

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY - RESPONSE TO THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MY SEPTUAGENARIAN FESTSCHRIFT

Prologue

- Program Director, Prof Andries van Aarde
- The Dean of the Faculty of Theology & Religion of UP, Prof Rantoa Letsosa
- Honorary guests, the contributors to my *Festschrift* (I trust that a fair number of them are virtually attending this occasion as well), and, in particular, Prof. Kobus Krüger, who has presented a *précis* of my ecclesiastical, academic and scholarly career
- Colleagues, and in particular, my personal friends, family and children, attending this symposium on whichever platform –

One feels humble and particularly grateful when receiving an acknowledgement for your life's work in the form of a *Festschrift*.

Turning 70 years old is, at least to me, of no little importance. We all are aware of the symbolic significance of this number. Earlier this year, the 'CLF- Elize Tempelhof Award' for a *lifelong* contribution to theology and ecology was bestowed on me. Together with this, this *Festschrift* accomplishes my academic career in the formal sense of the word, and I feel like about entering the so-called 'rest' God promises according to Hebrews 4!

Allow me to commence with my gratitude and appreciation:

First and foremost, I want to thank **Andries van Aarde**, Editor-in-chief of the *HTS Theological Studies*, sincerely for putting this project together and selecting and inviting the respective contributors to this edition. He has arranged this occasion today and taken financial responsibility for the function. Andries is enigmatic in multiple aspects.

Secondly, I acknowledge each of the **twenty scholars** contributing to this special edition. Most of these authors have been part of my research project on 'Theology and Nature'. Excluding this particular edition, we have published 38 articles over the past three years, an achievement I take much pride in. I realize some couldn't have contributed to this particular edition, yet I dearly value our mutual relationship and collaboration in the past.

I am honoured that many contributors acknowledged and even appreciated my research in their respective articles. It would perhaps be inappropriate of me to highlight these personal remarks, but the acknowledgement paragraph of someone like Jürgen Moltmann touched me *existentially*. Allow me to share this with you, not only because of his prominent profile but because of his reference to my late wife, Engela, to whom I dedicate my professional career posthumously today.

Moltmann (2023:6) writes:

I am delighted to contribute to this Festschrift of my friend Johan Buitendag. [...]

During his visit to Tübingen in 2016, he found me in a state of sorrow over my wife, Elisabeth, who had died three weeks ago in my arms. A year before that, his wife Engela had passed as well. These losses created an emotional bond between us. We have been close friends ever since.

I wish Johan happiness and blessings on his 70th birthday, together with wisdom and the joy of life.

Thirdly, I am particularly grateful to **Prof. Kobus Krüger**, who wrote the Preface to this *Festschrift* and presented a synopsis of my career and research. He gave a coherent view and interpretation of my forty-year journey in church and academia.

Fourthly, my appreciation goes to the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at UP, **Prof. Rantso Letsosa**. Your presence here today and the

kind words spoken earlier enhanced my gratitude and joy. I am proud to be associated with a faculty under the auspices of a dean like Prof. Letsosa.

Fifthly, thank you to **everyone** attending this event today, physically or virtually. I want to extend a particular word of thanks to my family and friends. Many of them are not theologians, and the event today would be a bit of agony for many of them, especially this response of mine.

Thank you in advance for bearing with me!

Allow me to make one last introductory remark regarding my response. One approach I could have followed is to reflect on each particular contribution. But spending just three minutes on each of the twenty articles would already be one full hour of suffering to you! An avenue I do not want to pursue at all!

Subsequently, I have decided to take *my* understanding of theology as a venture point and augment my vista of a theology of nature with relevant interlocutors *phenomenologically*. However, a few articles are so unique that I couldn't have integrated them into this mould seamlessly. Hovering less on them does not diminish my gratitude for these contributions. All I wanted to achieve was to offer a coherent view of theology as I understand it, enhanced by relevant articles from my interlocutors, well aware of the risk of a quilt-like or patchwork blanket appearance.

