In addition, the WCC team held "listening sessions," providing "space" for indigenous peoples to recall struggles with the government over legislation issues and land-use concerns.[14] At a practical level, these visits profoundly shaped the WCC's

[14] Brenda Fitzpatrick, *Stories of the Land. Second Edition. WCC Teamvisit to Australia, November 1993* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1993). This trip marked the beginning of many WCC consultations with indigenous peoples. In London, England, May 1996 the WCC provided "space" for indigenous leaders to discuss issues pertaining to mining and land-rights. "Mining and Indigenous Peoples Consultation," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 9 (1996): 28-31. Other important documents detailing the WCC's move toward indigenous understandings of "ecology" include: Elsa Tamez, "The Indigenous Peoples Are Evangelizing Us," *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 458-466; George Tinker "Spirituality, Native American Personhood, Sovereignty and Solidarity," *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 312-324; World Council of Churches, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group on Women. Hotel Le Grenil, Geneva. 28 October- 1 November 1992.Unit III, World Council of Churches,* Theology of Life Folder, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Pat Roy Mooney, "Bio-Pirates Patent Indigenous Knowledge...and Indigenous People Too," *Echoes* 4 (1993): 4-6; World Council of Churches, "Minutes of the Working Group on Racism, Indigenous Peoples and Ethnicity (Unit III), Berlin. 11-18 January 1996," World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; World Council of Churches, *Indigenous Peoples: Walking Together Towards Tomorrow* (Geneva: World Council of

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understanding of ecology as indigenous cultures evidenced alternative understandings of integrated and viable systems for sustainable resource management.

The realities of "environmental racism" also became clearer to the WCC in its attempts to work more directly with indigenous groups. The notion of "environmental racism"—whereby environmental degradation is allowed to increase disproportionately in regions inhabited by specific racial or ethnic groups in order to safeguard the health and well-being of other races or ethnic groups—increasingly alarmed the WCC in the 1990s. As the WCC's statement on Racism, Indigenous Peoples, and Ethnicity noted:

> There is a direct relationship between the increasing globalization of the economy and environmental degradation of habitats and the living spaces for many of the world's peoples. In many places where Black people or Indigenous peoples live, oil, timber and minerals are extracted in such a way as to devastate eco-systems and destroy their culture and livelihood. In addition, waste from both high and low tech industries, much of it toxic, must be disposed of somewhere...Increasingly, wealthier nations are also exporting their wastes to the third world.[15]

Churches, 1998). The WCC also became a member of the "Dalit Solidarity Programme" intended to support the Dalit peoples of India in their quest for justice and equality. Although not specifically oriented toward environmental issues, this program evidenced the WCC's commitment to solidarity issues with the most vulnerable of society.

[15] World Council of Churches, *Minutes of the Working Group on Racism, Indigenous Peoples and Ethnicity (Unit III). Berlin. 11-18 January 1996.* Geneva: World Council of Churches Archives, 1996: 61. "An essential part of the struggle against racism today is an examination of the fundamental relationships of power and dominance that operate on a world scale. Such an exercise may be questioned on the grounds that, while at a global level there are indeed unjust relationships of economic, military and other kinds of dominance...these have only an incidental connection with race. The facts are however that the greatest concentrations of economic, political and military power are mainly found in the white-led and industrialised countries of the north, and that those who suffer most as a result of their activities are the darker-skinned peoples of the south." (58)

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In response to these realities, the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism worked more deliberately to include environmental concerns in its working programs.[16]

Perhaps the most important theoretical move made by the WCC in its work with indigenous peoples during this time was its embrace and subsequent critique of the concept of "civil society." Although the WCC had long used the term "civil society" as a conceptual framework to summarize its own place in the arena of international relations, this term took on new importance in the late 1980s with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. The majority of non-governmental groups and humanitarian agencies—or members of "civil society"—had actively embraced this term in order to theorize their struggle for democracy and change. This reinvigorated notion of "civil society" was evident in the WCC's work during the early 1990s as WCC staff members struggled to understand the political ramifications of WCC ethical directives at both the local and global levels. The WCC's communiqué "On People's Movement and NGOS" illustrated the tensions of the WCC's claims to be a "NGO."[17] Here the WCC ruminated on its place in "civil society" and how it existed as both a NGO but also as a facilitator of "peoples movements" throughout the world. Perhaps most important here was the WCC's self-understanding as a mover in the world of "international civil society," that is civil society transgressing national boundaries: "...nobody can deny the decisive role of the Civil

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[16] For more on environmental racism in the United States see: Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990); Robert Bullard, "Race and Environmental Justice in the United States," *The Yale Journal of International Law* 18 (1993), 319-335; and Andrew Szasz, *EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[17] World Council of Churches, Unit III Justice, Peace and Creation, *Discerning the Way Together* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1993): 16-18

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Society in the process of promotion of democracy in Latin America, South Korea, Philippines, Africa, etc. Furthermore, the role of some international organisations like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and not less the World Council of Churches, has been very positive in the defense and promotion of human rights, the respect of the environment and the combat against racism. Their experience shows the great potential which could be developed if an 'International Civil Society' could be built-up and consolidated."[18]

An obvious tension emerged here, however. The WCC carried specific Christian ethical mandates: how then, could it claim to be part of "international civil society" given the ambiguity of such a term? Throughout the 1990s, the WCC struggled institutionally to clarify the term "NGO" and its role as such an organization.

The WCC cautiously embraced its role in "international civil society." This qualified institutional self-awareness became especially important as the WCC attempted to provide prophetic criticism of environmental policies offered by governments, international governmental organizations (such as the UN), and even other NGOs. Indeed, in its work, the WCC eventually expressed a clear priority to work with "people's movements" rather than "civil society." "People's movements" respected the integrity of specific cultures and values—such as indigenous peoples fighting land rights in North America. The WCC would also work in cooperation with NGOs in "civil society," strengthening democratic processes, working toward peace initiatives, and raising environmental awareness, but the WCC's primary ethical priorities would reside with

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[18] *Ibid.*, 17.

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"people's movements."[19] Indeed, the WCC clarified its ethical priorities by offering "anti-systematic" stances toward the powers of international governmental agencies and even international NGOs: only agencies and NGOs fostering a critical distance from destructive environmental forces were to be engaged in a long-term struggle for environmental justice.

Israel Batista engaged these tensions in a paper offered at the WCC's Civil Society Meeting in April 1994. Here he argued that although "civil society" was an ambiguous term, it still served as a conceptual wedge that the WCC might employ to understand the tensions of global and local ethical issues. Batista noted that understanding the world in terms of an "international civil society" challenged the WCC along three lines. First, the reality of an "international civil society" forced the WCC to redefine again its understanding of "ecumenical" as meaning the whole "oikos" in order to face non-Western political realities. Next, this concept empowered the WCC to search for new "alliances of hope" on environmental issues at the level of an international civil society. If the WCC were part of this "international civil society" it could participate fully in partnership with other institutions dedicated to justice, peace and creation issues. Finally, Batista noted that participation in an "international civil society" provided a theoretical basis by which the WCC could participate in the building of local, democratic institutions in order to provide stability for people facing direct threats to life.[20]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] "Civil Society and Life in Community: A WCC Programme. Civil Society Meeting. John Knox Centre, Geneva, 6-8 April 1994," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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IV. The WCC as NGO: Monitoring the United Nations on Environmental Actions

The WCC worked through its subunit for the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs since 1946 as an official channel for relating to the UN on specific political and ethical issues.[21] In 1995, the WCC revised its working relationship with the UN asserting for the first time that the WCC considered itself not just as an NGO, but also as a participant in the process of global governance. In so doing, it reasserted its earlier position that the UN does not set the WCC's understanding of world politics or its ecumenical agenda, but is a means by which the WCC's agenda is "furthered and applied to international policy-making."[22] The WCC therefore concluded in 1995 that it would work both formally and at an "ad hoc" level with the UN on major world conferences of ethical and political importance. In 1992, the United Nations Rio Earth Summit complicated the status of NGOs in that the UN "opened the doors to consultative status

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[21] For a concise history of the WCC's work with the United Nations see: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/un-hist.html>. See also Konrad Raiser's interesting reflections on the non-governmental status of the WCC and its relationship to the United Nations: "The United Nations and the WCC: Rights and Justice," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 278-283; and "The World Council of Churches and International Civil Society," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 38-44. The WCC has general consultative status in the United Nations as a NGO. "Any international organization which is not established by intergovernmental agreement shall be considered an NGO for the purpose of these arrangements, including organizations which accept members designated by governmental authorities, provided that such membership does not interfere with the free expression of views of the organization." United Nations, Resolution 1296 (XLIV), May 23, 1968, paragraph 7 as quoted in Rainer Lingscheid, "From Consultation to Participation: NGOs and the United Nations," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 307-311.

[22] <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/un-hist.html>.

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for several hundred NGOs, including WCC member churches, requiring a new approach by the WCC as facilitator of access and a provider of ecumenical coordination."[23] This section highlights the WCC's work with the UN during the 1990s on environmental issues, noting that the UN itself is a complex institution deserving careful scrutiny and study.[24]

The United Nations held several environmental consultations in the 1990s illuminating the role of the WCC as a NGO. The most important consultation occurred in 1992 as the UN Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro. This landmark conference, known popularly as the Rio "Earth Summit," solidified the UN's commitment to environmental issues through its "Rio Declaration" a Global Form, its Framework Convention on Climate Change, and a Framework Convention on Biological Diversity.[25] The WCC participated fully as an NGO in the Rio "Earth Summit" at an official level. Yet the WCC also helped organize and facilitate an "ad hoc" meeting in Baixada Fluminense, a poverty-stricken area outside of Rio de

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] The literature on organization and institutional work of the UN is sizeable. Good introductions include: Peter Baehr and Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations in the* 1990s, 2nd edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Ian Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar: Altruism under Fire—Non-Profit Organizations and International Development* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1995); Anne Winslow, ed., *Women, Politics, and the United Nations* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995); Paul Diehl, ed., *The Politics of Global Governance: International Organizations in an Interdependent World* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Thomas Weiss and Leon Gordenker, eds., *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1996); and Thomas Weiss, David Forsythe, and Roger Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 2nd edition, (Boulder, Colorado: WestviewPress, 1997).

[25] For good descriptions of the interrelationship of the UN and NGOs at the Rio "Earth Summit" see: Weiss, Forsythe, and Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 238-239.

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Janeiro, whereby the WCC met with 176 participants from 52 countries and signed "Searching for the New Heavens and the New Earth: A Christian Response to UNCED." This document affirmed many of the UN's environmental policy directives while also criticizing the UN's unexamined assumptions regarding "sustainable development."[26]

In September 1994, the UN brought NGOs together in Cairo for "The International Conference on Population and Development." The official result of this conference was a Programme of Action outlining goals toward new approaches for population policies through the year 2014. Specifically, under the guidance of NGOs the UN's new policy moved away from the language of "population control" and instead embraced reproductive rights and the empowerment of women within a context of "sustainable development." The WCC's presence at the Cairo Conference in 1994 was not as visible as the official delegations of the Roman Catholic Church, Islamic organizations, and other religious groups. Nevertheless, the WCC's position at this conference offered a clear and prophetic voice in which it again stressed the need to link population ethics to justice, peace, and creation issues. The WCC's official statement at Cairo argued that considerations about population growth must occur within an overall context of the "quality of life" by those people affected by such policies. Clearly, the WCC wished to give priority to an inductive methodology again, allowing people in local arenas to decide on such matters. Eventually the WCC endorsed in a qualified version the

[26] Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Redeeming the Creation, the Rio Earth Summit: Challenge to the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992).

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UN's Programme of Action and its reorientation toward population within the context of sustainable development.[27]

The WCC official report *Churches, Population and Development: Cairo and Beyond,* therefore, centered on the environment, conflicting definitions of "development," and reproductive rights issues for discussion regarding population issues and future work on such issues. The WCC questioned the UN's failure at Cairo to propose specific measures for limiting unsustainable consumption and production habits (especially in Northern countries). The WCC also questioned here the UN's arguments that sustainable development would indeed address the needs of the poor or even stabilize population growth in the near future. These critiques dovetailed with the WCC's critique of the UN's definition of "development." Instead of sustainable development, whereby economies are viewed as global and an end in themselves, the WCC offered the vision of "sustainable communities" predicated on the vitality and sustainability of local economies working toward the well-being of real human beings and environments.

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[27] For more on the WCC's involvement at the Cairo 1994 conference see: Diana Smith, "A Quiet But Prophetic Voice at Cairo," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 6 (1994): 5-6; World Council of Churches, *Theology of Life Consultation. Brasov, Romania*, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Lewis Mudge, "Ecclesiology and Ethics in Ecumenical Debate," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 11-27; World Council of Churches, "La Creación Como Amada Por Dios: Teología De La Vida: Estudio De Caso En Guatemala [Creation Forum, Guatemala City, May 1996]," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; and James Martin-Schramm, Report on International Conference on Population and Development [Cairo, Egypt, September 5-13, 1994]. Personal Memorandum to Martin Robra, World Council of Churches. Special thanks here to James Martin-Schramm providing a copy of his memo to Martin Robra and for his personal reflections on the WCC's involvement in population ethics. For more history on the WCC's work on population issues and its theological orientation see James Martin-Schramm, *Population Perils and the Churches' Response* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997): 42-56.

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Finally, the WCC report encouraged the UN to continue promotion of women's "reproductive rights" in the areas of fertility, pregnancy, and sexuality.[28]

The WCC staff actively participated in several other UN consultations addressing environmental issues during the 1990s. In August 1991, WCC staff assembled to address the UN's understanding of an "Earth Charter"—or a comprehensive environmental statement akin to the UN Declaration on Human Rights— by meeting with leaders of religious and world organizations at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey to consult on the implications for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).[29] In its document ""One Earth Community," the Bossey 1991 group emphasized the spiritual and ethical implications undergirding the work of UNCED. This document reflected many of the Seoul JPIC convictions in a more secularized version and moved toward a nascent formulation of an Earth Charter.[30] Moreover, the WCC sent seven delegates to the UN's

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[28] A miscellaneous statement on Cairo was attached to the following document: World Council of Churches, "La Creación Como Amada Por Dios: Teología De La Vida: Estudio De Caso En Guatemala [Creation Forum, Guatemala City, May 1996]." The notion of women's "reproductive rights" was a controversial, but carefully articulated stance by the WCC. "Dogmatic assertions affirming the sanctity of life in isolation from the circumstances under which conception takes place fail to bring that assertion to bear on women's lives. Equally dogmatic assertions that women have a right to bodily integrity fail to recognize the social, cultural and historical contexts that shape the capacity for responsible 'choice'." (20)

[29] For more on the historical and legal background of the Earth Charter see <http://www.ecouncil.ac.cr/value/charter.htm>.

[30] World Council of Churches UN Liaison Office, and Lutheran Office for World Community, *A Report of the Delegation of the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation to the Third Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. New York, April 7-28, 1995*, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. These Bossey 1991 principles included: a holistic approach to environmental issues; maintaining an inseparable link between ecological and social justice; ensuring equal to education for all peoples; safeguarding the rights of future generations; implementing a participatory based model for action and dispute resolution at both local and transnational

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Commission on Sustainable Development held in New York, May 1994. The delegation served as monitors for the UN's working groups and plenary sessions and as organizers with other NGOs to discuss and prepare reports on the UN's progress. This WCC delegation encouraged the WCC to develop an institutional expertise in specific environmental topics (land, forest issues, desertification, biodiversity, etc.) in order that environmentally competent WCC delegates might attend future conferences for the Commission on Sustainable Development.[31]

The WCC exerted pressure at other international conferences sponsored fully or in part by the UN. Several WCC delegates attended The Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995. The UN's capstone document at Beijing included a remarkable and extended commentary on "Women and the Environment."[32] Clearly, this work resonated deeply with the concerns of the WCC in refusing to separate issues of justice, power, peace, and the environment when speaking of women and their function in society. This section also addressed both local and international ways of integrating women more fully into questions concerning the environment.

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levels; protecting bio-diversity in all regions of the earth; fostering precautionary measures for environmental practices; and affirming a "polluter pays" principle as international working standard.

