

# Christ-centred ethical behaviour and ecological crisis: What resources do the concepts of order in creation and eschatological hope offer?

**Author:**Martinus P. de Wit<sup>1,2</sup>**Affiliations:**<sup>1</sup>School of Public Leadership, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa<sup>2</sup>De Wit Sustainable Options, Brackenfell, South Africa**Correspondence to:**

Martin de Wit

**Email:**

martin@sustainableoptions.co.za

**Postal address:**

PO Box 546, Brackenfell 7561, South Africa

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The ecological crisis, as well as a limited ethical response, forces a reflection on the transformative potential of Christian ethics on an idolatrous society largely shaped by a dominant economic culture. The aim of the article was to explore how the concepts of creation order and eschatological hope may be helpful in the understanding and formulation of a Christ-centred ethical response to the ecological crisis. A review of the relevant literature was presented, limited to insights from Reformational philosophy and eco-theology into the concepts of creation order and eschatology. The main internal tensions of using the concepts of creation order and eschatological hope as resources in Christ-centred eco-ethics were highlighted and discussed. Some implications for the further explanation and development of Christ-centred eco-ethics are outlined.

**Christosentriese etiese gedrag en ekologiese krisis: Watter hulpbronne bied die konsepte van orde in die skepping en eskatologiese hoop?** Die ekologiese krisis, asook 'n beperkte etiese antwoord hierop, dwing 'n besinning oor die vernuwende potensiaal van Christelike etiek vir 'n afgodiese samelewing wat grootliks gevorm is deur 'n dominante ekonomiese kultuur. Die doel van hierdie artikel was om te ondersoek hoe die konsepte van orde in die skepping en eskatologiese hoop nuttig kan wees in die verstaan en die formulering van 'n Christus-gesentreerde etiese antwoord op die ekologiese krisis. 'n Oorsig van die relevante literatuur, beperk tot insigte uit die Reformatoriese filosofie en ekoteologie oor die konsepte van orde in die skepping en eskatologie, is aangebied. Die belangrikste interne spanningsvelde in die gebruik van die konsepte skeppingsorde en eskatologiese hoop in 'n Christus-gesentreerde eko-etiek is uitgelig en bespreek. Sekere implikasies vir die verdere verduideliking en die ontwikkeling van 'n Christus-gesentreerde eko-etiek is beskryf.

## Introduction

The world is confronted with an ecological crisis, spawning a broad and renewed interest in the topic of morality and ethical response in many fields, including Christian circles. Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen and Van Heemst (2007) made an important contribution in this field, starting to document a Christocentric critique on a broad belief in progress itself and the exploitative nature of contemporary society. The authors referred to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's observation of the imminent collapse of a number of ecosystems as a building block in their argument that a misplaced faith in the forces of progress, including markets, technology, science, state and power, are reaching untenable outcomes and should be interpreted as nothing other than modern-day forms of idolatry. This is not to deny the blessings that markets, technology and science bring to the world, but a heightened sensitivity is needed to what Goudzwaard *et al.* (2007) call *the shadows of progress*, which to them reside in the stubbornness of the human heart. The thesis that societal crisis, at its deepest, stems from idolatrous hearts calls for repentance and deserves more reflection. In this article the focus is on a closely related topic, namely on what basis faithful Christians behave and inform choices amidst the ecological crisis.

The question as to what basis Christian ethical positions on ecology are or should be taken on is not new. A lot of work has been done in the fields of eco-theology and Christian eco-ethics over the last few decades (see for example Bouma-Prediger 2001; Santmire 2000; Scharper 1997; Oelschlaeger 1994; Schaeffer & Middelman 1993), mainly in response to Lynn White Jr's critical article accusing Christianity of the ecological crisis (White 1967). White argued that the biblical view of humans made in the image of God and given dominion over the earth introduced a dualism between humans and nature and a licence for exploitation. A further critique against Christianity is focused on 'perceived inadequacies of Christian eschatology' (Bouma-Prediger

2001:71), accusing Christianity of otherworldliness and little rationale for creation care. As observed by Horrell (2010c), in certain circles it seems as if:

Christian hope is construed in terms of an imminent return of Jesus, other-worldly salvation for the elect, and fiery destruction for the earth; attempts to preserve the earth are thus futile and contrary to God's purposes. (p. 8)