In his article, Andries van Aarde (Van Aarde & De Villiers 2023:1) states in the abstract of his article that his take on radical inclusivity represents an auto-ethnographic, autobiographical research of his life and work in church and academia. Perhaps my presentation is something of that genre, too. Although there is a vast difference in scope and contribution, my story is similar to his. Our respective engagements with the *Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa* (NHKA) and academia differ in degree but certainly not in nature.

I am particularly grateful and proud of my son Nico's contribution to this *Festschrift*. He writes from his discipline of Jurisprudence and opens a vital vista

for environmental law, which is perhaps essential for theologians to take cognisance of.

My presentation entails now the following main *foci*: a definition of theology (what is in a name?); ontology, epistemology and reciprocity; ecomomy (ethics); a Trinitarian theo-ontology; and subsequently, a vista towards a Theology of Nature, where I endeavour to bring cosmos, God and human beings together into a *cosmotheandric understanding* of reality, which I call 'integral ecology', a term Pope Francis made famous with his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of 2015.

In other words, as a reasonable thought construct, I offer a triangulation of ontology, epistemology and axiology, i.e., to conceive an integrated understanding of metaphysics, physics and ethics as essential building blocks of emerging reality.

Contemplation and action are intertwined; as I wrote elsewhere, different thinking leads to different actions (Buitendag 2004). The *Parliament of the World's Religions* (1993:2) appropriately undergirds the interdependence of *thinking* and *doing* when stating, 'Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the individual's consciousness is first changed.'

Orientation: What is in a name?

Jürgen Moltmann emphasises that faith and knowledge of the world need one another in a mutual quest for 'truth'. Therefore, someone like John Haught (2023:2) correctly applies the concept of 'intelligent subjectivity' to overcome this tautness, and Robert Russel (2006) proposes a 'creative mutual interaction' (CMI) to edify some consonance between theology and science. Piotr Roszak (2023:4) is thus correct when he says that the relationship is not a question of one discourse being replaced by another, nor of two discourses existing in parallel with each other, but of one relating to the other. It is neither a matter of warfare nor integration but of consonance.

Theology has a distinctive yet responsible epistemology. The provocative title of Alasdair MacIntyre's seminal work, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1983) appeals to me vehemently. Inquiry is not without presuppositions but should

have a rational and accountable claim. Human cognition is always 'embodied and embedded.' (McGrath 2019:23). Therefore, I define theology as follows:

Theology is a scholarly endeavour of believers in the public sphere to inquire into a multi-dimensional reality in a manner that matters.

The careful listener will immediately notice the omission of the concept of 'church' in my definition. Let me be clear about this. I do not support Barth's view of 'church' dogmatics. Robert Vosloo's article opens possibilities for articulating faith claims anew by recognizing different realities and different environments (Vosloo 2023:4). This leads me to replace the concept of 'truth' (Moltmann) with a quest for ultimate (?) *meaning* and an endeavour to come to grips with reality. This means placing all concrete items into a horizon of further possibilities and finally into the world of all possibilities (Luhmann 1985:7).

Theology is, therefore, a reason-based, faith-reflection on creation, or more precisely, an attempt to be a responsible discourse partner in the public domain of the human being's search for meaning and even consummation. I firmly believe that theology can contribute to this end. To experience reality as creation acknowledges that the real is not absolute but contingent and, therefore, changing, fragile and probably proleptic.

I worked for decades at a public research-intensive university (both scholarly and managerial), and my primary goal was to try to improve the international academic ranking of the then Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria (see Buitendag & Simut 2017). Subsequently, I formulated a personal view of a public university, which is to be read together with my take on theology:

Public universities are places of contestation and agents of change to provide spaces for creating knowledge, freedom of thought, vistas for the future, and well-rounded citizens of society.

Theology is, in my view, *per se*, Public Theology. I regard religion as a particular specimen of systems theory (Luhmann 1985:5). Neither synthetic nor analytical

solutions are of any help nowadays. Religion cannot be understood adequately in terms of subject/object or observer/object binaries because it is located on *both sides* of the distinction between the self/other –reference. Religion has always included what it excludes (Luhmann 1985:14). Religion is a self-referential system by nature.