[31] For a succinct overview of the WCC's role in the UN system see: Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and World Council of Churches, *The Churches in International Reports 1983-1986* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987); World Council of Churches, *The Role of the World Council of Churches in International Affairs* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986): 22-24. In the latter work, the WCC reaffirmed its commitment to and role in the UN institutional system.

[32] Ulrich Schmitthenner, *Contributions of Churches and Civil Society to Justice, Peace, and theIntegrity of Creation: A Compendium (With CD-ROM)* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999). On CD-ROM under "Beijing 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women," Chapter IV, part K., "Women and the Environment."

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> The continuing environmental degradation that affects all human lives has often a more direct impact on women. Women's health and their livelihood are threatened by pollution and toxic wastes, large-scale deforestation, desertification, drought and depletion of the soil and of coastal and marine resources, with a rising incidence of environmentally related health problems and even death reported among women and girls. Those most affected are rural and indigenous women, whose livelihood and daily subsistence depends directly on sustainable ecosystems.[33]

Many WCC delegates expressed satisfaction concerning the trajectories of the UN's Beijing Conference: still, however, the WCC pressed the UN to continue its work in order to move beyond superficial rhetoric and into fuller solidarity with women on environmental and development issues.

The UN World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, March 6-12, 1995, presented opportunities for the WCC to participate in the process of environmental policy shaping. In preparation for the Copenhagen Summit, the WCC published numerous reports and participated in pre-summit meetings in order to comment and review the UN's working draft. One issue that the WCC (alongside the Lutheran World Federation) addressed consistently was the content and meaning of "sustainable development": the WCC pressed the UN to define such abstract terminology and to translate "sustainable development" into real policies with concrete timeframes for action.[34] The WCC subsequently joined forces with other NGOs to voice its disapproval

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[33] *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Global Framework, section 34.

[34] Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, *World Summit for Social Development. Copenhagen, Denmark. 6-12 March 1995. Joint Report of the Delegations of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation/World Council of Churches, 1995): 9-11. For more on the WCC's participation at the Copenhagen Summit see Konrad Raiser's address, "Intervention by Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary, World Council of Churches." For more on the WCC's involvement in the preparatory meetings see Rainer Lingscheid, "The World Summit

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of the official drafts published by the UN in preparation for the Copenhagen Summit. Specifically, these criticisms focused on the UN's notion of "economic growth" as a means to achieve social and environmental progress. Eventually the WCC helped to revise UN drafts to bring these documents closer into compliance with the UN's own "Agenda 21" proclamations made at the Rio Conference. The "Ten Commitments of Copenhagen" became the official stance of the UN on development and environmental matters: the WCC, however, signed "The Copenhagen Alternative Declaration" to protest against the vague and non-specific language of the "Ten Commitments" proffered by the UN. This manifesto proclaimed that the UN's commitment to environmental issues assumed unsustainable economic practices and uncritical economic ideologies.

V. Ecology and International Economics

The WCC's efforts to describe its environmental efforts in the arena of "civil society" in the early 1990s necessarily included engaging the realities of globalized economic development and the tensions implicit between global "economic growth" and sustainable ecological practices.[35] Several WCC consultations directly faced the intertwined nature of "globalism" and "environmental sustainability" offering important

for Social Development," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 6 (1994): 7-9. The WCC influenced the 1995 Copenhagen conference through an official delegation participating in the preparatory and summit proceedings and by collaborating with other NGOs addressing the Summit.

[35] See here *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 9 (1996). See here especially Janet Somerville, "The Bank that Lets You Invest in Poor People [Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society]," 21-23 for the WCC's early work from 1975-1996 along these lines.

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recommendations.[36] The WCC usually sketched economic "globalization" as a distinctive feature of late twentieth century neo-liberal economic views regnant in world politics and policy.[37] Moreover, the WCC operated with distinctions between "globalization" and "neo-liberal economics." Globalization "indicates a movement stemming from the impact of high technologies in the organization of production and its effects on the international division of labour, the internationalization of political-decision making, the trans-nationalization of the economy and the formation of economic blocs, the growing predominance of the service sector and the explosion of financial movements of world capital."[38] Neo-liberal economics, by distinction, signified ideological commitment

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[36] These consultations were: Holland, November 1997 on "Faith Communities and Social Movements Together in the Mission for Justice;" Malaga, Spain, April 1998 on "The Globalizing Economy: New Risks—New Challenges—New Hopes;" and Bossey, Switzerland, July 1998 on "Globalization, Ethics and the Oikoumene."

[37] Richard Dickinson, *Economic Globalization: Deepening Challenge for Christians* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998): 5-6. Of course these are only sketches of much more complex realities. For more careful analysis see: Richard Dickinson, "Changing Ecumenical Perspectives on Economic Development: A Contribution to an On-Going Discussion," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Rob van Drimmelen and World Council of Churches, *Faith in a Global Economy a Primer for Christians* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998); and David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco/West Hartford, Conneticut: Berret-Koehler/Kumarian Press, 1996).

[38] Richard Dickinson, *Economic Globalization*, 12. Dickinson's writings reflected the WCC's institutional understanding of "globalization" that would shape its environmental efforts in the future. These characteristics of globalization included: the rapid growth of new technologies; the dominance of "free market" paradigms in economics; the rise of transnational corporation mergers and the concentration of corporate powers; the influence of transnational governmental organizations including the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the "World Bank"), the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; the reality of limited natural resources; a growing world population; the disintegration and loss of power by nation-states; and the growing disparity between rich and poor nations.

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oriented toward a "total free market" unhindered by state controls. This paradigm assumed that the "invisible hand" of the marketplace assures the highest good for each individual pursuing economic gain, reducing the *homo sapiens* to *homo economicus*. "Thus, it views humans as individuals rather than as persons in community, human beings as essentially competitive rather than cooperative...."[39]

At several points in the 1990s, the WCC attempted to offer a distinctive institutional critique of neo-liberal economic patterns. First, the WCC argued that neo-liberal ideologies conflicted with the "ecumenical vision of a united humanity through which differing communities and peoples live in solidarity with each other. The 'oikoumene' indicates the whole inhabited and habitable earth."[40] Moreover, the WCC argued that Christian traditions offered a more constructive understanding of economics

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[39] *Ibid.*, 14. Dickinson notes here the problematic neo-liberal economic attempt to bifurcate "political" issues from "economic" issues, or issues of justice and fairness from issues of production and distribution of goods and services. Dickinson also pointed to the problematic environmental practices of neo-liberal economics: its focus on exports as a main source for economic growth, its indiscriminate advocating of "privatization," its emphasis on the macro-economic initiatives without exploring in detail the social ramifications of specific policies, and the quest for short-term profit. To quote Dickinson, in the neo-liberal rationality, "economic analysis is typically limited to concern for efficiency and maximization of growth. In the final analysis, neo-liberalism focuses on one specific mechanism to coordinate economic activity—the market mechanism. This is something different from the market place we all know and remember, where people meet and communicate in the context of a direct exchange of goods." Although Dickinson here waxes sentimental about bygone "marketplaces," his point is still well taken. For more detailed recent works on understanding "economics" and environmental matters from a Christian perspective, see: James Childs, *Ethics in Business: Faith at Work* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); David Krueger, Donald L Shriver, and Laura L Nash, *The Business Corporation and Productive Justice* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1997); and Daniel Maguire and Larry Rasmussen, *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[40] Richard Dickinson, *Economic Globalization*, 17.

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whereby economic "power" is not limited to notions of scarcity and competition.[41] Thus, the WCC called for a systematic policy of "inclusion" in contrast to neo-liberal models of the consolidation of power.[42] By advocating the inclusion of all peoples into a more equitable economic model, the WCC argued theologically that all persons are created in the image of God and are called to responsible citizenship in the "oikoumene." Thus, "All people are called to be subjects of history, not simply the objects of the history of others."[43] Finally, the WCC contended that the Christian tradition itself offered a distinctive understanding of economic "value" whereby economic sustainability and use emerge from human relationships with God in the context of the larger "oikos." Here the WCC pointed to the institutions of the Sabbath, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee year in order to demonstrate how economics, environmental ethics, and political sensibilities should be fused. Understanding economic activities as part of "ecological stewardship"

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[41] See here recent theological reflections on "power" that move away from strictly competitive economic understandings: Christine Firer Hinze, "Power in Christian Ethics: Resources and Frontiers for Scholarly Exploration,"*The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, ed. by Harlan Beckley (Boston: The Society of Christian Ethics, 1992): 277-290; and William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[42] Richard Dickinson, *Economic Globalization* 24-25. Even more pointed criticisms of "world economic structures" are found in Ulrich Duchrow's article, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire: A View from Western Europe," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 21-27.

[43] Richard Dickinson, *Economic Globalization*, 25. Here Dickinson spoke of fragmentation and alienation as an attendant reality of globalization when wedded to neo-liberal policies. The reality of global production and its abilities to move from place to place have helped to weaken environmental standards and policies precisely because such mobility weakens the ability of any one place to remain secure in its long-term economic viability. Furthermore, Dickinson noted that neo-liberal policies challenged the viability of democratic statehood in less developed nation-states such as Somalia and the Sudan. Interestingly, Dickinson called for an investigation here into Christian political theory and its preoccupation with "inordinate state power" in a time where few countries and corporations hold concentrated power.

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thus directed the WCC toward a policy more attuned to environmentally sustainable practices.[44]

In conjunction with several staff members of the WCC, the Visser 't Hooft Endowment Fund for Leadership Development held a consultation on "sustainable growth" in June 1993 in order to investigate more carefully the WCC's institutional work on these environmental issues. The results of this consultation would have a profound impact on the WCC's thinking. First, the consultation recommended that the WCC revisit its understanding of "sustainable development" and economic growth to foster deeper understandings of these subjects: in brief, the consultation argued that sustainable development "leaves the world as rich in resources and opportunities as was the world inherited from the past. This means that renewable resources are consumed no faster than they can be renewed, that nonrenewable resources are consumed no faster than renewable substitutes can be found, that wastes are discharged at a rate no greater than they can be processed by nature or human devices. In its richer meanings, sustainability is more than survival."[45] The consultation, therefore, urged the WCC to embody a fuller understanding

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[44] An interesting aspect of the WCC's analysis on economics and development issued from its own self-critique on economic matters during a historical survey. The WCC's policies "have at times, especially during the 1970s, been caught up in ideological stances being too romantic about 'the poor' and 'the people'. There has even been talk about 're-peopling the people' when it was felt that people's movements had distanced themselves from what should be their primary concerns." "Report of an Ecumenical Consultation on the Topic of Development," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[45] Lukas Vischer, "The Theme of Humanity and Creation in the Ecumenical Movement," in *Sustainable Growth: A Contradiction in Terms?* sponsored by the Visser 't Hooft Memorial Consultation (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993):14. Herman Daly's preparatory article for this consultation indicated the extent to which the WCC engaged environmental economics at the methodological level. See Daly's "The

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of "quality of life" and "hope" over and against notions of mere "survival" in the modern age. As the consultation argued, a specifically Christian form of hope and life should mark the WCC's institutional understanding of sustainable economic practices. Finally, the consultation called for the WCC to be a prophetic example through repentance for past failures. As such, the WCC would be involved directly in the difficulties of institutional economic change, willing to "accompany the process for change, and through their life and witness to create conditions which reduce the risk of disruption [in society] and disintegration."[46]

VI. Climate Control and the WCC

One of the most effective environmental programs to emerge within the WCC during the 1990s was its "Ad Hoc Task Group on Climate Change." Climate change became a priority issue for the WCC following the 1992 United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. Subsequent to this conference, the WCC convened consultations on global warming, monitored the activities of the UN

Economist's Response to Ecological Issues: Elements of Environmental Macroeconomics," Appendix I.a, 39-51.

[46] Lukas Vischer. "The Theme of Humanity and Creation in the Ecumenical Movement," 32-33. See also here Janet Somerville, "The Bank That Lets You Invest in Poor People: EDCS [the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society]," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 9 (1996): 21-22. The WCC set up the EDCS in 1975 in order to provide micro-loans and investment capital to marginalized persons unable to otherwise start businesses. Again, the WCC envisioned such acts as "concrete solidarity and praxis" through alternative economic practices. At an institutional level in 1995 the WCC's Central Committee resolved that by the year 2000 ten percent of the WCC's general funds were to be invested in the EDCS.

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activities on climate change, published reports and statements on climate change, and informed member churches of the activities and significance of global warming.[47]

Indeed, the WCC's Study Paper on "Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith," prepared for the UN' consultation in Driebergen, Netherlands (Driebergen I), represented a major contribution by the WCC to the discussion of environmental issues within religious circles. Although the document offered only a cursory scientific discussion of the debate regarding climate change and global warming, this study surveyed the theological, ethical, and cultural ramifications of these challenges in helpful ways. Thus, "Accelerated Climate Change" offered one working paradigm of the WCC's approach to environmental matters in the mid-1990s. The first sections of the document outlined the potential scientific ramifications of global warming followed immediately by theological and ethical imperatives. These imperatives sketched broadly the WCC's theological methodology pertaining to climate change—empirical statements corresponding to scientific understandings of climate change, prophetic denouncement of such changes, and then pragmatic action grounded in Christian eschatological hope. The document also included a multi-dimensional understanding of climate change: the role of transnational corporations, the need for the mobility of peoples and goods, the place of military activities in oil consumption, deforestation, desertification of once productive

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[47] For a more detailed historical overview of the WCC's work on climate change see David G. Hallman, "Globalisation and Climate Change," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News* 12 (1997): 31-34. Also, see: Lukas Vischer *Churches on Climate Change: A Collection of Statements and Resolutions on Global Warming and Climate Change* (Geneva/ Berne: World Council of Churches/ Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1992). See especially here the "Report of the Observers sent by the World Council of Churches to the Fourth Session of the International Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC4) in Geneva, December 9-20, 1991," 94-108.

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dry lands, and the explosion of world populations. These descriptions guided the WCC's efforts toward practical "targets" for reducing greenhouse gases (guided by the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change), with specific challenges aimed at Northern and Southern countries. For Northern countries the WCC called for radical shifts in environmental policies and lifestyles. The WCC encouraged peoples of the South to continue work toward human rights and democratic participation such that self-reliance and regionally appropriate technologies might emerge.[48]

"Accelerated Climate Change" also promoted collaborative efforts by the WCC at the local, national, regional, and international level in collaboration with secular groups, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and international agencies. "We recognize and celebrate the movement of God's Spirit beyond the churches as well as within them. Our awareness of God's action in society provides a theological foundation with secular groups. We know, moreover, from the enormity and complexity of the climate change peril that the contributions of all sectors of society are needed for an adequate response."[49] This sketch revealed two important aspects of the WCC's response to these issues: first, a humility with regard to the enormity of climate issues and the need for expertise in these areas; and next, an explicit acknowledgement of the Spirit's work and movement outside of ecclesial boundaries.

Finally, in the "Accelerated Climate Change" document the WCC evidenced its "solidarity" with "international civil society," placing the WCC in a dynamic conversation with other NGOs in shaping public policy on global warming. The WCC's

[48] World Council of Churches, "The Place of Programme Unit III [Justice, Peace and Creation] Within the Structure of the World Council of Churches," *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation news* 6 (1994): 43.

[49] *Ibid.*, 30.

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unique contribution to such interchanges resided in its call for a "global community of solidarity and sharing" whereby the WCC recognized that "[t]his situation of unequal peril raises an immense challenge to the sense of human solidarity. A mounting fragmentation of humanity could easily take place. Already there are signs of withdrawal by richer countries from attending to the growing suffering in the South."[50] As a member of civil society, the WCC challenged the international community to ratify and implement the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change and to adopt specific target dates and strategies for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.[51]

Thereafter the WCC monitored the UN's progress on climate change carefully. The WCC sent a large delegation to the Berlin Climate Summit in 1995 (a summit charged with implementing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change). Here the WCC delegation participated in climate change negotiations through press releases, discussions with government delegates and NGOs, worship services, and careful monitoring of United Nation proposals and documents.[52] In 1996 the WCC provided significant financial and staff support for an international petition campaign geared toward combating global warming: the WCC's Unit III director addressed delegates at the UN Climate Change meeting in July 1996. Likewise, at the UN's second consultation in Driebergen, Netherlands (Driebergen II), the WCC convened a consultation in order to address the notion of "Climate Change and Sustainable Societies/Communities." The

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[50] *Ibid.*, 34.