The contributions in response to the 'ecological complaint', as Bouma-Prediger (2001:69) refers to it, have drawn at least two serious critiques of their own. Firstly, the critique that Christian eco-ethics and eco-theological resources often start with a doctrine of creation and tend to derive morality from a religious interpretation of cosmology (Jenkins 2008). The field of eco-theology has contributed mainly on what has been referred to as the 'cosmological axes' (Jenkins 2008:14) with little attention to soteriological insights into Christian eco-ethics. The second critique is one of hermeneutics. The response of a positive ecological narrative of creation care, a strategy of 'recovery' (as found for example in the *Green Bible* project, Horrell 2010b) based on a different reading of the Bible, has been criticised in several publications, pointing towards the crucial role of *hermeneutics* (the approach to interpretation) in the consideration of the ecological implications of biblical texts (Horrell 2010a; Horrell, Hunt, Southgate & Stavropoulou 2010; Conradie 2010a).

The answer to the question on what basis Christians behave ethically in the midst of ecological crises is thus not as straightforward as one might have hoped for, notwithstanding a long tradition affirming the role of Christians in creation care and emphasising an eschatology of renewal rather than destruction (see Horrell 2010a; Horrell *et al.* 2010). Therefore, before attempting to address the question how Christ-centred ethical behaviour needs to look in a time of ecological crisis, more critical reflection is needed on the validity of the resources we use in constructing such an argument.

In the discussion on sources of Christ-centred ethical behaviour we start with a discussion on the idea of creation order, and as a consequence cosmology, as well as views on eschatology and hope. The reason to focus on these two concepts is that it is in these areas that Christianity's contribution to the ecological crisis was most severely critiqued, and it is in these areas where the most work has been done so far in formulating a Christian response. We limit our evaluation to perspectives given in Reformational philosophy and in eco-theology. These positions are critically discussed and tensions identified that may serve as an input to further reflection and research on Christ-centred environmental or eco-ethics.

Following the introduction of the article, Christ-centred ethics is introduced in general terms. Thirdly, fourthly and fifthly, creation order, the cosmos and views on the eschaton are respectively discussed as sources of Christ-centred ethics from Reformational philosophical and eco-theological points of view. Sixthly, critical tensions in Christ-centred eco-ethics are highlighted, followed by the conclusion.

## What is Christ-centered ethics?

The important insight from Christ-centred ethics is that the person and work of Jesus Christ makes Christian ethics possible (Gustafson 1995). This observation sets it apart from any other moral philosophy or ethical theory. The word *ethics* is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, or, in short, morality. Aristotle used it to refer to a good desire, guided by human nature. In most ethical frameworks, humans are seen as the agents of moral change. In such a sense ethics is primarily humanistic and individual. Environmental ethicists go one step further to include non-human entities in their ethical reflection (Schrader-Frechette 2005).

Placing the work and person of Jesus Christ central in ethical reflection is common to many Christian thinkers on the topic. O'Donovan (2001:11), for example, states that the foundations of Christian ethics lie in what 'God has done in Christ'. Similarly, Bonnhoefter (2009) takes as a departing point that the:

source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one's own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. (p. 49)

Kuiper, Van Putten and Vogelaar (2012:75), in an introductory text on faith, science and culture from a Christian philosophical point of view, agree that '*Jesus Christus is het hart van een christelijke levensoriëntatie*' [Jesus Christ is the heart of a Christian life orientation]. The point is that all seek to find ethical guidance from God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ.

Christian ethics, however, is not one final, accepted idea. After an extensive review of various forms of Christian ethics, Gustafson (1995) concludes that:

There will continue to be various patterns of Christian ethics ... [t]he surplus of meaning in the Bible, the continuing effect of different historic traditions, and the emergence of new and different contexts for writing have this effect. (p. 713)