My engagement with insights from aspects of physics and biology gradually shaped my view to reflect increasingly more in an inductive and *aposteriori* way on reality as I see it. Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman (2023:7) would refer to this bottom-up approach as the Aristotelian philosophical principle of ‘epistemic fit’.

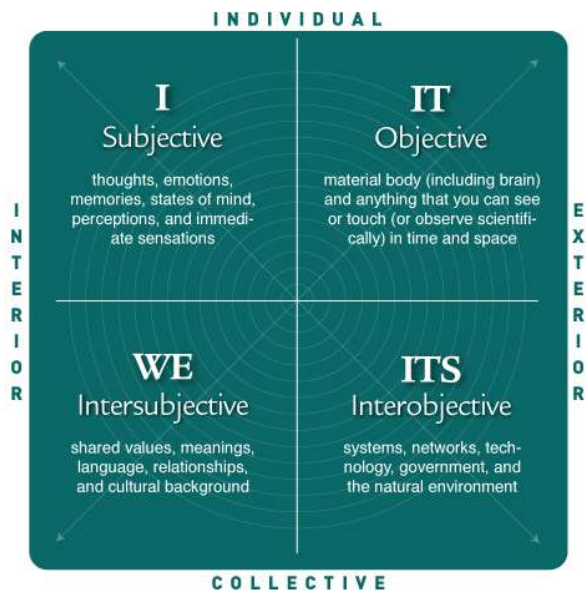
In contemporary theology, the *creatio passiva* (created result) gradually becomes the attention and not so much the *creatio activa* (creating act) as such. Theistic language of revelation is seldom appreciated by people outside neo-orthodox circles today. I realised increasingly that the fierce resistance against a natural theology under the influence of Karl Barth caused much damage to Protestant theology. Theology became elitist, excluded itself as a dialogue partner and became desolate from current world challenges and needs.

In many of my publications over the past decades, I sense a clear shift from discontinuity to continuity between humans and nature based on epiphenomenal and epigenetic processes. However, I fully acknowledge that humans do not live only in nature but also in language and story. Therefore, I endorsed the socio-linguistic approach of the Postliberal Theology of the Yale School at the time (Buitendag 2002; 2003). In an interdisciplinary dialogue of scientists and theologians, the participants representing various science and humanities disciplines must cope with linguistic differences regarding concepts, rules, shades of meaning and ambiguity, among others.

Notably, I support Nancey Murphy’s concept of the ontology of human beings as a ‘non-reductive physicalism’ (Murphy 2006). Meta-theories like *constructive-critical realism* (Losch 2023) and integral theory are more appropriate to open trajectories of addressing global issues of the 21st century.

An integral ecology offers the most viable view of this approach. It unites valuable insights from multiple perspectives into a comprehensive theoretical

framework based on Ken Wilber’s AQAL¹ model. Integral ecology subsequently understands our complex interiors more appropriately through natural and social scientific methods and our natural world through interior experience (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman 2011:*loc.* 774). It explores the myriad perspectives on ecology available today and their respective methodologies.



Moltmann (2023:1) pleads for three changes in his contribution, exhibiting herewith integral ecology. First, nature should no longer be seen and treated by humans as an object to be exploited but instead as a fellow subject in the green creation community. Second, humanity should be seen as embedded in this community of creation. Third, a new cosmic spirituality with a deep respect for life and everything that lives is needed. (To be frank, I do miss the place of abiotic reality in this take).

Ontology, epistemology and reciprocity

In the preface to this *Festschrift*, Kobus Krüger (2023:1-2) discusses four different angles of approach to the dialogue between science and religion and says that all four strategies he briefly explained are at fault. The present era

¹ The acronym stands for *all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types*.

poses a challenge to exploring a new landscape and laying out a new garden of religious thought.