[51] *Ibid.*, 43.

[52] Again, for a good overview of the complexities of this history see David G. Hallman, "Ecumenical Responses to Climate Change," *The Ecumenical Review* 49 (1997): 131-141. See also here Levi Lunde, *North/South and Global Warming: Towards an Effective and Equitable Basis for Negotiating Climate Change Conventions and Protocols* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989).

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WCC reviewed here the issues of sustainability, problems with the logic of "sustainable development," case studies on climate change from church officials in Eastern Europe, India, and the Pacific, and finally theological and ethical reflections on climate change.

Lukas Vischer's paper on "Climate Change, Sustainability and Christian Witness," presented at the WCC's Driebergen II consultation, summarized the WCC's witness on climate change issues and leveled the following question: could the WCC as an institution find criteria for specifically Christian assessments of sustainability regarding climate change? Vischer did not foresee a distinctive role for the WCC in this arena of climate negotiations, but rather an ancillary and supportive role. He envisioned the WCC as playing the role of an institutional gadfly, injecting Christian understandings about the proper place of human activity in relation to God and non-human creation. Vischer also called for the WCC to evidence its own commitment to ecological issues through a concrete change in its institutional existence. Although he lauded the WCC for its auspicious approach to these problems, he noted that the credibility of the WCC's witness depended upon the accuracy of its environmental analysis and its own environmental practices at an institutional level.[53]

VII. The WCC and Transnational Corporations: Monitoring Environmental Incidents

The environmental efforts of the WCC went well beyond shaping environmental policy in the arena of civil society. The WCC took aggressive stands against transnational corporations in attempts to bring about concrete solidarity with marginalized peoples. In

[53] Lukas Vischer, "Climate Change, Sustainability and Christian Witness," *The Ecumenical Review* 49 (1997): 142-161.

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1996, the most dramatic example of this solidarity occurred when the WCC entered into a public dispute with the Shell Petroleum Development Corporation concerning its environmental and human rights record in Nigeria. The WCC sent a team to Nigeria to investigate Shell's activities and to show the Ogoni indigenous peoples solidarity. In its report "Ogoni: The Struggle Continues" the WCC detailed numerous environmental violations including: illegal above ground pipelines, oil spills, and gas flarings within the Ogoniland region. In addition, the WCC detailed Shell's overall environmental record within Nigeria and offered specific recommendations for the Nigerian government, for Shell, and for the WCC to undertake in rectifying the problems there.[54]

The Shell Petroleum Development Corporation responded publicly with a point-by-point refutation of the WCC's reporting. Shell claimed that while some limited environmental damage had occurred in connection with its work in Nigeria, the WCC's claims that Shell had systematically degraded the environment were false. Indeed, to bolster its case Shell drew on international newspaper reports published in *The Times* (United Kingdom), the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), the *NRC Handelsbad* (Holland), and *The Independent* (United Kingdom) as well as World Bank reports published in 1995 to show that widespread ecological damage was not as self-evident as the WCC (and others, including Greenpeace) had claimed.[55]

The public exchange between the WCC and Shell was extremely important for the WCC at several levels. First, the WCC's public stance on this issue provided well-

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[54] Deborah Robinson, *Ogoni: The Struggle Continues* (Geneva: World Council of Churches and All Africa Conference of Churches, 1996).

[55] Shell Petroleum Development Company, *'Ogoni--the Struggle Continues* [World Council of Churches].' *Comments by Shell*, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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documented and thoroughly researched claims that the Shell Petroleum Development Company had engaged in illegal and environmentally damaging practices. The WCC's Ogoni report offered a careful historical overview of Shell's environmental activities, contextualizing Shell's activities in Nigeria's political and economic struggles. This report and subsequent WCC responses to Shell also demonstrated the WCC's willingness to engage in public theology as an agent in "civil society." That is, the WCC engaged in the struggle of the Ogoni peoples because of their stance to stand in solidarity with peoples who suffered environmental degradation. Moreover, the WCC attempted to stand in solidarity with the Ogoni peoples despite the difficult and complicated history of the issues.

Yet, Shell's detailed response to the WCC also confirmed the contested and politically charged nature of environmental problems. Indeed, as Shell's response indicated, the WCC's charges were perhaps only in part accurate—that is, although the WCC's report painted a damning picture of Shell's activities in the Ogoniland, Shell refuted these charges carefully and in detail. For instance, Shell denied the WCC's charges surrounding its handling of Shell oil spills, potential problems associated with gas flaring, the production of acid rain, purported indiscriminate dumping of drilling mud and sludge, and the dumping of oil into waterways. Eventually the WCC and Shell issued a joint communiqué reporting that the two sides had met and discussed both the WCC's report and Shell's responses to it. The communiqué noted that the WCC and Shell International Limited shared a common concern for the people and development of

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Nigeria.[56] Even after this communiqué, and despite Shell's continued protests, the WCC stood by its original report in order to give a "voice to the voiceless." Shell's subsequent public response approached indignation: indeed, Shell noted that although the WCC reported the events in Nigeria in order to give a "voice to the voiceless" this could not be considered equivalent to an accurate historical or factual picture of the events. Moreover, Shell highlighted the WCC's admission that it had in fact depended upon particular interpretations of Nigerian history and politics when the WCC called for its member churches, regional ecumenical organizations, and national councils of churches to divest shares in Shell.[57]

VIII. The General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998

When the WCC convened its General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, ecological issues clearly constituted the ethical pulse for thinking about "ecumenism" at a global level. At the Harare General Assembly the WCC introduced a new ecumenical method—the Padare listening model—whereby "life" and "creation" were clearly emphasized.

The Padare methodology emphasized again the WCC's role as a provider of "space" in the household of the earth whereby God's "creative life forces" could emerge in concrete situations. The Padare—a Shona word meaning "meeting place" or "gathering

[56] The WCC stated that it would look into alleged factual errors regarding Shell's work in Nigeria. WCC, Office of Communication, "Joint Communiqué from the World Council of Churches and Shell International Limited," March 18, 1997, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[57] *Ibid.*

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place"—emphasized a round, open circular format where participants raised specific issues and shared concerns about their lives. These sessions, literally "open spaces," provided a meeting ground for ecumenical participants to exchange informally life experiences on environmental topics ranging from contaminated water to deforestation to biotechnology. No specific recommendations or institutional resolutions issued from these meeting places; rather, the "Padare" was a place where participants could raise ethical concerns and start conversations.

At the Harare General Assembly, this model of the Padare emphasized that all people were welcome in the circle of humanity.[58] Clearly, the Padare method reflected the WCC's own changing ecclesiological self-understanding.[59] WCC meetings leading up to the Harare conference had experimented with variations of alternative meeting structures in order to be more inclusive to a variety of voices. For instance, in 1997 the WCC utilized the "Sokoni" model (reflecting an African village market) so that the WCC might better institutionalize the tension of "global" and "local" ethical issues. With the Sokoni method the WCC provided the "space" for real, practical concerns designed to meet the needs of local participants.[60]

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[58] Margot Kässmann, "Implications and Challenges of the Decade and Theology of Life to the Ecumenical Movement and the WCC [Central Committee Plenaries on Decade and Theology of Life, September 16, 1997]," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[59] The ecclesiological implications of the "Sokoni" methodology are complex and not of direct concern here. For outstanding reflections of the WCC's institutional moves toward the "Sokoni" methodology see: Lewis Mudge, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Household: 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' After Harare," *The Ecumenical Review* 51 (1999): 243-53.

[60] Eva Stimson, ed., World Council of Churches, *Together on Holy Ground. Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December 1998* (Geneva: World Council of Churches,

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Margot Kässmann, a WCC staff member, underscored that the Sokoni methodology had issued from the WCC's institutional understanding of its "Theology of Life" whereby WCC staff members lived with the ambiguities and tensions of global and local theological impulses. Kässmann described the "Sokoni" methodology as a type of ecclesiology stressing the fact that the church is a community of "lovers of life."[61] Likewise, Martin Robra emphasized that the Sokoni methodology underscored the WCC's commitment to "conviviality" in creation. Robra saw the Sokoni methodology as an extension of the WCC's Theology of Life whereby people embraced creation, moving away from the "domination of nature to new forms of conviviality (that's more than co-existence) of humankind and other kind...."[62]

The Harare General Assembly reflected the institutional work of the WCC on environmental issues at several key points. Plenary and guest speakers to the General Assembly noted repeatedly the importance of the WCC's connection of ecological issues

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1999). For other assessments of the Harare General Assembly, see: Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff, eds., World Council of Churches, Orthodox Task Force, *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope. Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Harare : the Report of the WCC Orthodox Pre-Assembly Meeting and Selected Resource Materials* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, Orthodox Task Force, 1998); Lewis Mudge, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Household: 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' after Harare;" Margot Kässmann, "The Social Witness of Global Ecumenism: A Guide for the Future [The 1999 Cynthia Wedel Lecture, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., March 25, 1999]," *Shalom Papers: A Journal of Theology and Public Policy* 1 (1999): 3-15; and S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Looking to the Future," *Shalom Papers: A Journal of Theology and Public Policy* 1 (1999): 16-25.

[61] Margot Kässmann, "The Social Witness of Global Ecumenism: A Guide for the Future [The 1999 Cynthia Wedel Lecture, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., March 25, 1999]," *Shalom Papers: A Journal of Theology and Public Policy* 1 (1999): 3-15.

[62] "Ecumenical Social Thought and Action in the Nineties: Theology of Life—Justice, Peace, Creation [Combined Notes for Addresses at University of Birmingham and Westminster College, Oxford University]," Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

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to justice and peace issues: Professor Wanda Deifelt, a Brazilian theologian at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Sao Leopoldo, noted that *metanoia* connoted not only personal human "conversion" but also seeing ecological issues anew. She urged participants to see God's creation through the cross of Jesus Christ, as broken and fragmented. Only when humans could see God's action in all creation could humanity truly repent and follow the way of the cross.[63] Other plenary speakers included Dr. Kosuke Koyama and the Archbishop Anastosios of Tirana and All Albania: both of these speakers highlighted the WCC's work in environmental issues as a sign of its eschatological hope in God's renewal of the earth.

IX. Assessments

The WCC's institutional commitment to environmental issues changed substantially between the years 1991 to 1998. Theologically, the WCC's commitment to issues of ecology remained largely grounded in its institutional understanding of ecumenism as a larger movement in the "oikoumene." At a more practical institutional level, however, environmental disasters and specific environmental issues, however, forced the WCC to respond institutionally in new ways. This section provides an assessment of the WCC's extensive institutional commitment to environmental issues from 1991 through 1998. Again, Gustafson's matrix of questions from theological, social scientific, philosophical, and natural scientific sources supplies a good starting point for interrogating the WCC's work in order to provide impressions and criticisms.

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[63] World Council of Churches, "Together on Holy Ground. Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December, 1998."

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Theologically, the WCC's environmental ethics between 1991-1998 attempted to offer new insights on environmental matters. Julio de Santa Ana, a faculty member at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, provided profound reflections on the WCC's unique ethical work during the 1990s. In his unpublished article "Elements for a Theology of Life" de Santa Ana argued that the WCC's approach to environmental ethics was often prompted by systematic changes in world information systems. Thus, the WCC's theological responses to environmental threats were not separated from its own institutional commitments to such work. Indeed, de Santa Ana pointed to the ascendance of capitalistic marketplaces and the acceleration of new technologies in the construction of social realities: "The rhythm of life is speed-up. The operational logic becomes more and more binary, according to the computers' programmes. That is: it is a logic of 'take it or leave it'; adjustment or exclusion. Those who make the necessary changes for adjustment have a place and a chance in the system. Others who cannot, or don't want to pay the price, are 'out.'"[64] The WCC's work during the 1990s, de Santa Ana contended, often embraced the criticisms of "anti-systemic movements" in environmental ethics, attempting to provide space for "interruptions and openings" into the closing of world systems.

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[64] Julio de Santa Ana, "The Concept of Civil Society," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 2. De Santa Anna stressed, though, that these reflections were not complete or systematic. Indeed, his writings here and elsewhere tend to be of at the level of general "trends" within society, eschewing the more formalized analysis of traditional ethics and analysis. "What matters is to perceive that the anti-systemic movements in our time denounce the irrational character of the rationality of the prevailing system...However, although there is an increasing awareness of the need of this shift of paradigm, by now it should be recognised that we are far from reaching a consensus concerning the new paradigm. We are in the process of searching it." (2)

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De Santa Ana also claimed that the WCC's recent ethical work represented the reality of "complexity"—or the blurring of distinctions between society, human culture, and non-human forms of life ("nature"). This "complexity" within modern society prompted the WCC to embrace new paradigms for ethical reflections.

> The time when Christian communities knew that in order to give witness of their faith they should fulfill God's mandates (Barth), or the 'divine imperative' (Brunner), is past—mostly because the understanding of God's will is not so clear now as it was 40 or 50 years ago. Churches ask themselves how to get a better understanding of the relations among creation, redemption and transfiguration of reality as operated by God in Christ. Thus a theology of life seems to be necessary. Above all in order to have clearer ethical guidelines, which must take into consideration not only history, but also nature. That is, an ethics with an inclusive approach to the complexity of life.[65]

De Santa Ana's recognition of the WCC's struggle with complexity, world economic systems, and concrete ethical action reflected bold attempts to rethink the WCC's ethical action in the 1990s.

At other levels, however, de Santa Ana's reflections embraced uncritical concepts lodged deep in the WCC's ecological commitments. For instance, he petitioned for a "biological" understanding of life as a justification for an "ethics of life." This often resulted in uncritical or even sentimental understandings of ecological problems as "life problems." Specifically, de Santa Ana noted "it is possible to understand the different orientations between cultures of love and cultures of violence. The former are respectful of the movement of life, the latter try to put life in a straight-jacket. Doing so, they kill life."[66] De Santa Ana attempted to ground his interpretations of ecological ethics by

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[65] Julio de Santa Ana, "Elements for a Theology of Life," 1995, Theology of Life Binder, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[66] *Ibid.*

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redefining scientific evolutionary theory: "evolution implies change and adaptation in view to live better...at this point we perceive the importance of relationships. The course of life depends on how they are managed."[67] De Santa Ana's reflections ignored many of the issues implicit in environmental problems. Thus, his analysis of the WCC's work fell short because he did not offer a careful understanding of "evolutionary ethics" or "life" as detailed by many philosophers and theologians working on these matters. Indeed, de Santa Ana's approach here was limited, ironically, by a specifically anthropocentric understanding of "life" processes. De Santa Ana intimated in many places that the human creature is the focus and lens through which all "life processes" are interpreted. Yet, many theologians have perceived the difficulties of juxtaposing "life" and "humanity" as central themes in a theological paradigm. That is, theologians committed to scientific understandings of evolution often argue that humanity may be merely "stage" in the evolutionary process and not the apex of this process.[68]

The question for the WCC as an institution here can be clearly stated: what is the WCC's understanding of "life" in its "Theology of Life" and what is the place of the human creature in such an understanding of environmental ethics? Larry Rasmussen, professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, and long-time WCC staff collaborator, has provided perhaps the most compelling vision for North American ethicists who wish to engage the WCC's work along these lines. Indeed,

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[67] *Ibid.*.

[68] For examples of such thinking, see Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" *James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments*, ed. by Harlan Beckley and Charles Mason Swezey, 13-38 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988).