Much lies in the enormous diversity of what is contained in Christ. Earlier attempts to include a whole range of Christological events, such as creation, advent, cross, resurrection and ascension, into one scheme have been undertaken by theologian Karl Barth, amongst others, with his creation-reconciliation-redemption triad. However, O'Donovan (2001:xvii) calls this an arbitrary choice, one that can only be treated as convention and one that leaves a limited 'truncated' view of the gospel, not 'a self-evident principle for arranging specific subject areas that ethics interests itself in.' O'Donovan (2001) goes on to focus on the event of resurrection in order to speak about liberated human action specifically (p. xviii). Hauerwas and Wells (2004) also start with Christ-centred ethics, but specifically plead for a reintegration of ethics with theology, ecclesiology and sacrament, pointing towards a reflection on the practices of the church and how that shapes the character of Christians. What this short discussion illustrates is that there are various Christ-centred ethical approaches that may guide behaviour amidst the ecological crisis. The approach taken in this article is to take one step back and critically discuss

two central concepts in ethical discourse, namely creation order and eschatological hope, and in the process reveal the main possibilities and tensions for further reflection on an integrated Christ-centred approach to environmental or eco-ethics.

## Creation order as a source of Christian ethics

### Creation order in Reformational philosophy

The idea of creation order, or the *nomos* or law order of creation, is rooted in the Dooyeweerdian or Reformational philosophy that reality is God's creation that takes its meaning from God. In Reformational philosophy the topic of order has often been associated with laws, universal principles and creational structures.

Building on the insights of John Calvin, Van Woudenberg (2004), in his introduction to Christian philosophy, a publication of the earlier Association of Reformational Philosophy, argues that God calls on people and gives each the specific duty to work against disorder in the world. In this view, order is created through God's laws for people and nature. God's sovereignty is seen as his action with regard to the world, which carries the character of a law that provides order and structure to the world. There are natural laws and cultural laws and both are manifestations of God's ordinances to the world.

According to Reformational philosophy everyone on earth conforms to universal creational norms, but to really come closer to God we need the direction and teachings of Scripture (Van Woudenberg 2004:33). Universal revelation is directed to God, explaining the universal *pistic* [a deep-seated kind of faith] modality in Reformational philosophy. Douma (1976) pointed out that in such a view, the function of faith is seen as a created function of all people. Van Woudenberg argues that the revelation of God in creation can teach us something about God, but does not tell us anything about sin and grace, an area reserved for particular revelation in Scripture. The important implication of such an interpretation of the Reformational viewpoint is that to understand God's ordinances one cannot rely on Scripture alone, but one has to include empirical observation and practical experience to obtain insights into particular norms where Scripture does not provide explicit guidance (Van Woudenberg 2004:34). Such a position cannot go unnoticed as it does open up a debate on Scriptural hermeneutics that may have important implications for any Christian environmental ethics.

How the idea of creation order plays an explicit role in ethical conduct is the next question. In the tradition of Reformational philosophy, ethical responsibilities require an acceptance of what Stoker (2006:132) refers to as a 'transcendental revealed principle of creation', but acknowledging that such an endeavour cannot be independent from the Word of God. According to Stoker (2006), the source of theoretical ethics is empirical study on different appearances of good desire whilst the 'source of practical Christian ethics is ... the Holy

Scripture and in particular God's commandments' (p. 134). In his reflection on the ethics of technology Schuurman (2006), like Stoker, points to a cosmology of the reality as God's creation (as opposed to objects of manipulation) and the commandments of love (as opposed to power) as sources to redirect the ethics of technology. Schuurman (2006) further argues that the responsibility of humans is to be keepers and minders of earth as a garden, not as lords and masters, recognising an intrinsic value of God's creation:

In the Christian religion, the command of love for God and the neighbour contains the essence of all motives, commands, values and norms. Also, in technological development, this dual love must unify. This means that from the start *everything must be appreciated according to its nature*. [italics added] (p. 164)

The insight is that *love* is seen to appreciate all things as they are by *nature* in God's creation, a task, Schuurman argues, of humans that is aided by science and responsible deployment of technology. Cultural activities are directed away from humans themselves in love of God and the neighbour. According to Schuurman, the prime objective for science is the growth in wisdom in the 'full experiential reality' (2006:167) and for technology a focus on 'building and conserving' (2006:166). Normative principles are to be derived from the cosmology of Reformational philosophy, forming a guide for responsible technological development. Such an *ethic of responsibility* is rooted in the good *nature* of God's creation, a nature that is meant to be better understood by science and applied by technology. Love is to seek what is natural. Both Stoker and Schuurman argue that ethical conduct in Reformational philosophical thinking is based on what is perceived to be natural in created order, culminating in ethics of law, love and responsibility.