He honours me by adding that my publications transcend all four incorrect strategies and explores a new path for the future, offering an ecodomic emphasis on the theological understanding of creation as a dimension of harmony and beauty, indeed a manifestation of divine love.

In my view, the consonance of science and theology characterises an epistemological pluralism or verisimilitudinous knowledge, offering us a bricolage of unintegrated knowledge and discernments emerging from various disciplinary or social viewpoints on our reality (McGrath 2019:222). The key is to discover that, as in music, a melodic line can run in parallel, on the principle of counterpoint, but interplay must always exist to avoid cacophony (Roszak 2023:5).

There are two kerbstones to avoid in this enterprise. On the one hand, there is an *epistemic fallacy*, meaning that an understanding of reality can be reduced to purely epistemological statements. This fallacy entails placing reality inside a subjective reference; therefore, it is individualistically/socially constructed. On the other hand, there is an *ontic fallacy*, which in turn assumes that knowledge of being is objectively accessible and is, therefore, independent of a particular socio-linguistic niche. It places objective reference again inside a framework of being as if it could exist atomistically.

In his contribution, James Loader (2023) illustrates the abovementioned fusion of epistemological horizons well when he argues that the multifarious use of *water* as a literary motif in the book of Proverbs entails that its explicit and implied use can function literally, metaphorically and metonymically. Ulrich Körtner (2023:5) argues similarly when distinguishing between *instrumental* and *orientational* knowledge and bases ethical conduct on meaningful stories, metaphors and symbols. Therefore, I appreciate the term 'religious multilogue', which Kobus Krüger (2023:3) attributes to my pursuit of a shared public sphere for the common human good in the shared cosmos.

In a paper I read at the *Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion* (IRC) at Oxford University in 2010 during the celebrations of John Polkinghorne's eightieth birthday, which Polkinghorne attended in person, I suggested that Polkinghorne should place a *bi-directional arrow* between epistemology and ontology and discard his unilateral strapline of 'epistemology models ontology' of which he was so proud of and alluded to so frequently in his writings (see Buitendag 2011:8).

If Polkinghorne would like to take more contemporary theologians with him, I suggested that he no longer speak of critical realism but take Andreas Losch's suggestion seriously and perhaps consider the term *constructive-critical* realism (cf., Losch 2023). This modification should bring an epistemology of natural science and hermeneutics of theology together in a vivid construct of *reciprocity*.

Alister McGrath speaks elsewhere of 'non-linear integral equations' (McGrath 2006:194) and portrays theology as a constant comparison and evaluation process, leading to modification and further evaluation until a stable situation is attained. It is a never-ending process. Any equilibrium is always provisional owing to the iterative procedure of continuous comparison, appreciation and, in particular, modification.

Consequently, I abandon an onto-theology and opt for a *theo-ontology* based on a Trinitarian presupposition (Buitendag 2022). This understanding honours the intimate connection between knowing and being and prevents the bifurcation between fidelity and rationality. Wittgenstein's assertion that rationality always has a history and takes different forms in different social locations resonates with a growing empirical and historical awareness of the diversity of human concepts of rationality. This approach supports ontological unity and epistemological diversity, as indicated above.

The question is not what the implication of ecology is for theology but rather the inverse: what is the significance of the Named God (Ex. 3:14) for ecology? It would advance our dialogue with the sciences where nature (creation) is the common denominator discerned from an acknowledged *apriori* (as all cognition does). In other words, I propose a *theo-ecology vis-à-vis* eco-theology. The text

absorbs the world, not the inverse, where the world absorbs the text. The meaning of language is always in its application.

This approach lays the table for Luco van den Brom's proposal of a *stratified* understanding of history to open space for a divine agency (Van den Brom 2023). The universe's development can subsequently be described as the interplay between chance and necessity, resulting from God's gifts of freedom and faithfulness. This approach appears to be compatible with deism and theism, provided that the divine agency and the activities of human creatures are not on the same level.

The universe can thus be described as an information-bearing entity in process and hierarchically structured. We can imagine God interacting with this hierarchy.