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Rasmussen was instrumental in the formulation of the WCC's Theology of Life program during the 1990s.[69]

Rasmussen approaches ecological issues theologically while weaving in insights from other disciplines, painting wonderfully complex pictures for readers to study. Thus, for instance, he speaks not of "humanity and nature" as autonomous spheres of life but rather as demarcated overlapping realms of humanity, society, and nature. Rasmussen asserts that humans are always human "in and as nature." Thus, he sides with scientists who map "nature" as a holistic reality whereby all life interplays as one emerging flux. Moreover, Rasmussen notes that biologists and evolutionists have long understood that "nature" will survive as long as the earth continues as a physical entity. Thus, rather than focusing on "nature" or the "environment," Rasmussen explores the viability of human survival on the planet earth given present environmental problems and future trajectories on issues such as world population growth and decline, sustainability in economic models, the loss of biodiversity throughout the world, global warming, and so forth.

Rasmussen paints humanity, especially Western, white male-dominated humanity, as one of the primary instigators of contemporary ecological quandaries. In his view, the human creature has invaded and dominated every terrestrial ecosystem. Among the human species, some creatures are more invasive than others are: North Americans tend to be more intrusive into the space of non-human species than the indigenous Indian populations of Central America.[70] A central issue for Rasmussen in his work, therefore, is how humans should live in sustainable relationships with "others" of the earth and how to

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[69] See especially, Larry Rasmussen, "Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics," in David Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology. Voices From South and North* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994): 112-129.

[70] Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 39.

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configure power dynamics in human-human relations and human-biosphere relations to that end. Rasmussen maintains that these are not new ecological "issues:" rather, these are realities that have borne on every culture or society from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary urban societies.[71] Rasmussen also underscores, though, that humans face a unique situation in the early twenty-first century whereby we must face the consequences of six billion people pillaging, polluting, and indeed fundamentally altering the earth and its intricate ecosystems.

Rasmussen, therefore, expounds an "earth ethic" issuing from his interpretation of these incredibly immense and complex problems. His thesis hinges on six key arguments: the integral functioning of natural transactions in the biosphere and geosphere; nature as a restless self-organizing dynamic; the earth's treasures as a one-time endowment; the integral relation of social and environmental justice; the divine source and intrinsic dignity of creation; and creation as carrying specific ethical freight. This "earth ethic" resonates with other theological visions of a "theocentric" understanding of creation and humanity, although Rasmussen still wishes to retain some room for a Lutheran "theology of the cross."

Rasmussen's earth ethic inveighs against the common image of a "space-ship earth" whereby the earth is portrayed as a vessel and humanity in charge as its guiding crew—Rasmussen is clearly uncomfortable with such anthropocentric language which often dominates traditional Protestant theologies. Thus, he turns instead to the image of a "day care earth" whereby the earth is "child-proofed" such that humanity may enjoy creation without ruining the fundamental integrity of creation itself. As Rasmussen

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[71] *Ibid.*, 39.

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claims: "Theologically stated: [the model of the earth as a] day care gives sin and error room; [the model of the earth as a] spaceship doesn't." The globe, if "childproofed" sufficiently, would allow humans to practice ecological virtues and still allow for the realities of human finitude and sin.[72]

Rasmussen's work is seminal because he has served as a consultant to and staff member of the WCC, supplying the WCC with key theological concepts for thinking about environmental concerns. His article "Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics" sparked a renewal in the WCC's thinking about creation issues especially with respect to a detailed understanding of a "theology of life." Rasmussen's "theology of life" offers a reinterpretation of ecumenical theology whereby the notion of the ecclesial "space" of the WCC replaced long-standing debates within the WCC concerning "ecclesiology." Here Rasmussen speaks of contextual theologies and embodied ethics as the content of an "articulated space"—that is, a real and inductive theology emanating outward toward "others." He cites the WCC's recognition here of the postmodern mood and problems facing ecumenical ethics as a task: "The WCC in this situation is more and more caught between pressing global demands and the irreconcilable diversity of local needs."[73] Rasmussen attempts to resolve this tension between global and local demands through ecumenical ethics that evoke a "strong biblical sense of moral responsibility before the

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[72] These virtues include participation, sufficiency, equity, accountability, material simplicity, spiritual profundity, responsibility, and subsidiarity. *Ibid.*, 172.

[73] Larry Rasmussen, "Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics," *Working on a Theology of Life: A Dossier.* Theology of Life Notebook. World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland. Later printed in: David Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North* (Geneva and Maryknoll, New York: World Council of Churches/Orbis Books, 1994): 112-129. Rasmussen is quoting Konrad Raiser's work in this section.

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God who is the power in and of creation and the transcending power who beckons creation's redeeming transformation in the steady direction of compassion and justice."[74]

Rasmussen also asserts that a "theology of life" involves the recognition that the "Bible's own moral-trajectory remains incomplete...."[75] Therefore, the WCC's Theology of Life is constructed and received as a gift to be embodied by real people in specific contexts: by entering into dialogue with neighbors in the whole "oikoumene," a broader, more "ecumenical" understanding of environmental ethics will emerge.[76] In Rasmussen's estimation, the WCC's institutional legacy supplies a distinctive hermeneutical lens by which it might interpret Christian ethics, intertwining issues of justice, peace, and creation issues such that the WCC might address ecologically complex issues from both the point of view of the marginalized and also as a powerful Christian community standing over and against secularized public policy.

I sense throughout Rasmussen's presentation of his "theology of life" and "earth ethics" deep tensions with his roots as a Christian theologian as he struggles to translate traditional Lutheran concepts into greater sympathy with both anthropological understandings of "earth-oriented faiths" and insights more akin to materialistic and evolutionary based world-views. Indeed, Rasmussen leans heavily upon his Lutheran

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[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] This emphasis on empowering local cultures to address ecological issues offsets the top-down paradigm of experts "fixing" ecological issues. Rasmussen notes here the epistemological and hermeneutical difficulties of such endeavors: how can scientific experts measure and interpret the rupture of the ozone layer and its effects on planet earth? By placing global scientific knowledge in tension with local, concrete cultural responses, Rasmussen seeks a creative tension that does justice to the complexities of these issues. (*Earth Community: Earth Ethics*, 117 and 164).

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theological training in attempting to integrate this "theology of the cross" with a more secular form of evolutionary ethics.[77] In this way, Rasmussen attempts to show how both the life of Jesus and all creation manifests God in particular ways.[78] Yet, Rasmussen stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that only Christianity carries with it the particular hope of salvation from present ecological crises. "If we turn again to religion, we note that the perennial wisdom of most religious traditions has typically affirmed that creation is the Great Community, just as they have professed this comprehensive community as the basic referent for our lives and all others. We are kin to all else because we share a common origin in divine creativity. We share an ongoing journey as *creatio continua* as well. And not least, we share a common destiny in the destiny of the universe as itself."[79]

Rasmussen's stance at the intersections of theology, ecological ethics, and ecological religion forces him to hold in tension many disparate strands of thinking. For instance, Rasmussen greatly tempers the anthropological trajectories of a Lutheran theology of the cross with a wisdom-based approach to universal religions. Rasmussen

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[77] *Ibid.*, 333-343. Other theologians have also struggled with these issues. See for instance, Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Northcott's turn to "pre-modern" natural law offers a glimpse of the difficulty of questions on how to grapple with modern Christian accounts of nature and grace. Northcott claims that natural law "affirms that the natural order is a moral order, even though subject to elements of moral ambiguity arising at least partly from the Fall, that this order is determinative for human society and morality, that human goods are interdependent with the goods of the non-human world, that this order is represented in each human person by the powers of conscience and reason and that this naturally located morality is found in every human culture." (234) Indeed, Northcott recognizes the difficulties of turning to natural law and the "naturalistic fallacy" that plagues such thinking.

[78] See especially here Rasmussen's provocative reading of Luther and Bonhoeffer as mediators for a contemporary ecologically-sensitive theology of the cross. *Ibid.*, 271-310.

[79] *Ibid.*, 323.

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juxtaposes the insights of evolutionary thinking with a more anthropocentric ethical approach. The result of this montage is a complex, multi-layered approach that resists simplistic summaries or quick applications. "Determining what the relevant wholes are and what life requires in the way of a reciprocity of interests, with the concomitant sacrifices, is among the most daunting of moral endeavors. No simple disclosure tells us precisely how we 'relate to all things in a manner appropriate to their relations to God.'"[80]

Several aspects of Rasmussen's theological account are puzzling, however. Rasmussen's "day-care model," often utilized indirectly by WCC staff members, entails some perplexing elements: specifically, Rasmussen wishes to "child-proof" the earth, set limits, and provide guidelines. Practically speaking, who plays the role of teacher or daycare provider here? If our day-care overseer is God, how do humans know this God and how is this God interpreted? At one point Rasmussen suggests turning to "earth-

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[80] *Earth Community,* 347. Rasmussen's account is compelling to me because it reflects the complexity of ecological issues and the moral dilemmas of these questions. For an alternative view of moral problems see: Edmund Santurri, *Perplexity in the Moral Life: Philosophical and Theological Considerations* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1987). Santurri holds that an independent ethical realm exists thereby relieving Christian ethicists of the burden of "explaining" moral dilemmas—that is, for Santurri there are no real dilemmas on how Christians should act, rather there are only epistemological and hermeneutical issues on what humans know and how they know it. "For in the Christian view, systems of moral discourse are not simply reducible without remainder to the brute factual conventions of a given society. Quite the contrary, the Christian will at least have to say that some of these moral systems represent more or less accurate attempts to capture the contents of an independent moral reality transcending in varying degrees the conventions themselves. This moral reality might be interpreted in terms of either providential directives or divine commands, but the crucial point is that, given such a reality, however interpreted, a conflict between the explicitly normative canons of a system cannot in itself be regarded as evidence that the conflict is irresolvable in principle. It may simply be the case that a resolution is available (in moral reality) but has not been captured by the canons of the systems in question." (205) I disagree with Santurri here because his account bifurcates "society" and "reality," thereby perpetuating the notion of a "constant" moral realm. Rasmussen's account affirms a more evolutionary model of reality as a way to deal in part with recent ecological problems.

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based religions" and Christians who are "earth-inclined." Yet, who decides which religions are more "earth-inclined" given the enormous complexity of culture and religion?[81] Moreover, in my estimation Rasmussen's call for cosmologies informed by evolution clashes at times with this desire for a "child-proofed" earth. Note for instance that he proclaims that any God-talk "in the particular cosmologies and ethical systems of different traditions and locales that does not include the entire fifteen-billion-year history of the cosmos and does not relate to *all* its entities, living and nonliving, ancient forms and very recent ones (such as humans), speaks of a God too small."[82] I agree with this assessment, but also offer a question in return: if our conception of God is this expansive then should not our understanding of present environmental problems also be contextualized on a larger evolutionary map of the cosmos as well? Why constrain human conduct in the form of a "day-care ethic," and, in an ironic sense, place the action of humanity at the very center of this evolutionary story rather than trusting that in the larger scheme of things, God is indeed bigger than humanity's self-made dilemmas?

Another important reflection on the WCC's environmental efforts included WCC staff member Martin Robra's writings on "Theology of Life—Justice, Peace, Creation: An Ecumenical Study." This article offers a subtle description of the WCC's Theology of Life program, commencing with the situation of threatened communities and moving toward abstract understandings of "life" and "creation." Robra argues that theology

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[81] I am suggesting that given the heated and tangled debates on environmental ethics one should not affirm too quickly Rasmussen's day-care model without considering other arguments in theological and philosophical circles. See for instance: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). As MacIntyre argues, different conceptions of justice are closely linked to different and possibly incommensurable conceptions of rationality.(ix)

[82] *Earth Community: Earth Ethics.*, 266.

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provides a "space" such that a range of theologies (both Christian and non-Christian) can meet to discuss commonalities and differences in order to offer more inclusive understandings of the "other." Robra contends that the WCC's work revolves around "interconnected struggles" within the context of a "storied space," hearing the cries of people and "their polyphonic cry for life."[83] Robra's questions here are practically oriented: how could the WCC move from the beginning task of "resistance" toward more constructive acts of solidarity in environmental ethics? Many questions surface at this point: even if one is to use the notion of "space," which seems fruitful in a postmodern situation, what criteria for evaluating the quality of discussion and argumentation does one bring to this space? How might one adjudicate between the "polyphonic cries for life"? Practically speaking, can a person or institution attend to all "cries for life"? If not, where does one begin? In my estimation the WCC needs some concrete standard for assessing these "cries for life" and for attending to them in a concrete manner.[84]

Social scientific critiques of the WCC's work during the 1990s also appeared. Peter Scherle's institutional overview of the WCC's work maintains that the WCC works in decidedly "Constantinian" ways, attempting to work within the Christianized cultures and politics of decidedly Eurocentric conduits of political power (e.g., the UN).

> The WCC seems to be (and given its character as an institution it is difficult to see how this could be avoided) just another instrument of

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[83] Martin Robra, "Theology of Life—Justice, Peace, Creation: An Ecumenical Study," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 30.

[84] Holmes Rolston III provides perhaps the most honest account of environmental ethics and competing demands within ecosystems. See here his chapter "Life in Community: Duties to Ecosystems" in *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988): 160-191.

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> spreading western civilisation and Christianity around the globe. Its programmatic thrust and use of resources is geared toward 'helping' those outside the 'Hadrian-wall' and not to change the culture within it of which Christianity is a part and that has caused the major problems humanity is faced with today: the incredible and increasing poverty, the massive military potential, the destruction of nature etc.[85]

Scherle also comments on the WCC desire to embrace "indigenous" cultures and, quite possibly, return to a more ethically pristine time: "In a world of global interconnections (trade, travel, communications etc.) a 'culture of life' cannot be the result of a withdrawal into reservations of an allegedly 'original' or 'indigenous' culture."[86] Thus, according to Scherle, one potential hazard of the WCC's "Theology of Life" program is its temptation to ossify indigenous cultures in such a way that these cultures become sentimentalized or romanticized.

An informal working group—entitled "Friends of the WCC"—leveled other social scientific and theological criticisms in the early 1990s. This group, chaired by John Habgood (at that time the Archbishop of York) submitted a statement to the WCC entitled "The Future of Ecumenical Social Thought." The statement grew out of earlier consultations of this group held at Vancouver in 1990 and subsequent meetings in Zurich 1991 and Berlin 1992. The "friends of the WCC" complained that the WCC's social witness lacked both competence and credibility because the statements and documents of the WCC no longer carried either a convincing public or ecclesial direction. This group called the WCC to reorient its public policies so that its work reflected the true differences of opinion concerning environmental matters and public policy within the

[85] Peter Scherle, *All in One Boat? The History of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action—A Case Study of the WCC*, 1996, Theology of Life Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[86] *Ibid.*, 25.

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WCC member churches. The group also called for the WCC to exercise modesty in its relations with other churches and the world: "The WCC cannot be a shadow UN, pretending to be competent on all the world's problems. Particularly in a time when financial stringency requires a reduction of staff and programmes, [the WCC] must choose carefully the issues on which it seeks to influence the world and the churches. Contrary to this, the programme plans announced for Unit III, Justice, Peace and Creation, sound immodest and pretentious."[87] The report continued that the WCC lacked a coherent rational ethical approach, especially in "applying" biblical or theological reflections to direct action.[88] These criticisms evidenced fundamental disagreements in understanding the WCC's role in "political" and "policy" matters.

One of the most important "friends of the WCC" was Ronald Preston. Preston, a long-time consultant for the WCC on social ethics, worked in collaboration with the "friends of the WCC" and individually in calling for accountability in the WCC's social ethics. Preston argued that the WCC should employ "experts" in ethical fields such as ecology in order to generate careful scientific understandings of complex realities.[89]

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[87] John Habgood, "A Statement to the World Council of Churches on The Future of Ecumenical Social Thought [Consultation at Berlin, May 29-June3, 1992]," JPIC Box, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

[88] *Ibid.* See also, John Habgood, Hermann Barth, Ronald Preston, Risto Lehtonen, and Paul Abrecht, Report on the Meeting With the World Council of Churches on the Future of Ecumenical Social Thought, at the Ecumenical Institute (Bossey) Switzerland, February 18-19, 1994, Theology of Life Box, Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Archives.