### Critical discussion on creation order as a source of Christian ethics

How the order of creation is interpreted remains of utmost importance in Reformational philosophy as it sums up an understanding of something no less than God's revelation itself. But does God indeed rule by creational norms and laws? This is not an irrelevant question and one that is worth revisiting, especially when it is perceived that God *reveals* himself to humans through creation. To accept that God does reveal himself in creation requires an acceptance of God's universal revelation in creation, a Reformational philosophical position that has already received its fair share of discussion and critique (see e.g. Douma 1976; Berkhouwer 1951). The idea of universal revelation instilling a creational *pistic* function in *all people* remains contentious. The main counter-argument is that faith is worked in us by listening to God through the Word of God, not by understanding creation (Douma 1976:26–29). Not listening to the Word of God is not some form of faith; in contrast, it is idolatry and provokes God's wrath. The role of creation is that it asks that the Creator, and nothing or nobody else, is glorified and when this is not accepted by stubborn human hearts, God has much cause for anger (Van Bruggen 2006:43). The universal revelation of God exists only insofar as nobody has an excuse not to know and glorify him, as the invisible

things of him from the creation of the world are clearly to be seen. The focus is not on some remnants of goodness in humanity, thereby relativising our fallen state, but on the gracious gifts of God to the world (Calvin 2008:54–58). In a similar vein, Berkhouwer (1951:272–274), in an extensive theological review on the topic of universal revelation, points towards two clear dangers: firstly, an annoyance with a fallen humanity and with the cross of Christ, pointing towards particular revelation as serving only an additional function. Secondly, and based on historical observation, that mankind allows general revelation to participate in the darkness of the human reaction to let (in a classical nature-grace scheme) ‘natural knowledge’ compete with and judge the ‘supernatural’. Instead, hearing God’s Word leads to a better understanding of his actions throughout history in Christ and is the real origin of God’s revelation (Berkouwer 1951:274).

In a Christ-centred view, creation order is not the ultimate source of ethics. The living and personal God is not hidden either behind a facade of natural laws, principles, structures and order, nor behind history, process and change. The question of how to view creation order as a source of Christian ethics can thus only be entertained when contextualised in knowledge of God as revealed in the work of and person of Jesus Christ.

Creation order and cosmology have been intrinsically linked in the Protestant Reformational and Catholic traditions. One example will suffice for the purposes of this article. Arpels-Josiah (2004), in a discussion on the resources John Calvin’s theology provides for environmental ethics, points out that:

[t]he danger of disorder, chaos, and collapse, so vivid in Calvin’s view of cosmology and history, shaped his view of providence into one in which God powerfully restrains and stabilizes the created order. (p. 149)

A discussion on creation order as a source of ethics needs to be complemented with a further discussion on how Christian versions of cosmology have developed, which is the field of eco-theology, the focus of the next section.

## Cosmos as a source of ethics

### Eco-theology on cosmos

Eco-theology has been described as a theology that focuses on the inter-relationships of religion and nature, particularly in light of environmental concerns. One example, a study performed over the time period 1987–1992 on Christian environmentalism in the United States of America, Kearns (1996) identified three main responses to what White (1967:1206) concluded as the need to ‘find a new religion, or re-think our old one’. The first can broadly be described as the ‘Christian stewardship ethic’, the second one as an ‘eco-justice ethic’ and the third as a ‘creation-spirituality ethic’. ‘Christian stewardship’ is focused on rethinking Western Christianity within its own tradition, focused on ‘an evangelical interpretation of the biblical mandate for humans to take care of the earth’ (Kearns 1996:57). The ‘eco-justice ethic’ is associated with the idea of liberation linking

‘environmental concerns with church perspectives on justice issues such as the just sharing of limited resources and the real cost of environmental problems’ (Kearns 1996:57). A ‘creation-spirituality ethic’ is more orientated ‘to a possible new religion and focuses on reorienting humans to see their place as one part of a larger, panentheistic creation’ (Kearns 1996:57). These are all very different ethical strategies, but they do share a common concern with how to develop a practical environmental theology or eco-theology to account for emerging ecological realities – ‘each wants to somehow connect environmental issues with Christian identity’ (Jenkins 2008:15).