The argument only holds when we conceive God's act as the whole course of history, from conception to consummation, when God ultimately achieves his purposes. In this respect, Andreas May points out the significance of freedom in God's plan (May 2023).

This view is similar to Pannenberg's contention that the actualisation of God's law is eschatologically determined. Today, the believer lives proleptically in anticipation of God's promised future. Ted Peters promotes, therefore, proleptic ethics (Peters 2023:785). Once we apprehend God's will for the consummate future, we seek to incarnate that future proleptically in present human action.

This brings us to my take on ethics, or as I formulated above in my definition of theology, a scholarly endeavour in the public sphere in *a manner that matters*.

Ecodomy

In 2014, I introduced the concept of ecodomy to the Faculty of Theology at Pretoria, and it was accepted as the overarching *Faculty Research Theme* (FRT) for the following decade (Buitendag & Simut 2020). It addresses the current world crises concerning ecological and social disequilibria. On the one hand, we need new visions for 'household politics' (*oikodomia*) and a reinterpretation of

the traditional 'aliens in a foreign land' (*paroikia*). The constructive and immanent thrust of ecodominical communities must incorporate the element of critical non-conformity.

Ecodomy intends to address ethical thinking and decision-making issues on various societal issues and spheres of life while considering religious worldviews, values and norms. This approach is indispensable to building leadership (human capital), ethical thinking, and decision-making processes in the tertiary environment and society (Simut 2023).

This approach, of course, begs for a new paradigm. The underlying concept is taken from 1 Corinthians 14:12 in the Greek New Testament, *oikodomé*, which is used about God's household or total cosmology. Ecodomy looks at religious worldviews and norms but has a strong interdisciplinary research focus on global justice, human dignity, reconciliation, moral formation and responsible citizenship.

Ecodomy's central message is a *connected approach*, not holistic, but integral. In the Anthropocene, the evolutionary processes are intertwined with natural history. The interconnectedness and interrelationship of the cosmos are based on the premise that human beings bear the image of *stardust* (Jähnichen & Losch 2023). We have forgotten that we are the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. The interrelations of the economy, ecology, theology, religion, life and poverty to the self and society come into play, where we must deal with justice and inequality (Van den Hoogen 2023:4).

For most people, spiritual values are vital in driving communitarian behaviour. It is becoming increasingly clear that a lasting and effective social commitment must consider cultural, sociological and religious dimensions. In particular, the current environmental crisis has demonstrated how effectively religious communities have mobilised to respond to climate change. With their emphasis on wisdom, social cohesion and interrelationships, religions can strategically ensure effective integral human development.

My notion of *thinking differently and acting differently* should thus be read from the contingency within a specific system to do right to Luhmann's *autopoiesis* of a system. As constructions of reality, concepts are not opposed to reality but allow us to approach it. Rick Benjamins finds a common denominator when he states that theology should offer a metaphysical worldview that does not compete with a scientific outlook in any respect. Instead, it presents a supplementary approach to reality that is closer, intimate, or resonant with the world as we experience it. As Jürgen Moltmann suggests: 'Finally, we need a new cosmic spirituality which sanctifies lived life and engenders "respect for life" for everything that lives.' (Moltmann 2023:2). The idea of natural dignity and a corresponding human responsibility overcomes any form of anthropocentrism (Jähnichen & Losch 2023).

A Trinitarian theo-ontology

Remarkably, two of the greatest thinkers in Protestant theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dealt so divergently with the doctrine of the Trinity in their dogmatic presentations. Karl Barth wants to make it clear from the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* that the God who reveals Himself to us is the *Triune God*. By contrast, Friedrich Schleiermacher concludes in his *The Christian Faith* only at the end of his exposition that the doctrine of the Trinity is the coping stone of Christian thinking about God (Schleiermacher 1999:739).

In other words, the critical question was whether God revealed Himself as the Triune God or whether the church came to that conclusion with reflection and deliberation. In short, is the doctrine of the Trinity a conviction given *from above* to the church, or is it a construct of a search *from below*? Can this question of linearity be tolerated, or is it a chicken-egg situation? The point of departure in both an epistemology and an ontology is decisive to this answer. As indicated above, I opt for a reciprocal approach and abductive reasoning.