[89] A good history of the criticisms by the "friends of the WCC" is found in Marlin VanElderen, "Friendly Dialogue: A Positive, Outspoken Critique," *One World* 4 (1994): 11-14. See also here the following works: John Habgood, Hermann Barth, Ronald Preston, Risto Lehtonen, and Paul Abrecht, "Report on the Meeting With the World Council of Churches on the Future of Ecumenical Social Thought, at the Ecumenical Institute (Bossey) Switzerland, February 18-19, 1994," Theology of Life Box, World Council

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Samuel Kobia, a unit director for justice, peace, and creation issues, responded to these "friends" by noting that issues of scientific "expertise" and "power" were conjoined: indeed, both Kobia and General Secretary Konrad Raiser countered that the WCC's social programs had consulted scientific and ethical experts. Thus, responding to Preston's arguments on consulting economists on complex social problems, the WCC countered, "The problem is not always that the theologians [within the WCC] cannot agree with the economists, but that the economists don't agree among themselves."[90] Moreover, Duncan Forrester, a theologian at the University of Edinburgh, countered that contrary to the highly "realistic" and "rationalized" ethical models of Preston, the WCC's social ethics could not offer carefully crafted ethical plans precisely because it stood at the margins of society with the voiceless, never sure what the next move might entail. For Forrester, the WCC's intentional stance of risky solidarity provided the best paradigm of how Christian ethics should proceed.[91]

These assessments provide a good transition into chapters four and five. In chapter four, I examine the WCC's institutional context for engaging ethical arguments and approaching moral problems. Thus, I look specifically at the WCC's engagement of environmental problems and conclude that the WCC argues distinctively at the levels of

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of Churches Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Ronald Preston, *Confusions in Christian Social Ethics: Problems for Geneva and Rome* (London: SCM Press, 1994); Peter Lodberg, "Book Review of Ronald H. Preston, *Confusions in Christian Social Ethics. Problems for Geneva and Rome*, " *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 503-504; and Duncan Forrester, "Returning Friendly Fire: Ronald Preston and New Ecumenical Social Ethics," *Crucible* 36 (1997): 189-197.

[90] Marlin VanElderen, "Friendly Dialogue: A Postive, Outspoken Critique," *One World* (1994): 14

[91] Duncan Forrester, "Returning Friendly Fire: Ronald Preston and the New Ecumenical Social Ethics" *Crucible* 36 (1997): 189-197.

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prophet, environmental expert, and environmental advocate. This multi-leveled way of arguing about environmental matters reflects the WCC's policies and methodology as an ecumenical institution. In chapter five, I glean specific virtues from the WCC in their institutional work on ecology. Here I contend that the WCC's emphasis on institutional humility, solidarity, and risk constitutes a weighty ethical legacy to consider in formulating a Christian understanding of environmental ethics.

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CHAPTER 4

Prophet, Expert, and Advocate: The WCC and its Formation of an Institutional Environmental Ethic

Environmental concerns in recent years have become increasingly central to the work of NGOs. The Seattle 1999 World Trade Organization meeting evinced the power of non-governmental actors to confront and challenge powerful governmental and inter-governmental organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other international inter-governmental institutions and thereby to act as democratic forces in attending to environmental issues at an international level.[1]

This chapter investigates the place of the WCC in this arena of NGOs. What is the place of Christian institutions such as the World Council of Churches in such contemporary non-governmental environmental movements? How should one evaluate the contribution and efforts of a complex organization such as the WCC? In chapter one, I offered a broad matrix of questions for analyzing the WCC's work on environmental issues drawing extensively from the work of James Gustafson. In chapters two and three I utilized this interpretive matrix to the WCC's historical work on environmental issues. I concluded in these chapters that one could rightly criticize and commend the WCC's work on environmental issues at many levels. Moreover, I claimed in these chapters that

[1] The official name of the "World Bank" is the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

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the WCC's institutional work provides theological and ethical resources for those engaging environmental issues in a multileveled and complex manner.

In this chapter, I investigate more fully the contours of the WCC as an institutional non-governmental actor in the arena of environmental ethics. As many scholars have shown, ecological issues have instigated new theoretical and practical demands upon international institutions. NGOs, in many instances, have cleared obstacles in formulating practical and concrete responses to ecological crises. I attempted to show in chapters two and three that the WCC's institutional reaction has at times served as an effective and creative response to environmental issues at the institutional level. I argue in this chapter that this institutional response to environmental issues is multi-layered and differentiated given various contexts and circumstances. I conclude that the WCC's institutional environmental work falls into three overlapping ethical arenas: that of a Christian prophetic witness issuing messages of hope and warning to the world; that of an expert non-governmental Christian organization laboring in the realm of international civil society to formulate "public policy" as an "expert;" and finally, that of a Christian institutional advocate working in solidarity with people's movements throughout the world to advance justice, peace, and creation issues.

These ethical dimensions of the WCC's institutional work correspond roughly to James Gustafson's delineation of levels of discourse in moral dialogue and argumentation as outlined in chapter one.[2] To review briefly, Gustafson identifies various "levels" of moral or ethical discourse employed by individuals and institutions: a prophetic level aimed at relaying outrage and alarm to the larger public, a narrative level appealing to

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[2] *Intersections: Science, Theology, and Ethics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1996): 35-55.

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specific religious and moral communities and their traditions and practices, a public policy level aimed at engaging specific national or multinational organizations, and an ethical level rooted in a critical assessment of pertinent "facts."[3] Gustafson's understanding of the multidimensionality of moral discourse is helpful in discerning the WCC's institutional response concerning environmental matters. Thus, I commence this chapter with an examination of the WCC's work on environmental issues at the level of a Christian "prophetic" and "narrative" voice within the larger public arena and within the communal context of Christian churches. This section intentionally conflates Gustafson's categories of moral discourse at the prophetic and narrative levels. Next, I examine the WCC's work as a public policy NGO, limning the contours of its political efforts on environmental issues in the realm of international civil society. Here I identify the WCC's work within Gustafson's understandings of "ethical" and "public policy" discourse. Finally, I sketch the WCC's place in environmental issues at the level of a Christian institutional advocate in solidarity with people and issues—a critical element in understanding the WCC's institutional ecological ethic. This category, in my estimation, reflects a unique institutional aspect of the WCC's work and does not fit neatly into any of Gustafson's categories.

I contend in this chapter that in order to understand fully the WCC's institutional work on environmental issues one must grapple with its work at different levels of ethical discourse. It is only with this complex scheme in mind that one can accurately interpret the WCC's ethical position on ecological issues as part of the complex skein of justice, peace, and creation matters.

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[3] This four-tiered model for understanding moral discourse is not a static entity in Gustafson's work. Rather, he refines and adapts this model according to the context.

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I. The WCC as a Prophetic Voice and Ecclesial Space

Chapters two and three of this dissertation portrayed the animated and sometimes apocalyptic language utilized by the WCC as it engaged ecological issues. I argue in this section that the WCC's moral discourse on environmental ethics includes a distinctive prophetic and narrative dimension. In order to understand this prophetic and narrative stance of the WCC I engage the recent work of Lewis Mudge, a Presbyterian theologian at the San Francisco Theological Seminary and frequent WCC collaborator on issues of ethics and ecclesiology. Mudge makes a significant contribution in discerning the WCC's role as an ethical and prophetic witness in his recent work *The Church as Moral Community: Ecclesiology and Ethics in Ecumenical Debate.* [4] I explore briefly in this section Mudge's claims about the WCC's role as a prophetic and narrative community offering ecclesial "space" for ethical reflection and action. Mudge's work, I argue, explores the vibrant prophetic and ecclesial character of the WCC's institutional work and yet does not take into account other salient features of the WCC's institutional ethics.

Mudge's primary concern in *The Church as Moral Community* centers on reclaiming distinctive ethical practices and spaces provided by ecclesial communities in a

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[4] Lewis Mudge, *The Church As Moral Community* (New York/Geneva: Continuum/World Council of Churches, 1998). See here also Mudge's related work on these matters, including: "Ecclesiology and Ethics in Current Ecumenical Debate," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 11-27; "*Veritatis Splendor* and Today's Ecumenical Conversation," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 158-163; "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Houshold: 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' After Harare," *The Ecumenical Review* 51 (1999): 243-253. I wish to thank Professor Mudge for discussion on these matters through stimulating personal conversations and written exchanges.

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world where "secular" concerns often engulf moral discourse. Mudge highlights the work of the WCC as a good example of how Christian churches can provide a distinctively Christian witness within the world while not shrinking into a sectarian mode and retreating from the world at large.[5]

Mudge argues that contributions by churches "to public discourse have become disconnected from the fabric of communal relationships in which Christians stand by virtue of the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ. We argue individualistically, legally, ideologically, but seldom as members of a body for whom relationships of basic trust with others are fundamental."[6] Mudge therefore concludes, "asking moral questions well begins when we learn to *be the church* well."[7] Mudge ends by stating that communities of "Christian practice can here and now begin to make space in the midst of human affairs for an energizing, sacramentally real, presence of a larger, inclusively

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[5] Douglas John Hall has argued that Christian churches, as institutions, do not hold the expertise that is necessary for unlocking the complex issues surrounding environmental concerns. "But we do have—or may receive!—something more important than expertise; and that is the prospect of sufficient *trust, modesty,* and *openness* that we may dare to "reason together". There is perhaps no other collectivity in the world today that can draw upon the resources of mutuality, ultimate concern for the earth, and historical hope that are there for those who expect the reign of God." Douglas John Hall, "The State of the Ark: Lessons from Seoul" in D. Preman Niles, ed., *Between the Flood and the Rainbow* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990): 48, footnote 4.

[6] Mudge, *The Church As Moral Community,* 8.

[7] *Ibid.,* 9. Mudge notes that both "moral" and "ethical" are difficult terms to describe adequately. His working definition here revolves around morality as connected to the practices in which people are formed. Ethics describes a field of investigation and inquiry dedicated to critical interaction with the content of moral formation.

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human, matrix of mutual moral obligation. Adapting biblical language, we are calling this imaginatively and actively maintained space a 'household of life.'"[8]

Thus, Mudge contends that churches provide non-Christians in the "household of life" with a space for deepening, broadening, and stretching philosophical (non-Christian) moral thought in dialogue with the Christian tradition of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. As Mudge claims, "Congregations thereby articulate the human communities around them as spaces in which the Spirit's people-gathering power is active. By proclaiming the gospel, celebrating the liturgy, and acting prophetically they signify that Jesus Christ is continually forming communities of people to be agents of God's *oikoumene*."[9]

Mudge's call for the distinctiveness of ecclesial ethics resonates with those within the WCC who wish for a more ecclesiological foundation in the WCC as an institution. As Mudge notes, transnational corporations, modern nation-states, and other such world ordered "systems" evidence various logics and rationalities which compete for the loyalties of individual persons: "Each colonizing world system today imposes on us its own teleology: whether that be a teleology of economic growth, or of profit maximization, or of technological progress.[10] Mudge contends that human behavior emerges from human practice as shaped by institutions. Thus, the character and shape of institutions is of vital importance to Mudge and his arguments: if the Church is to be a

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[8] *Ibid.*, 8.

[9] *Ibid.*, 82.

[10] *Ibid.*,56.

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Christian *oikoumene,* its cultural habits must be rooted in distinctively Christian understandings of politics and economics, and social realities.[11]

For Mudge this has direct relevance to the life of the WCC as an institution: indeed, he contends that the WCC is in a "life-or-death competition" with other global movements that seek to control life itself. Transnational corporations and the vibrancy of global capitalism especially threaten Christian understandings of the goodness of creation and life within the world: "Evangelization of the nations, in the sense of cultural Christianization, is no longer a feasible goal. Radical religious and cultural pluralisms are here to stay. The *oikoumene* needs new formats for understanding and responding to God's mission to humankind."[12] Mudge, therefore, offers the WCC as a good example of a Christian institution that provides "space" for worship and prophetic imagination. Thus,

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[11] Mudge's work overlaps and engages the work of Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre on the idea of a distinctive "practice" within particular communities. See especially: Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements With the Secular* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). For more sociologically oriented studies on "practice" see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[12] *The Church As Moral Community,* 50. Central to Mudge's work is the notion that both conservative and progressive agendas in ethical reflection tend to ignore theological underpinnings. Here Mudge turns to the work of British theologian John Milbank: "Contemporary political theologians tend to fasten upon a particular social theory, or else put together their own eclectic theoretical mix, and then work out what residual place is left for Christianity and theology within the reality that is supposed to be authoritatively described by such a theory." *The Church As Moral Community,* 29 quoting Milbank. I agree with Mudge here that that Milbank has many penetrating insights to offer on Christian ethics. Yet Milbank's understanding of sociology, political theory, and other social sciences as rival "master narratives" pine for a lost "Christendom" whereby theology was the queen of these sciences. Such conclusions, in my estimation, do not do justice to the complexity and insights of non-theological discourse. See here Gerard Loughlin's insightful account of Milbank's work: "Christianity at the End of the Story or the Return of the Master-Narrative," *Modern Theology* 8 (1992): 366-384.

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at an institutional level the WCC fosters moral capabilities that challenge the ethical assumptions of other world institutions. Moreover, Mudge argues that Christian communities and institutions potentially offer a type of moral and spiritual hospitality "to [secular] ideas and movements that, without changing their secular character, places them in a larger reflective setting, perhaps changing their import in the process."[13] Thus, Mudge explores the work of the WCC as an institutional paradigm of how Christian churches might offer a distinctively Christian ethic while still understanding themselves as a human institutions. Central to his argument is the following query: "Does a theological formula exist that defines the intrinsicality of the church's moral being without reducing the church to the particular moral positions it may advocate at any given time?"[14]

Mudge's arguments outline clearly the distinctive prophetic and narrative role of the WCC as an institutional actor. His argument centers on the reality that the "church is to be the church," providing prophetic and narrative "space" whereby the Christian tradition is lived and engaged creatively as a basis for moral decision-making. Moreover, his opinions clearly reflect one aspect of the WCC's environmental work. That is, the WCC draws upon on its own communal understanding as a "fellowship of churches" to provide guidance to its ethical positions. Indeed, the Christian tradition permeates the WCC's ethical conversation at the prophetic and narrative levels of ethical discourse.

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[13] *The Church As Moral Community*, 107.

[14] *Ibid.*, 25.

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Yet, these modes of discourse do not exhaust the WCC's institutional approach to environmental ethics.[15]

As I argued in chapters two and three, the WCC also engages moral issues not only at a prophetic and narrative level, but also as an expert (dealing with "facts") and as a public policy analyst. That is, the WCC argues about environmental issues with scientists, politicians, and policy makers in order to offer factually accurate yet theologically informed environmental public policy analysis.

Mudge struggles with this conception of ethical "facts" or public policy analysis in his review of the WCC's ethical work. He clearly rejects the language of Christian ethical "realism" or the WCC's work toward shaping a "responsible society" as represented in the WCC's work by Ronald Preston. Mudge insists that Preston's "realism" is a form of secular pragmatism, offering little long-term vision or life by which Christian institutions may sustain genuinely Christian practices. Moreover, Mudge contends that Preston's Christian "realism" blunts the distinctiveness of the Christian community as a community with unique practices and ethical habits.

The problem here, however, is that Mudge's exploration probes only part of the WCC's work as an institution. The WCC argues at many levels, with Christian prophecy

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[15] These conversations character of the WCC as a moral or ecclesial community often deteriorate into polemics for an "ethical approach" issuing from the Life and Work movement or the "ecclesiological approach" issuing from the Faith and Order movement. For good reflections on this see: Thomas Best and Martin Robra, eds., *Ecclesiology and Ethic: Ecumenical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997). This edited volume contains several WCC statements and reflections on how the WCC as an institution reconciles the ecclesial and ethical trajectories of its work. See also here: Duncan Forrester, "Ecclesiology and Ethics: A Reformed Perspective," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 148-154; and Konrad Raiser, "Ecumenical Discussion of Ethics and Ecclesiology," *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996): 3-10;

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and narrative shaping its identity in part. Ironically, Mudge himself eventually embraces a form of ethical "realism," appealing to empirical "facts" and the judgments of experts on complex ethical matters.[16] Yet, Mudge is hard-pressed to argue why his appeal to "realism" is more "realistic" than the position from which Preston levels his criticisms of the WCC. Why is Mudge's appeal to ethical experts more palatable than Ronald Preston's push for engaging social scientific models? Mudge's call for ethics shaped by a distinctive Christian community need not conflict with understanding the WCC as a complex, multi-layered institution. Indeed, the WCC has worked at the prophetic and narrative levels of ethical conversation, portraying itself as a distinctively "Christian" community, offering prophetic and narrative space for the Christian tradition to be engaged. This level of ethical conversation, though, reveals a limited aspect of the WCC's work. Indeed, the WCC often employs the moral language of "realism" and "pragmatism" precisely because it also operates as a non-governmental organization with institutional trajectories that do not square neatly with its prophetic or ecclesial identity.