### Eco-theology’s soteriological blind spot?

Jenkins (2008:14–15) further makes the important point that the main responses in environmental theology to White’s (1967) critique are all organised along ‘cosmological axes.’ Jenkins argues for the use of soteriological narratives in the pursuit of Christian eco-ethics, or what Conradie (2010b) refers to as the ‘deepest rationale for Christian earth-keeping.’ In a review of Pauline theology, Horrell (2010c) argues that the apostle Paul’s:

soteriological vision is literally all-encompassing, whether this is put in the theocentric terms of Rom. 11 and 1 Cor. 15 or the more Christological terms of Col. 1. Just as God, through Christ, is creator of all things so, in Christ, God is the redeemer of all things. (p. 20)

Conradie (2010c:111) points out that the question of how the ‘Christian notion of “salvation” is to be understood in the context of environmental threats’ needs further reflection, pointing towards the Dutch reformed theology of God’s cosmic history of creation, fall and redemption as a possible unifying theme on the Christian doctrines of creation and salvation. (It cannot escape attention that such a unifying theme was worked out by Reformational philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd in a philosophy with a strong cosmological focus, but also by theologian Karl Barth in a strong Christological focus.) Attempts to unify the all-inclusive Christian narratives have at best led to a ‘pluralism of Christian environmental ethics’, providing ‘heuristic models that can inform social ethics’ (Jenkins 2008:228). In an overview on the ecological significance of the synoptic gospels, Bauckham (2010:81), for example, concluded that a ‘Christian theological understanding, rooted in the whole canon of Scripture, of what it means for God’s human creatures to be part of God’s whole creation ... has barely begun’.

To inform practical Christ-centred environmental ethics, the ‘soteriological blind spot,’ or what Jenkins (2008) refers to as the need to ‘renovate grace’, in most of eco-theological thinking needs a correction. Jenkins pleads for the rediscovery of Christianity’s own ‘ecologies of grace’; the healing it entails ‘might teach citizens what to make of the wounds of memory and the healing efforts of ecological restoration.’ Such an approach taps into the vast Christian pool of resources on why ‘we need not live alone or silently with those wounds’ (Jenkins 2008:232) in a world with massive ecological suffering and loss. When Christians allow environmental distress to ‘pierce hearts and darken souls’, a transforming practical hope

becomes possible (Jenkins 2008:233). The idea of suffering brings insights with possibly valuable ethical implications: 'God uses suffering in pursuance of his purpose to make us holy' and 'God intends suffering to be a "means of grace"' (Stott 2006:365–366).

## Eschatological hope as a source of Christian ethics

### Eschaton in Reformational philosophy

Reformational philosophy, with its cosmological focus, has not concentrated a lot of effort on a theory of the last things. Ambiguity did surround Herman Dooyeweerd's initial ideas on the topic. Blosser (1993), in a discussion on Dooyeweerd's theory of a human being, observes that:

as a consequence of this, there is a tendency to verticalize the eschaton; to lose sight of the abiding significance and eternal validity of the creation ordinances on the new earth beyond the judgment; to block off the future, linear character of cosmic time so that 'structure comes to an end'. (p. 203)

This 'verticalised eschatology' is not shared by all Reformational philosophers though. It seems as if later scholars in this tradition had a more 'horizontal eschatology' in which their idea of creation order continued into a new creation. Wolters (1987) reviewed translations on 2 Peter 3:10 and suggests that a process of smelting and refining characterises the final days. Creation is expected to be radically purged by fire. According to Wolters, this does not mean a cosmic annihilation, a complete destruction or abolition of the created order. Future cataclysm is not a 'burn up' but rather a 'meltdown'. Wolters concludes that there is a permanence in the created earth and, despite the coming judgement, maintains a belief in the continuity of creation order.

The debate of Reformational philosophy on eschatology tends to focus on the continuity or discontinuity of created orders, not very different from the more cosmologically focused eco-theology, the topic of the next section.