I believe the doctrine of the Trinity was not given as a fundamental revelation of faith (*contra* Barth) but was the outcome of centuries of intellectual wrestling by the Early Church (Nicaea, 325). Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is an emerging *result* of Christian doctrinal deliberations.

The implication is that no final judgement should be made about this or any other tenet. Like a subsequent *S-curve*, every point leads again to a new height. And this movement lays the table for a fresh understanding of God.

The most important impetus for a new curve is the deconstruction of the Neo-Platonic interpretation of the notion of *ontology*, as again illustrated in the article by Sergio Scatolini (2023). The static and metaphysical sense has become obsolete. As an integral ecology suggests, balanced spiritual ecosystems must articulate and embody new ways of approaching the cosmos, God and humans.

In the past few years, I have spent some time researching the insights of Orthodox theology, mainly as applied by scholars of the Russian Silver Age (e.g., Buitendag 2022). Their view led to a system- or process-oriented view of the Triune God. Process and creativity have replaced substance and causality, resulting in a dynamic or event ontology instead of a static one. A new socially oriented worldview that emphasises the ontological priority of relationships to the individual and corporate entities that are thus dynamically interrelated (*perichoresis*) should be pursued.

Toine van den Hoogen (2023:5) draws our attention to the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa, who understood God's life, light, and joy as being mirrored in our human soul and the entirety of material creation, which is a 'mirror of the mirror'. Mirroring shines in our human life. And the mirroring is shining in the cosmos. The question of what's going on in the story of life is now subsidiary to the question of what's going on in the story of the *universe*.

In other words, there is a place for natural grace in creation, and nature takes part creatively in its self-creation. The creaturely *Sophia* has her foundation in the *Divine Sophia* and is permeated by Her. It is evident that for someone like Sergius Bulgakov, natural grace is intrinsically part of nature and an active force within creation. It is the same Spirit that creates and sanctifies life and matter. This presence of the Spirit is non-hypostatic in creation as the Comforter, from beginning to end. This mode of knowing is possible only *per gratiam* (Roszak 2023).

I have alluded to a meta-religious approach instead of an 'inter-' or 'intra-religious' one because it transcends the traditional boundaries of space and time, leading to a *Theology Without Walls*, as Christopher Denny (2019) epitomises it. This approach acknowledges various paths to coming to grips with reality and experience subsequently deification. *Theosis* recognises humanity's infinite capacity to transcend particularised religious identities and belong in different ways, with and in God.

Looking at the classical formulation of the Trinity of *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, through a lens of *Three Faces of God* as Paul Smith does, opens up a feasible reinterpretation of the Trinity by attributing the Persons as *God-beyond-us*, *God-beside-us*, and *God-being-us*. Smith perceives a God great enough to embrace science and go beyond what science cannot answer (Smith 2017:22, 29).

Towards a theology of nature

Ressourcement is about revisiting traditional sources, and *aggiornamento* is the challenge of a new and broader contextualisation to find new ways to rethink and reformulate the fundamental affirmations of faith to communicate God's love more effectively. This venture is analogous to the three questions posed by Jim Conlon (2017:166): *What are my roots?* (my relationship to the planet); *What is my work in geo-justice?* (my place); and *Who am I?* (my path).

I endeavour to oscillate among these aspects regarding God, humans and the cosmos as an integrated process expressed in *cosmotheandric sophiology*.

The cosmotheandric vision does not develop from nor gravitate around a single point; neither God nor man nor the world forms a single point of gravity and is, in this sense, *polycentric*.

This process aims to generate a syncretic meta-language of theology, science, and art. Ultimate truth is essentially antinomistic and above the plane of rationality. Knowledge is, therefore, contradictory. This contradiction exists because tacit knowledge permeates rational and reasonable thought (Michael Polanyi). Natural philosophy is transmuted into supranatural thought.