II. The WCC and Public Policy: Environmental Action within International Civil Society

The WCC exists as a complex organization with multiple aims. Yet too many interpreters have overlooked or simplified the institutional ramifications of the WCC's actions in its attempts to shape and influence both ethical and public policy discourses.

[16] Mudge asks the following question: "Do Christians deeply concerned about justice, peace, and the sustainability of a livable environment have to step outside the theological circle to find serious intellectual or moral companionship? It appears in many cases that today they do. The faith may thereby be diluted, or it may be enriched, by borrowings of this sort." *The Church As Moral Community*, 30.

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This section sketches the WCC's arguments as a public policy maker and "ethical expert." As I demonstrated in chapters two and three, the WCC has attempted to position itself as an NGO on environmental issues in various international policy forums. Again, this issues directly from the WCC's self-understanding of its institutional aims. First, the WCC understands itself as an NGO whereby it constructively contributes to a "responsible society" and to public debate concerning environmental issues, thereby seeking credibility with secular institutions. Next, the WCC sees its attempt to gain ecological expertise as a responsible position as it attempts to influence public policy and stand in solidarity with poor and oppressed peoples throughout the earth. Thus, the ethical expertise gained by the WCC in various conversations serves not as an end in itself, but rather brings the WCC into dialogue with non-Christian actors in the realm of international politics. Entrance into this "public" forum is necessary in order to address both the "realistic" nature of environmental problems within the world as well as to move these conversations back to a local level where people battle concrete environmental problems.[17]

Several questions surface here regarding the WCC's ecclesial and institutional aims. Can one legitimately define the WCC as an NGO, or should one define the WCC more accurately as an ecclesial institution? Two scholars in the field of international relations, Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, provide a good working definition of international NGOs for the purposes of this dissertation: international NGOs are transnational, non-profit organizations concentrating on issues directly related to economic, environmental, medical, educational, and humanitarian relief work. Other

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[17] As noted in chapters two and three the WCC itself has significant criticisms about a "public" arena of conversation where "experts" operate.

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pertinent issues confronted by international NGOs include issues tied to science, technology, and religions in world discourse. NGOs employ a cosmopolitan discourse, utilizing the language of "human rights" in conversing with governments and in debating the terms of major world problems. Interestingly, Evans and Newnham cite the WCC's work directly as a pertinent example of a NGO:

> [The] majority of INGOs [international NGOs] are not political actors *per se* but rather functionally specific groups which may 'cross over' into politics when the opportunity or the need arises. The limiting case is probably that of Green movements and environmental politics. In this case INGOs do not really function independently from the international political system. There is a qualitatively significant difference between Greenpeace and the World Council of Churches in this regard. INGOs collaborate with or conflict with governments on a case-by-case basis. [18]

Clearly, Evans and Newnham view the WCC as an important international NGO engaging in social concerns by collaborating with other NGOs on an ad hoc basis.

Other political scientists also explicitly point out the WCC in describing the scope and mission of NGOs. For instance, the political scientists Thomas Weiss, David Forsythe, and Roger Coate describe the WCC as an NGO with a normative Christian basis: "...broadly oriented NGOs are active on human rights from time to time, but they are linked more to religion or some other normative standard than to the International Bill of Rights. An example is the World Council of Churches."[19] Their assessment clearly takes seriously the WCC's self-understanding as a Christian institution without downplaying its other institutional characteristics as well. This raises questions pertaining

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[18] Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998): 268-9.

[19] Thomas Weiss, David Forsythe, and Roger Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Second edition, (Boulder, Colorado: WestviewPress, 1997): 188.

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directly to the WCC's institutional identity and its ability to address both Christian and non-Christian communities on issues of public interest such as environmental concerns.

When one studies the full impact of the WCC's work on specific environmental issues it becomes evident that the WCC actively engages its member churches, international NGOs, and local governmental structures in order to interact dialectically on issues of ecology. The WCC operates here with a dialectical mentality, affirming those structures and movements within international society that resonate with the WCC's own position on ecological matters while at the same time offering calculated rebukes to errant governmental and political structures.

This conversation becomes more complicated when one understands the place of environmental matters in international political institutions as a whole. In recent years, the ascendance of "international NGOs" such as Greenpeace or the Red Cross has complicated some interpretations of what constitutes a "political" influence within world politics. Many scholars within international relations and political science emphasize a "state-centered" or state-as-actor model as the only legitimate understanding of who "acts" in international politics. Thus, many political scientists would not accept the WCC as a "political actor." Recent attempts in political disciplines have attempted to synthesize state actors with NGOs to formulate a "mixed model" actor whereby states, international organizations, NGOs, and multi-national corporations share the stage of action in international politics. These scholarly movements have added a great deal of confusion and complexity to this field. At the same time, these revisions have recognized the

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dynamic contributions of non-state actors to the field of international politics thereby challenging older conceptions of "political influence."[20]

This question of religiously oriented NGOs such as the WCC and its place as a political expert in the arena of environmental matters has generated fruitful responses from many disciplines. Jean Bethke Elshtain, a political theorist and Christian ethicist at the University of Chicago, has sketched the place of religious practices in political sciences and noted that "[p]olitical and international relations theorists consistently understate the power of religious conviction and its role as a defining, shaping, and constitutive force in world affairs. Force of belief is a form of power; it is, or may be, fungible."[21] Elshtain's position—that political scientists often mistakenly admit only state actions as "political"—resonates with many other important scholars in political science and Christian ethics today. Robert Keohane, a political scientist at Duke University, has written widely about the importance of non-governmental institutions in the formation and direction of world politics alongside state actors and multi-national corporations.[22]

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[20] For a good overview of these movements in political science and international relations see: Paul Hirst, *From Statism to Pluralism: Democracy, Civil Society, and Global Politics* (Bristol, Pennsylvania: UCL Press, 1997); and Jean Grugel, *Democracy without Borders: Transnationalization and Conditionality in New Democracies* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[21] Jean Bethke Elsthain, "International Politics and Political Theory" in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds, *International Relations Theory Today* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press; 1995): 263-278.

[22] Robert Keohane and Marc Levy, eds., *Institutions for Environmental Aid: Pitfalls and Promise* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996). Political scientists have written extensively on the place NGOs and more specifically church institutions have in defining "public" issues, such as environmental ethics. A good example of political scientists recognizing the inherently "public" work of the WCC is Douglas Johnston, "The Churches and Apartheid in South Africa" in *Religion, the Missing*

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Where then does the WCC fit in such an analysis? How does it work on environmental matters and how has this situated its work and identity? Moreover, how have environmental issues changed traditional conceptions of "political action" and "expertise" within both governments and NGOs, challenging the self-identity of institutions such as the WCC?

In an important article on "International Political Theory and the Global Environment" Andrew Hurrell, a political scientist at Oxford University, noted that environmental issues present a unique challenge to international organizations. Hurrell contended that the transregional nature of global environmental issues may actually challenge long-held political understandings of the sovereignty of nation-states whereby geographical political entities have a significant degree of autonomy over a specific region and people. Hurrell thus argued that environmental issues may well blur traditional distinctions in international relations and politics that draw clear distinctions between "international issues" and "domestic issues."[23]

Hurrell, like other political theorists, posited that a "transnational civil society" only emerged gradually from the struggles of ecological concerns, focusing "on the increased role of specific sets of transnational actors and NGOs, loosely collected under

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Dimension of Statecraft, ed. by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 177-207. For other interesting approaches to NGOs and their place in public life see: Phillip Taylor, *Nonstate Actors in International Politics: From Transregional to Substate Organizations* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984); Werner Feld and Robert Jordan, *International Organizations: A Comparative Approach* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988); and Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

[23] Andrew Hurrell, "International Political Theory and the Global Environment" in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. by Ken Booth and Steve Smith (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 129-153.

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the broad heading of the 'environmental movement'."[24] Hurrell identified transnational civil society as including the scientific community, environmental pressure groups, sustainable development groups, grassroots democracy advocates, and protectors of indigenous rights. In Hurrell's words, "The strength of such groups rests on their ability to develop and disseminate knowledge, to articulate a powerful set of human values, to harness a growing sense of cosmopolitan moral awareness, and to respond to the multiple weaknesses of the state system, both local and global."[25] Thus, environmental political movements have drawn on the reemergence of this concept of "civil society"—now expanded into an "international civil society"— in order to understand the structures of trans-border, non-governmental oriented spheres whereby ordinary citizens engage in meaningful political gestures which directly influence environmental change at the local and global levels.

What is the place of the WCC in such a "transnational civil society?" Does the WCC work in this arena of "civil society" as an "environmental expert" to shape public policy debates and the implementation of policy? Again, recent scholarship in the social sciences has seized this term "civil society" as a means for understanding the astounding democratic changes in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. For some, "civil society" has become synonymous with grassroots organizations and intermediary organizations that empower citizens to mediate the labyrinth of power relations existing between individuals, state bureaucratic organizations, and transnational corporations.

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[24] *Ibid.*, 144.

[25] *Ibid.*, 144-145.

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Julio de Santa Ana—a WCC staff consultant on justice and peace issues—offered an outstanding précis of this notion of "civil society" by drawing on Antonio Gramsci's understanding of civil society as a "set of public non-governmental organisms, groups and movements which express people's concerns and people's rights."[26] De Santa Ana's understanding of civil society entailed positive connotations revolving around the empowerment of local citizens. Other scholars, though, have claimed that the use of "civil society" is morally ambiguous at best. John Ehrenberg, a political theorist at the New School for Social Sciences, offered this overview of civil society:

> Coercion, exclusion, and inequality can be as constitutive of any civil society as self-determination, inclusion, and freedom. Nothing is written in stone or is true by definition; a 'robust' civil society can serve all sorts of purposes, and the presence or absence of bowling leagues proves nothing by itself. Organizations of lung cancer survivors are not the same as the American Tobacco Institute; the White Citizens Council was different from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; and it makes no theoretical or political sense to lump the Christian Coalition together with the American Civil Liberties Union. Qualitative distinctions and political choices must be made.[27]

As noted in chapter three, the WCC often embraced this notion of an international or transnational civil society during the 1990s as a means by which it could theorize its own place in public policy conversations concerning ecological issues. For instance, the WCC's general secretary Konrad Raiser invoked the notion of the WCC as a public policy actor and NGO expert within transnational civil society, working toward an

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[26] Julio de Santa Ana, "The Concept of Civil Society," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 3-11.

[27] John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 249. See also here the following works for insight on this subject:); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (New York: Penguin, 1994); and Benjamin Barber: *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

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expression of resistance and solidarity that would reshape public life and public space. Ultimately, for Raiser, civil society was about a certain quality of relationships as differentiated from strict "politics" or "economics": "Civil society seeks to build a sense of coherence and trust and, through communication, to create a culture of fundamental moral consensus, rather than to acquire, defend and exercise power or to accumulate capital."[28] Moreover, Raiser appealed to the transformative power of international civil society actors; such actors, he claimed, were in search of a more global ethos and cosmopolitan ethical community: "If national churches are typical actors in civil society at the level of the nation, may we not assume that the WCC, which understands itself as a fellowship of more than three hundred such churches in about one hundred countries, provides an important and ready-made space for promoting international civil society—particularly in view of the long heritage of ecumenical social thought and engagement?"[29] Raiser's arguments here pointed toward the WCC's work as an important "space" within international civil society contributing distinctively to this realm.[30]

Other scholars have attempted to understand the WCC's multifaceted institutional identity. For instance, Muto Ichiyo, a non-profit coordinator with People's Plan 21 at the Pacific-Asia Resource Centre in Tokyo, Japan argued that the while WCC was part of international civil society, it should also wrestle with its other institutional identities. Specifically, Ichiyo contended that a fuller understanding of the WCC's institutional

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[28] Konrad Raiser, "The World Council of Churches and International Civil Society," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 39.

[29] *Ibid.*, 41-42.

[30] For instance, many scholars have argued for a close historical reading of the influence of the WCC upon the UN and its formulation of a charter for international human rights. I am indebted to conversations with Martin Robra and Konrad Raiser on these matters.

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work would emphasize its role as a facilitator in an "interpeople alliance of hope," and not just civil society. Ichiyo argued that the concept of "civil society" elevated the nation-state as the central actor of political action and change, defining all other agents in relation to this state. His questions prompted serious reservations concerning the full embrace of the concept of "civil society" within the WCC.

Indeed, Ichiyo contested the WCC's strict identification with civil society as a barrier to understanding the WCC as an institution of relationships and hope as rooted in its Christian identity. Ichiyo introduced concepts such as "transborder participatory democracies" and an "interpeople alliance of hope" as accurate summations of the WCC's institutional work. Ichiyo concluded that the WCC's relationship with state actors and NGOs, civil society participants, and people's alliances unfolded dialectically, affirming a place in international civil society while also standing against the hegemony of the state underpinning such ideas.[31]

To summarize, the WCC as an institution has functioned practically well beyond its common understanding as a "fellowship of churches" such that it engages public policy groups, governments, transnational corporations, indigenous people's movements, and inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations. Moreover, the WCC's institutional forays into public policy include promoting itself as an "expert" in many arenas of environmental policy. Thus, an accurate understanding of the WCC's

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[31] Muto Ichiyo, "Alliance of Hope and Challenges of Global Democracy," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 28-37. Another significant WCC participant, Aram Keshishian, the Moderator of the Central Committee at Johannesburg in 1994, suggested that the WCC could embrace its role in "civil society" if sufficient ecclesiological basis from Faith and Order studies could be established. See here: Aram Keshishian, "Central Committee Johannesburg, 1994: Report of the Moderator," *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994): 214-230.

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institutional work on environmental issues should include a brief look at the WCC's use of scientific sources for environmental work.

The complexity of environmental ethics should give pause to any individual or institution casually entering into this field. For instance, Robert Leo Smith's textbook on *Ecology and Field Biology* samples some of the differing approaches to the field of "environmental studies" or "ecology." His entire first chapter is devoted to "Ecology: Its Meaning and Scope." Here Smith highlights scores of differing opinions on what rightly is encompassed by the term "ecology" and what is rightly left out of such arguments: he finally concludes that ecology is "the study of the structure and function of nature. Structure includes the distribution and abundance of organisms as influenced by the biotic and abiotic elements of the environment; and function includes all aspects of the growth and interaction of populations, including competition, predation, parasitism, mutualism, and transfers of nutrients and energy among them."[32] Smith provides a good overview of different fields and approaches within ecological studies. Several divisions within environmental studies demonstrate its complexity: plant ecology, animal ecology, ecophysiology (or physiological ecology), population ecology, and ecosystem ecology.

Smith also highlights major methodological divisions in approaches to ecology: one important tension is the all-inclusive "holism" of systems ecology (a study of the total behavior and/or attributes of a complex ecological framework) over and against a more inductive approach (a study of the particular working parts of an ecosystem). These methodological approaches divide over the manner of testing data as well: should one test hypotheses by inductive or deductive methods? Should ecology rely on strictly statistical

[32] Robert Leo Smith, *Ecology and Field Biology*, 5th edition (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1996): 4.

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models of analysis, or do nonstatistical models provide valuable insights? These are just a few of the thorny questions posed by Smith in introducing ecological studies.