### Eschaton in eco-theology

Views on the future of the world differ markedly in Christian circles. Horrell (2010a:112–114) identified three prevailing strategies:

- to see the world as being destroyed in future, leaving little motivation to care for or preserve (see e.g. Van Beek 2006)
- to see the world as being renewed, already now providing a basis for environmental ethics (see Valerio 2008)
- to acknowledge that there are very different eschatological perspectives in the Bible itself (see Adams 2010).

The first position – the final destruction of the world, a radical transformation, with no motivation for an environmental ethic – is a position not taken in eco-theology and is not seriously further discussed here.

A strong eco-theological focus is on the second position – the renewal of creation. Valerio (2008:209), as an example,

influenced by Jurgen Moltmann's (1997) 'theology of hope', argues that we are challenged to 'live our lives in such a way that we enable the rest of creation to fulfil its eschatological goal'. Moltmann (1997:122) argues that God's Kingdom is realised in this current reality, through a new creation with cosmic dimensions following the resurrection of Christ. According to Valerio, salvation in Christ extends beyond people, including the whole of creation (citing Col 1:15–20) and therefore broader action is required, a life of 'realised anticipation'. In this view, new creation is already here within the old, urging for radical involvement in the world through gospel proclamation, social concern and care for the environment. Creation is viewed as continuing, a dynamic process, and the last days are interpreted as a refining process: the earth and everything in it 'will be found' rather than 'burnt up'. There is an expectation that creation is and will be 'our home, now and always' (Valerio 2008:207).

In the third position, mostly with reference to Romans 8, it is argued that 'this passage seems to indicate a non-destructive (yet radical) transformation of existing creation' (Adams 2007, as quoted in Horrell 2010a:113). Adams (2010:168), with reference to 2 Peter 3:5–13, Revelation 21:1–22:5 and Isaiah 65:17–25, argues that '[w]aiting for the new heaven/s and earth does not mean abdicating moral responsibility and is not incompatible [sic] with pro-environmental action'<sup>1</sup>. Based on 2 Peter 3:5–13 and Revelation 21:1–22:5, a new heaven and new earth only 'follow the dissolution of the present created order' (Adams 2010:173), rather thinking about an 'image of the creator "recycling" the old into the new, preserving and re-using matter in the process' (Adams 2010:174). Adams finds a primary biblical motivation for environmental consciousness in the 'inherent goodness of creation' (Gn 1:4, 10, 12) and the 'creation mandate' (Gn 1:26–28), bringing a responsibility to act as stewards of God's earth, which, for him, trumps visions of a transformative or dissolutive future.

Some commentators in eco-theology such as Valerio (2008) point towards a continuity of creation already in the here and now. Those who emphasise the importance of a cautious hermeneutic, like Adams (2010), point towards a radical transformation of existing creation in the last days with some form of continuity for the righteous. Hendricks (2005) moves in the same direction, but cautions against speculation on what such a continuity will look like, rather pointing towards God's loyalty and promise of a new heaven and new earth.

### Eschaton and Christ-centred ethics: A discussion

The critical question does remain what Christian hope means for ethical behaviour here and now. A difference in hope makes for a difference in living. Christian hope is a narrative with an ending in the return of Christ, in contrast to the endless eschatologies offered by secular projects of hope (Bauckman & Hart 1999).

<sup>1</sup>This despite the argument Adams (2010:171) makes that 'all the works of human beings done upon the earth will be exposed to divine scrutiny and judgement. It does not point to the survival of the earth'. He concludes that the 'destruction and re-creation of the whole world' is envisaged in 2 Peter 3.

Wright (2007) provides essential inputs in dissecting the idea to be hopeful Christians from an interpretation of the eschaton being discontinuous and continuous at the same time. In contrast to a piety that sees death as a moment of 'going home at last' or the time we are 'called to God's eternal place', Wright (2007:38) emphasises the transformative power of a belief in resurrection: '[r]esurrection ... has always gone with a strong view of God's justice, and of God as the good creator'. For Wright, the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of rediscovering hope (Wright 2007:87). Wright maintains that the ultimate future hope remains a surprise, but there is a powerful intermediate hope: 'the things which happen in the present time which implement Easter and anticipate the final day' (2007:41).