Nico Buitendag (2023) raises a caveat from system theory regarding a worldview encompassing theology and science. He exposes an intrinsic anomaly when one social system tries to uplift another social system. It is like trying to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. This caveat, of course, could raise a question about Calvin Schrag's well-known notion of a 'transversal space' (Schrag 2006:19) where different voices engage ingeniously, and an imaginary plane transcends universality. Could this plane perhaps be like living in a cloud of cuckoo land?

Previously, I alluded to Luhmann's statement, 'One would have to assert that the natural is artificial because it is produced by society and that the necessary is contingent because under different conditions it may have to accept different forms' (Luhmann 1995:37). The earth systems need to be respected. Society's functional systems are also limited by what they can achieve through instrumental human action. The law cannot decisively steer behaviour (solving the climate crisis is not as simple as everyone following the law) nor eradicate all unwanted actions.

Living in God's forgiving and transforming grace and having received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers can develop an ethic that seeks to give co-creative expression to the power of love. To love in our ecological crisis is to strive for a just, sustainable, participatory creation that manifests divine love, beauty and harmony and is a panentheistic conception of reality inclined to a connected system.

In concurring with Lianne Winslow's take on receiving grace through the restorative beauty of nature through an Edwardsian eco-spirituality, nature is an instantaneous act resulting from the Spirit, requiring nothing other than being human. Human flourishing by being in sync with nature ontologically represents an emotional and spiritual communication of God to humans through a language of nature.

Winslow concludes that a theological understanding of the metaphysical reciprocity between God, humans and the biosphere (where is the geosphere?) can be expressed in a Theology of Nature, where God's divine ideas for communicating spiritual truths are embedded in nature and sensed by the

reflective mind. This approach concurs with Benjamins's take that God speaks to us in our encounter with reality.

To interpret reality as addressing us as the voice of God means that we re-install the revelation of God. This understanding breathes the integral approach of a Theology of Nature. It is resonant with the world as we experience it.

Epilogue

Based on the insights obtained through decades of research and contemplation, my conviction today is that theology should come to grips with reality, neither in a metaphysical, ontological manner from God nor in an existential abstract way from man, but in a non-reductionistic manner from an integral cosmos. Theology needs a pneumatological doctrine of creation, which provides a future granted by God which can already be experienced in the present.

Ted Peters makes much of this proleptic understanding of reality, which leads to solidarity and hope – ecologically and sociologically. John Haught says this concisely when asserting that any empirical survey of nature that restricts itself to following the modern scientific method's habitual exclusion of thought from its survey of nature cannot make nature intelligible.

The stratification of the quest for meaning prevails, as does the demise of onto-theology. This approach leads me to integrate three crucial inquiries, as indicated above.

Two of my contributors engage with theo-ecology from Islamic thought and, as I do, transcend comparative phenomena and find a transversal plane of spiritual experiences where mystics have a profound message to humankind in their journey in the world, as Syafa'atun Almirzanah (2023) suggests. I fully endorse Sergio Scatolini (2023) when he adds a balanced spiritual ecosystem qualification that converges worldviews and allows inclusiveness and pragmatism to come more forcefully to the fore. The abovementioned Aristotelian 'epistemic fit' applied to ecumenism by Daniel Morris-Chapman (2023) could also apply to diverse religions.

Where Systematic Theology calls for the intrinsic coherence of theology, a theology of nature encompasses coherency to the awe and wonder of the seen and unseen reality (1 Tm. 6:16).

Kobus Krüger (2023a) draws in his article the conclusion that *Theravāda Buddhism* could be extended towards the notion of a living, evolving cosmos, appearing from and disappearing into non-substantial *silence*. In bowing to mystery, Albert Einstein emphasized that there is more to the real world than the human mind can ever encompass.

The classic Dutch universities still demand today the century-old concluding phrase of academic orations: 'Ik heb gezegd'. Thus, I have spoken, and, therefore, I hold my peace for now.

Johan Buitendag
Professor Emeritus
University of Pretoria

22 November 2023