The issue of global warming and climate change provides a concrete example of complexity in environmental studies. Efforts to construct specific public policy recommendations with respect to "the facts" of global warming have proved to be elusive. The WCC has attended extensively to the issues of global warming within its "ad hoc working group" in recent years, offering specific policy recommendations to the United Nations and other intergovernmental groups. In its publications, this WCC working group has concluded:

> Human societies are changing the chemical composition of the atmosphere through the excessive use of fossil fuels. Polluting gases are accumulating in the atmosphere and trapping more of the sun's heat leading to a gradual global warming. Of the various greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide (CO_2) is having the biggest impact. CO_2 is produced by the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy for electricity, industry and transportation. Concentrations of CO_2 in the atmosphere have risen from about 270 ppmv (parts per million by volume) at the time of the industrial revolution to 365 ppmv today....Over the past hundred years, global mean surface temperature has increased 0.5 to 1.1°F (0.3 - 0.6°C). The 1980s and the 1990s have been the warmest decades on record. Increasing temperatures affect many aspects of weather, such as wind patterns, the amount and type of precipitation, and the types and frequency of severe weather events. Sea level has risen during the past century between 3.9 and 10 in. (10 - 25 cm) because of thermal expansion of the oceans and scientists estimate that with current trends, they could rise by an average of 5 cm per decade over the next 100 years. Some estimates suggest that sea levels could rise by almost a full metre by the year 2100.[33]

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[33] World Council of Churches (David Hallman <dhallman@uccan.org.>, "The Earth's Atmosphere: Responsible Caring and Equitable Sharing for a Global Commons. A Justice Statement regarding Climate Change from The World Council of Churches (WCC). Prepared in anticipation of the 6th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP6) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in The Hague, The Netherlands, November 2000." E-mail to Daniel McFee, August 24, 2000.

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How should one interpret the WCC's broad appeal to the estimates of experts in suggesting "sea levels could rise by almost a full metre by the year 2100?" Which experts does the WCC reference here?

Most scientists agree that recent global warming is linked directly to the increase in levels of specific gases—including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons— as the byproduct of human activity.[34] James Nybakken, of the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, states this quite bluntly: "There seems little doubt that the 'greenhouse' gases have increased over the last 100 years, and much of this increase is due to the activities of humans in burning fossil fuels and wood."[35] Nybakken continues by charting the potential for disastrous changes in sea levels, concurring with the WCC's assessment that sea levels could rise as much as 5-7 feet over the next century. Nybakken also admits, though, that the data in scientific circles is open to interpretation. "Whereas we can chart with relative accuracy the trends in atmospheric gases, sea-level rise (or fall), and the advance or retreat of glaciers over the last 100-200 years, this time frame is geologically insignificant and varies so much that it cannot serve as a basis to predict long-term changes.... The real question, and the source for the controversy, is whether or not the changes we are now observing are simply natural

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[34] See here the extensive work of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC published the findings of its scientific working group and its social and economic group throughout the 1990s. See especially here: Working Group II, *Summary for Policymakers: Scientific Technical Analysis of Impacts, Adaptations and Mitigation of Climate Change*, November 1995.

[35] James Nybakken, *Marine Biology: An Ecological Approach*, 4th edition, (New York: Addison –Wesley Educational Publishings, Inc. 1997): 443.

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variations in an otherwise stable climate since the end of the last ice age, or whether they are forewarnings of a long-term change."[36]

Robert Smith's section on "Biogeochemical Cycles" also evidences the difficulties involved in assessing "global warming" and "global climate change." Smith contends that a continuing increase of atmosphere levels of carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons are intensifying the "greenhouse" effect and will eventually have a disastrous effect on the long-range health of the planet earth. Smith also scrutinizes carefully the evidence and arguments involved in these scenarios. He notes that most arguments on global warming employ "simulation models" of global warming, seeking to predict and identify potential trouble spots. Such models reflect past changes in the environment and depend largely upon the input of specific climate changes: each environmental situation is contingent upon a multiplicity of factors that humans ultimately can only measure with accuracy after the fact. In the end, Smith appeals for action on climate change while calling for constant testing of climate change and the refining of models of simulation and testing.[37]

Global climate change is but one dimension of the field of ecology that the WCC has engaged. Other controversial environmental matters could be highlighted as well, such as endangered species and biodiversity, the desertification of productive lands, acid

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[36] *Ibid.*

[37] The popular literature on global warming and the greenhouse effect alone has exploded over the past ten years. A good general introduction to the popular literature is: Bruce Johansen, *The Global Warming Desk Reference* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002). S. George Philander's work is also an outstanding introduction to this field from a scientific standpoint: *Is the Temperature Rising? The Uncertain Science of Global Warming* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998). Philander's work highlights points of agreement and disagreement between prominent scientists on global warming.

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rain, soil erosion, biotechnology, and so forth. A survey of scientific and popular literature in any of these fields reveals an extraordinary range of opinions and thoughts pertaining to the interpretation of particular environmental "crises" and suggestions for future actions in environmental problems.[38] Clearly, the WCC enters into these fields as a public policy institution attempting to formulate sophisticated responses to complex problems. Scientific matters of "fact" quickly move into the realm of interpretations of such facts and how such interpretations should be implemented.[39]

IV. The WCC as Advocate of Solidarity: Working with "People's Movements"

James Gustafson contends that moral discourse occurs at several different levels: in this chapter I have highlighted the WCC's moral discourse at the prophetic and narrative level, the public policy level, and the scientific "expert" level. In this chapter's final section, I argue that the WCC engages environmental ethics at an additional level—

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[38] For a salient cautionary tale of ecclesial organizations attempting to act as ethical experts see: Ted Peters, *Playing God? Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 115-139. Peters relates the recent story of religious leaders attempting to critique "genetic engineering." Peters shows that their attempts confused science with myth, complicating an already complex dialogue between scientists and governmental regulators.

[39] Another example of ecological complexity involves understanding and defining "biodiversity." See here, Stuart Pimm, et al., "Can We Defy Nature's End?" *Science* 293 (September 21, 2001): 2207-2208; James Clark, et al., "Ecological Forecasts: An Emerging Imperative," *Science* 293 (July 27, 2001): 657-659; Brian Czech and P.R. Krausman, *The Endangered Species Act: History, Conservation Biology, and Public Policy* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). These authors highlight the difficulties of defining "biodiversity" by reviewing the history and implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Given the overwhelming number of species on the brink of extinction in North America, which species are targeted for protection, and why? See also here the article by Stephen Palumbi, "Humans as the World's Greatest Evolutionary Force," *Science* 293 (September 7, 2001): 1786-1790.

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as an "advocate" working beside Christian and non-Christian peoples who struggle with issues of environmental degradation.

As I noted in chapter three, the WCC's work during the 1990s shifted dramatically in response to the growth of environmental concerns. The WCC's "Theology of Life" initiative provides a good example of how the WCC as an institution gravitated toward affirming "life" among marginalized peoples. Most often, the WCC institutionalized such affirmations by participating alongside "people's movements" as an advocate for justice and social rights. Indeed, the stated institutional mission of the WCC in many situations was simply to stand alongside marginalized peoples as "advocates of justice."[40]

The WCC's institutional stance of "solidarity" with ecologically marginalized groups has often achieved this stated goal: at many junctures, the WCC has supplied the space and resources for marginalized peoples to engage environmental problems dynamically. Kees Biekart, a Dutch political scientist, provides good examples of the WCC's work as an "advocate" in his book *The Politics of Civil Society Building: European Private Aid Agencies and Democratic Transitions in Central America.* Biekhart states that the goal of his work was to study "how European private aid agencies have contributed to democratic transition in [Latin American] countries and what lessons can be learned for future policies to confront social injustice."[41] Biekhart's study offers

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[40] For another example of the WCC's solidarity with marginalized peoples issuing out of environmental issues see: Pat Roy Mooney, "Bio-Pirates Patent Indigenous Knowledge...and Indigenous People Too," *Echoes* 4 (1993): 4-6.

[41] Kees Biekhart, *The Politics of Civil Society Building: European Private Aid Agencies and Democratic Transitions in Central America* (Utrecht : Utrecht International Books, 1999).

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specific parameters for determining progress in the areas of "democratization" and "global civil society," terms often employed by the WCC in justifying its work in social ethics.

Biekhart concludes that the WCC is a good example of a European aid agency working effectively as an advocate in aiding the formation of democratic structures in Central America. Biekhart notes that a few large European aid institutions supply the monies and organizational support necessary for sustained political change while other smaller aid agencies—including the WCC—operate at a more "ad hoc" level, providing occasional support and encouragement in Central America. Biekhart references the work of the WCC at several points, noting that the WCC's seed-money grants to regional and local grassroots organizations in Central America have provided the impetus for concrete social change. Biekhart's institutional analysis of European aid groups working in Central America presents an independent and external glimpse of the WCC's work during this period.[42]

Moreover, Biekhart's study clarifies an institutional dimension of the WCC's work during the 1980s and 1990s that does not fit neatly into any of Gustafson's categories for moral discourse. The WCC's work in Latin America (and in many other parts of the globe) during the 1980s and 1990s reveals a legacy of advocacy whereby this ecumenical institution attempted to work alongside marginalized peoples for concrete social change, providing monetary grants, listening posts, human rights case workers, lawyers, safe meeting places, etc. This advocacy work does not fall under the categories of prophetic, narrative, public policy, or ethical levels of moral discourse delineated by

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[42] *Ibid.*, 66, 197, 226, 242, 330.

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Gustafson. Rather, in my estimation, the WCC's work as a social advocate, standing in solidarity with particular communities and peoples reflects a further commitment as an advocate to the "people's movements" described in chapter three.

V. Conclusions

The argument of this chapter is straightforward: I argue that the WCC addresses environmental issues at three levels of institutional work: the prophetic/narrative level, the public policy (expert) level, and at the level of solidarity and advocate. This three-tiered hermeneutic for reading the WCC's work reflects, I believe, a careful understanding of the WCC's institutional commitments and actions pertaining to environmental issues.[43]

This hermeneutic also aids in sketching the WCC's larger commitment to environmental issues. That is, the WCC may address environmental issues at one level—the prophetic level, for example—without giving careful attention at other levels. Thus, rather than simply criticizing the WCC for its oversights and failures at one level of environmental assessment, one must incorporate a larger institutional view of the WCC and attempt to understand its work holistically.

In my final chapter, I argue that the WCC has unique institutional aspects that serve as good examples of how to approach environmental ethics from within the realm of Christian ethics. I glean three specific institutional aspects from the WCC's work that

[43] See here Erich Weingartner, "Human Rights within the Ecumenical Movement," in *Forms of Solidarity: Human Rights* (Geneva: International Reformed Center, 1988): 28-43. Weingartner offered various interpretations for the WCC's work on human rights, pressing for a more complex understanding of the WCC as an institution.

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aid in pressing forward theological and ethical conversations on environmental ethics. These institutional aspects—humility, solidarity, and risk—are found uniquely in the institutional life of the WCC and should be interpreted as distinctive contributions to conversations in Christian ethics.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Humility, Solidarity, and Risk:

The WCC's Institutional Contribution to North American Christian Environmental Ethics

> Fragile as it is, the [WCC] Council is poised as relatively few institutions and movements are. Though it might wish otherwise, it is an accurate reflection of the broken world's realities. Tensions of North, South, East and West emerge in every serious decision. Interconfessional, intercultural and regional conflict attends every meeting. Like the world itself, the Council is always on the verge of coming apart, despite real unity.[1]

> It is true, as some modern writers have pointed out, that modern man's attitude toward disenchanted nature has sometimes shown elements of vindictiveness. Like a child suddenly released from parental constraints, he takes savage pride in smashing nature and brutalizing it. This is perhaps a kind of revenge pressed by a former prisoner against his captor, but it is essentially childish and is unquestionably a passing phase. The mature secular man neither reverences nor ravages nature. His task is to tend it and make use of it, to assume the responsibility assigned to The Man, Adam.[2]

In recent years, North American Christian ethicists and theologians have become increasingly involved in debates concerning environmental ethics. Indeed, the theological

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[1] Larry Rasmussen and Joseph Bush, "Breakdown or Breakthrough?" *The Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 285.

[2] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: A Celebration of Its Liberties and an Invitation to Its Discipline* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965): 23. Larry Rasmussen points to Cox's work as an early foray into the area of Christian ethics and ecology. Larry Rasmussen, "Luther and a Gospel of Earth," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 51 (1997): 1-28. Rasmussen also cites Theodore Hiebert's study of nature and religion in early Israel entitled *The Yahwist's Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) as a significant challenge to Cox's contention that only humans and God are not defined by their relationships to nature, thereby freeing themselves for history.

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literature pertaining to environmental ethics and ecology has exploded exponentially since 1965 when Harvey Cox voiced his opinions in *The Secular City.*[3] Many theologians now openly question Cox's conviction that the ravaging of nature by humanity is "unquestionably a passing phase." Moreover, Cox's utilitarian view of nature has undergone considerable critical scrutiny by Christian ethicists since the 1960s.[4]

In North America many prominent theologians now argue that all life on earth faces a unique challenge because of the impact of the humans species: the activities of humans have shaped and altered the planet earth in such ways as to change its

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[3] An excellent resource for grasping the breadth of this material from 1961-1993 is Peter W. Bakken, Joan Gibb Engel, and J. Ronald Engel, eds., *Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith: A Critical Guide to the Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995). This annotated bibliography, although already dated, outlines the development of North American theological and ecclesiastical responses to environmental issues. See also here the work of Henlee Barnette, *The Church and the Ecological Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Christopher Bamford and William P. Marsh, *Celtic Christianity, Ecology and Holiness* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Lindisfarne Press, 1987); Drew Christiansen, "Ecology, Justice, and Development [Notes on Moral Theology, 1989]," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 64-81; Joseph K. Sheldon, *Rediscovery of Creation: A Bibliographical Study of the Church's Response to the Environmental Crisis* (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, 1992) ; Clare Palmer, "A Bibliographical Essay on Environmental Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 7 (1994): 68-97; Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Pamela Smith, *What Are They Saying About Environmental Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) ; and Jim Ball, Keith Pavlischek, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Planting a Tree This Afternoon: Global Warming, Public Theology, and Public Policy* (Wynnewood, Pennsylvania: Evangelicals for Social Action, 1998).

[4] Critics such as Lynn White (a Medieval Historian) and John Livingston (a Canadian conservationist) charged that "western Christian theologies" were largely to blame for ecological problems. See here Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155(1967): 1203-1207. Livingston repeated and extended White's claim: "I know of no formalized western theology that even admits the kinds of questions that are raised by ecologic insight, much less begins to face them." John Livingston, *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981): 10. See also Max Oelschlaeger's careful study *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994): 19-51.

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evolutionary trajectory permanently. This claim—that we live in an extraordinary age—is widespread among environmental ethicists and shapes most attempts to think about environmental issues today.[5] As shown in the first two chapters of this dissertation, the work of the WCC echoes this theme of the "uniqueness" of present ecological challenges.[6]

What insights and lessons might North American theologians cull from the WCC's work on environmental issues? I argue in this chapter that the WCC's institutional work on environmental ethics relays significant lessons for Christian theologians and ethicists in North America. Specifically, I claim that these lessons involve both the style and content of the WCC's environmental ethics. Stylistically, the WCC's institutional ethical approach is less of a "systematic" attempt to address environmental issues and more of an ad hoc method of attending to important ecological issues at particular moments. Thus, the WCC's recent environmental ethic reflects a form of ethical *bricolage*—that is a pasting together of resources, traditions, and positions in order to address immediate ecological concerns. Moreover, I suggest that the specific content of the WCC's ethics revolves around institutional commitments to ethical humility, risk, and solidarity. I contend that these institutional virtues deserve significant attention from North American ethicists wrestling with environmental problems today.

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[5] See here work of Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989). McKibben, a journalist and United Methodist layperson, argues cogently in this popular work that recent environmental changes (e.g., global warming) demand a unique hermeneutical perspective in order to understand more fully the enduring repercussions of such issues. This is also a major theme in Stephen Bede Scharper's *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

[6] See here especially the work of current WCC staff member Martin Robra, *Ökumenische Sozialethik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 135-150.