In a discussion on Wright's argument, Burger (2010) contrasts the theologians Wright (2007) and Van Beek (2006) on their vision of Christian hope. Burger (2010:76–78) observes that Wright emphasises that hope makes one build in his kingdom, a 'participatory eschatology'. In Wright's view the space-time universum as we know it will not be destroyed. Efforts of people towards saving the earth therefore do have meaning. Burger observes that Wright writes mainly against those who are either overly spiritualised or materialised. In contrast, Van Beek (2006) emphasises that this world is so full of sin that we have to give up any ideal of betterment in the world. The universe will come to an end and it makes no sense to put effort into environment, justice or to change structures. Love for and solidarity with the weak already asks enough of us. Burger observes that Van Beek writes mainly against the cultural optimism that humans, with God, are on our way in an evolutionary process towards reaching a beautiful future on this earth. Burger also argues on the basis of 1 Corinthians 15 that our works in the Lord will not be in vain. He further argues that the Holy Spirit is already blessing efforts for justice and peace on earth. In general, there is continuity *and* discontinuity, but we do know that 'when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1 Jn 3:2). This theme of continuity *and* discontinuity is also the conclusion reached by Hendriks (2005), who cautions against the urge to explain what the end will look like and rather points toward God's faithfulness and his promises of salvation as God will not abandon the works of his hands. Hendriks points out that there is a mystery and a surprise in the last days, one that we may not understand, an outcome that we may leave in complete faith to God who has everything in his hands.

A Christian environmental ethic remains possible in the expectation of a renewal and recreation of the entire cosmos, and in accepting that the continuity of the cosmos is not in contrast to visions of judgement and discontinuity. The radical and practical implication of a new creation that has already started in Christ, creating the space for real Christian hope, is a topic that needs far more attention in Christ-centred eco-ethics.

In conclusion, it is only through God's faithfulness and his promises that the perceived tensions between a renewed creation and a world full of crises and eminent final judgement

hold together in a sense of mystery and surprise. Following O'Donovan (2001), transformation means that:

God ... is doing something new, keeping with creation but in no way dictated by it. This is what is meant by describing the Christian view of history as 'eschatological' and not merely as 'teleological' (p. 64)

The Christian faith leaves the end of things wide open, a future far greater than we can remotely comprehend, and far greater than any naturally deterministic or teleological worldview would suppose.

## Critical tensions in Christ-centred eco-ethics

The review on sources of a Christ-centred environmental ethic as presented so far revealed some critical tensions that need further reflection and research. Some of the key arguments from Reformational philosophy and eco-theology on creation order, cosmology and eschatology as sources of ethics were discussed and led in argument with a broadly defined Christ-centred ethic, invoking some critical tensions that will have to be resolved in the further reflection on Christian ethical behaviour amidst an unfolding ecological crisis. This section attempts to highlight these critical tensions that, in turn, may serve as a basis for further reflection on a Christ-centred environmental ethic in response to the ecological crisis.

Firstly, within Christian ethics there is a different focus on the ultimate source of ethics. In this article we particularly highlighted the limitations of accepting creation order, cosmology and/or eschatology as fragmented or absolutised sources of environmental ethics without a clear attempt to root these in the person and all-encompassing work of Jesus Christ. This does not imply a particular view of Christ limited to salvation, but one that sees Christ as being in, through and towards all of history, all of the future and all of created reality.

Secondly, the idea of accepting the idea of creation order as a source of ethics invokes tension between the universal and particular revelation of God, between the cosmos and the Word of God as resources of revelation and between the perceived importance of reason and science in relation to faith and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Here lies a tension on perceptions of how the person and work of Christ relate to creation, one that has occupied theologians – such as Barth, Berkouwer, Kuyper and Bavinck to name a few – and continues to be a fertile theological debate (see e.g. Neal 2010; Schaeffer 2006). Following Calvin (2008), Berkouwer (1951), Douma (1976) and Van Bruggen (2006), the position is taken that hearing God's Word leads to a better understanding of his actions throughout history in Christ – the real origin of God's revelation.

Thirdly, there is a tension between the cosmological focus of eco-theology and soteriology as ultimate sources of Christian ethics. Such polarisation is unhelpful in guiding Christian behaviour and is not Scriptural. Serious attempts to unify approaches to cosmos and salvation need further critical

reflection, opening up vital Christian resources, such as suffering, as a means of grace.

Fourthly, the tension between an expected continuity and discontinuity of creation in the last days remains. Those positions that focus on creation order and cosmology as a source of ethics tend to accept a position of continuity of creation whilst positions that accept an absolutised soteriology, at the expense of the all-encompassing work of Jesus Christ, tend to accept positions of discontinuity. Such polarisation is also not very helpful in guiding Christian behaviour. The implications of rather emphasising God's faithfulness, whilst being open to mystery and surprise of how God will make all things new for Christian eco-ethics, need to be further explored. Tanner (2010) started to provide important insights by emphasising that Christian hope is unchanged, whether outcomes turn out well or not, paving the way to include less optimistic worldviews within Christian eschatology.

With such deep tensions invoked by polarised ideas on the nature of the work of Christ, the sources of God's revelation to us and the nature of eschatological hope, the development of Christian eco-ethics faces severe challenges. One option is to work in fragmentary ways with a focus on only parts of knowing God through Christ's works, such as his presence at creation, the fall and redemption, resurrection and consummation. Another option, implied in an encompassing Christ-centred approach, is to depart from classical reflection on ethics as based on a translation of revealed order only into a framework of ethical doing, or one of good living in a Biblical sense. The choice between right and wrong is still relevant, but now within the context of the all-encompassing work of Christ. De Bruijne (2006), inspired amongst others by Hauerwas (see Hauerwas & Wells 2004), in a discussion of ethics and spirituality in Reformed theology, offered some suggestions in this regard. Christian living is about knowing God, to reflect his glory (De Bruijne 2006:97). Human beings are asked to be nothing less than holy as Christ is holy, a clear ideal situation, in contrast to a reality that continues to demand ethical choices that are complex and often in conflict with different ideal ethical and moral objectives. De Bruijne (2006:99) argues that a good life is much more than a choice between right and wrong, moving beyond a classical conception of ethics and finding meaning in the destination and vocation that God gave to life. The meaning of such an approach to Christ-centred eco-ethics is worth investigating, but will (as De Bruijne himself points out) also have to account for several questions, such as the acceptance of process-based growth towards spiritual individuals or 'morally self-justified church communities' (O'Donovan 2001:xix in reaction to Hauerwas 1977) and the normative status of Scriptural revelation.

## Conclusion

The article sets out to answer the question of how concepts of creation order and eschatological hope can provide resources for a Christ-centred ethical behavioural response to the

ecological crisis. It was pointed out that Christ-centred ethics is not one final idea, but one that sets it apart from other classical ethical frameworks by placing the person and work of Jesus Christ central. Such a position provokes tension with those positions in Reformational philosophy that sees creation order as evidence of God's universal revelation and, in effect, relegates the work of Christ to a particularity of salvation. In response, the article follows those that argue for a careful interpretation of the all-encompassing work of Christ when making ethical claims on the basis of any concept of created order. Tensions about how the work of Christ relates to creation remain very relevant and cannot be ignored when deriving a Christian environmental ethic, an observation just as relevant for much of eco-theology with its cosmological focus. Without connecting the insights of eco-theology to soteriology, and thereby including Christian resources on the meaning and value of suffering and pain in a broken world, ethical positions derived from such a theology will continue to be challenged by Christ-centred Scriptural interpretations. Ethical insights from alternative views on eschaton, the 'last things', are also crucially divided between those positions that emphasise the continuity of creation with an associated call for Christian action, and those positions that emphasise the discontinuity of creation in final judgement. The article follows those who have argued for a position of faith in God's promises, leaving the end open to mystery and surprise. However, such an unwavering hope is characterised by including outcomes that turn out well or not so well in human perception, as God not only works through an affirmation of goodness, but also uses suffering and pain as a means of grace. The option to depart from the limited classical interpretation of ethics only to inform the choice between right and wrong towards a process of growth in Biblical living (also in response to the ecological crisis) has been muted as a possibility. How the outlines of such a life in Christ might look like in practice, or the praxis of a Christ-centred eco-ethic, is another important question highlighted for further research and reflection.

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## Competing interest

Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and therefore the NRF do not accept any liability in regard thereto.

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