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I structure this chapter around these two arguments concerning the style and content of the WCC's work. First, I investigate briefly the technique of ethical *bricolage*—what does this entail practically and institutionally for environmental ethics? I engage the work of Jeffrey Stout on ethical methodology and demonstrate that Stout's work is useful for understanding the WCC's institutionalized ethics. Next, I turn to the content of the WCC's work as an institutional actor in environmental ethics. I suggest that the WCC's commitments to environmental humility, risk, and solidarity constitute unique institutional dimensions of the WCC's work and are instructive for North American theologians attending to environmental ethics.[7]

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[7] The notion of "bricolage" in theological ethics has proved extremely influential in recent years. Many other works in Christian theology and ethics have shaped the "selective retrieval" of this chapter, including: Darryl M. Trimiew, *Voices of the Silenced: The Responsible Self in a Marginalized Community* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1993); Ian Markham, *Plurality and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gloria H. Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Elisabeth Gerle, *In Search of a Global Ethics Theological, Political, and Feminist Perspectives Based on a Critical Analysis of JPIC and WOMP* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1995). Christine Firer Hinze, *Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995); William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament. Community Cross, New Creation : a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, California: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Daniel Maguire and Larry Rasmussen, *Ethics for a Small Planet New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998); Emmanuel Katongole, *Beyond Universal Reason: The Relation Between Religion and Ethics in the Work of Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); and Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2000).

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I. Theological Ethics as *Bricolage*

In chapter one I presented the theological ethics of James Gustafson as a montage of sources and questions. Gustafson engages ethical material originating from theology, philosophy, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. This complex ethical methodology depends heavily on the selection of materials and traditions for engagement. Indeed, one of the appealing characteristics of Gustafson's work issues from his ability and desire to interface with multiple understandings of ethical problems.

In a similar manner, the WCC engages in environmental ethics utilizing a variety of sources, traditions, and experts. Rarely in the WCC's work does one find a call for "the" Christian response to environmental problems: rather, the WCC usually commits itself to understanding ecological systems as a multi-dimensional reality, worthy of examination from many vantage points.

I contend that this practice of "selective retrieval" by the WCC reflects its unique style of engaging ethical issues. Indeed, the WCC's "selective retrieval" of ethical sources mirrors what Jeffrey Stout, a religious ethicist at Princeton University, calls "*bricolage.*" In short, Stout argues in his work *Ethics After Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* that Gustafson's methodology serves as a good example of "selective retrieval," or *bricolage*, within the field of ethics. Stout gleans this notion of *bricolage*—or selective retrieval and fusing together of ethical sources—from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss noted that all thinkers to some extent blend and combine sources together in attempts to confront specific cultural and historical problems. Stout extends this understanding of *bricolage*, claiming that all ethical work is a matter of constructing specific positions from a jumble of previous sources and

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traditions. Thus, as Stout notes: "A *bricoleur*, as I use the term, is someone with decisions to make about not only which ethical beliefs to accept but which ethical concepts to employ, and thus which candidates for ethical truth or falsity to entertain. Such decisions we make pragmatically or not at all. *Bricolage* is meant to be a metaphor for what we all do when using ethical language self-consciously."[8] Stout declares that Gustafson represents, "in short, a most self-conscious practitioner of what I call moral *bricolage*."[9]

This notion of *bricolage* facilitates an understanding of how ethicists approach sources and problems. Indeed, Gustafson has described his own ethical work as an "intersection:" that is, his work in theological ethics "intersects" the work of scientists, sociologists, and philosophers at the particular junctions of ethical dilemmas and problems. Stout has shown that Gustafson's ethical work not only "intersects" the work in other disciplines but actually appropriates from other academic disciplines, thereby shaping and molding Gustafson's positions.[10] Thus, Stout sees in Gustafson the practice of *bricolage* whereby "Christian resources" and non-Christian resources intersect in a dialogical and dialectical manner.

Stout concludes—arguing against both ethical universalists and ethical communitarians—that a pragmatic philosophical liberalism represents most accurately

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[8] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988): 337.

[9] *Ibid.*, 169.

[10] See here Gustafson's work *Intersections: Science, Theology, and Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1996): 1-10.

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ethical decision-making in the late twentieth century.[11] Stout posits that moral agents in pluralistic societies carry a diversity of ethical fragments from a variety of moral systems: indeed, these moral agents exercise judgment and interpretation (consciously and unconsciously) in selecting what is worth saving for future generations to ponder. "As I see it, we are all *bricoleurs*, insofar as we are capable of creative thought at all." [12] Stout presses ethicists to understand their role as "engineers," constructing solutions by utilizing specific moral resources at hand. Ethicists here become creative problem-solvers, selecting specific traditions, arguments, and historical examples in their attempts to craft specific solutions for particular problems.

Stout's portrait of ethics as *bricolage* and ethicists as engineers is a quite useful tool for environmental problems. Ecological problems such as global warming are staggeringly complex. Thus, ethicists who attend to global warming issues focus on specific aspects of much larger and more complex matters. The complexity of environmental issues precludes one person from offering a comprehensive "overview" of the problems at hand.

Stout's work attends to several philosophical problems pertaining to ethics as *bricolage* that deserve mention here. How could an individual ethicist justify her usage of some materials and not others? What sources should ethicists engage? What if an ethicist construes an issue incorrectly, and offers an inaccurate or immoral solution to a problem? Questions of rationality in ethical arguments (or epistemic justification), moral blame,

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[11] Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, x.

[12] *Ibid.*, 74.

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and notions of "truth" emerge here as significant problems in utilizing the model of the ethicist as an "engineer."

Stout defends his work and his use of *"bricolage"* on a pragmatic level. For instance, as he undertakes the question of moral blame he grounds his arguments in the limits of knowledge that particular moral agents possess: "...moral blame is like epistemic justification. People are epistemically justified in believing a proposition if, epistemically speaking, they are doing the best that could be done under the particular circumstances. They need not necessarily be believing truths, provided they are making proper use of available evidence and concepts, avoiding wishful thinking, and so forth."[13] Stout cordons off questions of epistemic justification here from questions of truth. Therefore, in evaluating the moral veracity of ethical stands one must take into account the resources and evidence available to the moral agent at the time. Indeed, Stout claims that moral agents "may be engaged in practices that we rightly judge to be evil and still be blameless, provided they could not have known the moral truth of the matter, have not been negligent, intend no injustice, and so forth."[14]

These matters of epistemic justification, moral blame, and truth stand as important questions in any ethical assessment.[15] Stout's ethical descriptions, much like Gustafson's,

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[13] *Ibid*,. 86.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] "None of us starts from scratch in moral reasoning. Nor can we ever start over again, accepting only beliefs that have been deduced from certitudes or demonstrable facts...If there is no impersonal, necessary order of dependence within the realm of moral knowledge, there will be no reason to ask whether moral or religious judgments necessarily come first and no reason to think of the philosopher's assessment of religious ethics as part of an atemporal analysis of the language of moral obligation and goodness. There will be good reason, however, to subject specific religious traditions to philosophical scrutiny, to inspect

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involve both narrative description and empirical verification in equal parts. As Stout claims about the concept of "human rights":

> My position has little to do with the ontology of moral properties. I grant that the language used to refer to human rights is a human invention, created only recently. It does not follow, however, that rights are unreal in any worrisome sense or that we are incapable of uttering truths when we use the language of rights invented by our ancestors. It is our ancestors' philosophical justifications I have trouble with, not their idea that we members of the constitutional democracies really do have rights like the right not to be enslaved or the right to religious freedom.[16]

Thus, although Stout recognizes the historically constructed aspects of the term "human rights," he also submits that the working aspects of this idea and the realities formed by its usage link it to an ethical reality that is in some sense "true."[17] Stout's understanding of ethics as *bricolage,* therefore, ultimately reflects his usage of "modest pragmatism" as a means to locate moral realities.[18]

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the interaction of particular religious and moral vocabularies under particular historical circumstances." (*Ibid.*, 120)

[16] *Ibid.*, 225.

[17] This understanding of "truth" is Stout's attempt to deal with relativism and nihilism. Stout's arguments demonstrate that the moral diversity, or the "babel" of moral language, does not compel one to become an ethical relativist, nihilist, skeptic, or fundamentalist. Rather, Stout starts with the very fact that disagreement is a significant moral achievement in that it allows two or more parties to discuss the issue at hand in a potentially constructive way. (*Ethics After Babel,* 19-20) Thus, Stout probes into the ways in which one can make "truthful" claims about morality in ways that do not degenerate into the chasm of nihilism or skepticism. Here Stout emphasizes the differences between "truth" and the "epistemic justification" of such truth-claims by positing a modified version of "common-sense" realism.

[18] "A modest pragmatism, however says no such thing. It abandons the optimistic modernist's hope for an ultimate language of rational commensuration, for it views the language of instrumental reason as just another language--a useful one, to be sure, but not one that enjoys the privileges which would derive from being prior to all the rest. It insists that the creation of new vocabularies always begins with existing linguistic patterns, making something new out of something found. And it insists that choice between or among vocabularies itself always takes place within some vocabulary or other, although not always the

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Stout's description of moral *bricolage* serves as a good backdrop for understanding the WCC's style of engaging environmental ethics. That is, the WCC rarely engages ethical issues in a systematic or comprehensive sense. Rather, its style for environmental ethical analysis consists of selective engagement in the fields of theology, the social sciences, philosophy, and the natural sciences. Stylistically, this shapes the WCC's approach to ethics in that it is neither possible nor desirable for a "comprehensive" or "expert" analysis of ecological issues. Rather, immediate, local action must emerge from the WCC as an institution. Such ethical action usually emerges from the WCC in the forms of prophet, NGO policy expert, and human rights advocate (as detailed in chapter four).

II. The WCC's Institutional Commitments to Ecological Ethics— Humility, Solidarity, and Risk

One purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the environmental commitments of the WCC as an institution: does the WCC make distinctive contributions to Christian ethics for thinking about environmental issues? If so, what are these? In this final section, I argue that the WCC's ethical content in its institutional environmental stances of humility, solidarity, and risk is worthy of extended study and understanding.

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same one, governed by entrenched standards and assumptions, as well as the perceived needs of the moment."Stout, 264. "Our task, like Thomas Aquinas's, Thomas Jefferson's, or Martin Luther King's, is to take the many parts of complicated social and conceptual inheritance and stitch them together into a pattern that meets the needs of the moment. It has never been otherwise. The creative intellectual task of every generation, in other words, involves moral *bricolage*. It is no accident that Aquinas, Jefferson, and King were as eclectic as they were in using moral languages—and no shame either." (*Ibid.*, 292)

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These aspects of the WCC's institutional life encapsulate its ethical style and content, and therefore offer a good conclusion to this study.

A prominent feature of the WCC's work on environmental matters is its call for humility. The WCC consistently argues that human sin and finitude limit efforts to attend to environmental problems. Thus, the WCC institutionalizes the virtue of humility in that it does not claim to have exhaustive answers to environmental problems. Rather, the WCC often understands its work dialectically and as part of an emerging ethical conversation. Beyond much of the prophetic language employed in the WCC's documents, there is an ethical tentativeness in much of the WCC's work.

The WCC institutionally also embraces humility because it understands its own work dialectically, as interplay between justice, peace and creation issues. Thus, the WCC posits that humans must display humility as they wrestle with the short-term consequences of environmental commitments: environmentally sensitive programs may actually undermine human development in short-term scenarios. The WCC argues that if Christians are to speak about environmental issues cogently, they must reassess their conception and use of power. Specifically, in a world where humans dominate all other species of life what would it mean to engage in revised visions of power relationships with other forms of life?

Thus, the second institutional virtue of the WCC is its emphasis on "solidarity" with human and non-human creatures. A seminal question in environmental ethics centers on how to link humans and non-humans conceptually. That is, beyond the most basic aspects of material reality, how can one speak of a "relationship" between human and non-human creation? As noted in chapter three the WCC has embraced recent

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theological advances in understanding the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Indeed, the WCC's recent work on the "intrinsic value" of non-human creation depends heavily upon understanding the Holy Spirit as animating the entire universe.[19]

The WCC wrestles with the theological tensions here between the Spirit's movement at the global level and the Spirit's presence in particular, concrete realities. The WCC, in its call for "solidarity" with all marginalized creatures, embraces this theological tension. When the WCC stands in solidarity with indigenous Indians, women, and marginalized peoples it does so because of a theological conviction that God's Spirit is present in all peoples. This logic could be extended by the WCC to non-human creation as well as a realm where God's Spirit animates material substances. Thus, the WCC can speak of standing in "solidarity" with threatened arenas or species of non-human creation because the Spirit animates this dimension. The WCC's conception of ethics as solidarity with non-human creation—that which is "other" from human—could entail a practical move toward embracing God's intrinsically valuable creation. Therefore, the WCC could stand in "solidarity" with snail darters and snakes in order to embrace God's Spirit wherever it may work.[20]

This concrete ethical stance of standing in solidarity with the "other"—either human or non-human—fuels the imagination. Indeed, the notion of standing in

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[19] For a good overview of these advances see: Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. by John Hoffmeyer, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

[20] *The Church as Moral Community* (New York/Geneva: Continuum/World Council of Churches, 1998): 63.

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"solidarity" with non-human creation is an odd, even fantastical idea.[21] Lewis Mudge argues that human solidarity is a "*pragmatic* sense of who we are together and how we live together, even if it is not based on universally recognized first principles. Perhaps the Christian church is better positioned to provide *that* sense of relationship to the 'other' than it is to wrestle with particular policy questions in the public realm."[22] The WCC as an institution could provide this pragmatic sense of "solidarity" with non-human life forms as part of the "oikoumene" or household of faith. Formal discussions of ecclesiology, however valuable, need not impair understanding the WCC as an institution that works pragmatically with the "other" in concrete forms of solidarity.

This leads to a final aspect within the WCC's institutional environmental work: institutional risk. Specific questions entailing institutional survival should emerge as important conversations in which the WCC should engage. Why should an institution risk for that which is non-human? How is God working in all creation, and how does God's work demand risky investments of time and energy toward that which is non-human?[23] I

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[21] See here Steven Smith's *The Concept of the Spiritual: An Essay in First Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) for a fascinating read on these matters.

[22] Lewis Mudge, *The Church as Moral Community* (Geneva/New York: World Council of Churches/Continuum, 1998): 63.

[23] The WCC's risky stances echoes Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens—both at the London School of Economics—in their advocacy of a "risk society" in order to think creatively about environmental ethics. "The focus of this book...includes neither the global political economy of uncertainty and risk, nor risk biographies, nor the dangers of international anarchy in the aftermath of the Cold War. Instead, it mainly concentrates on ecological and technological questions of risk, and their sociological and political implications...The thesis is that we now have an 'earth politics' which we did not have some years ago, and that it can be understood and organized in terms of the dynamics and contradictions of a world risk society. What is the environment? What is nature? What is wilderness? What is 'human' in human beings? These and similar questions have to be remembered, reposed, reconsidered and rediscussed in a transnational

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believe the WCC operates with a "risky" institutional mentality, at times disregarding its own institutional health in order to risk solidarity with marginalized peoples and, occasionally, with non-human species.

In my experience, the WCC does this precisely because environmental issues have so defined the present mission of European politics and recent understandings of pressing world issues for this day and time. Thus, this virtue of "risk" moves along two planes of meaning—a political understanding of "risk" as public action despite scientific uncertainty, as well as the theological embrace of the "other" in attempts to stand in solidarity with marginalized creatures. Beyond pragmatic calculations of institutional survival, the WCC often engages in an ethic of "risk" whereby it institutionally embraces positions that could potentially endanger its long-term health.

In conclusion, the WCC has a unique history and witness through which it addresses environmental matters. North American theologians should consider the WCC's commitment to environmental matters seriously and carefully. Clearly, this ecumenical organization has contributed greatly to environmental conversations: hopefully this dissertation has contributed in some way to the WCC's future work as it faces tremendous ecological issues in the near future.

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setting, even if nobody has the answers." Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 1999): 8.

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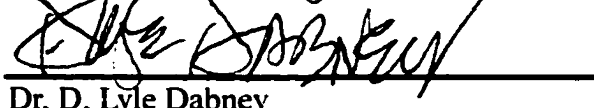

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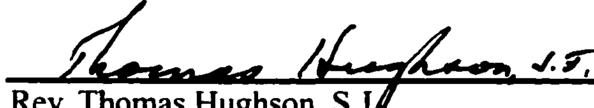

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Approved on June 20, 2002

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